

# Clan Culture: Challenges and Potential for University During Transformation Period (Russia)

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**Abstract:** The clan corporate culture of the university as a culture of collaboration and cooperation is a possible answer to the search for unity between two opposing trends of a modern university. There is a tension between the traditional professorial university culture and innovation and market culture which helps to overcome the contemporary challenges of globalization and competition in the educational market. It is obvious that the clan culture impedes the university transformation into an economic corporation and contributes to the university community preservation and professional and personal identity. The relevance of the study lies in the fact that the university corporate culture configuration as a management tool helps the formation of a common vision of the world-class university. Right now, in a competitive situation within the Russian excellence program 5-100 it is crucial for university to ensure loyalty of employees, students, university partners and university environment. The university clan corporate culture is responsible for introducing innovative brands and for preserving the classical heritage to transforming into new type of the university.

**Keywords:** University Corporate Culture, Clan Culture, Organizational Transformation

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## 1. Introduction

Since 2013, fifteen Russian universities have been participating in the 5-100 excellence program through which every university should achieve certain performance indicators by 2020, including the proportion of attracted foreign students, the certain proportion of foreign professors, publications of university staff, academic mobility and internationalization of the university and others. The program foreshadows structural and substantial transformations not only of the university as an organization, but also of the modern university concept in a philosophical sense. In 5 years Tomsk state university showed the quickest growth in the global rankings rising from the 678th to the 277th place due to different explanations one of which is the analytical support of the corporate culture transformation.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of corporate culture in the period of active transformation of the ideological and socio-economic structures in the modern organization. Open discussions of the university

administration with the university community about the difficulties give a special meaning and explanation of the declared university corporate culture changes; recall the positive image of the future, so called “World-class University”; reminds of the history, culture and values; show positive examples; set “standards of excellence” and reflection on the University’ uniqueness. This explains the interest of the specialists in humanities in studying of corporate culture as an anthropological phenomenon.

The main focus of researchers at the turn of XX – XXI centuries was on studying mainly the economic actors of the corporate culture [3]. The study of the corporate culture of the university is at the initial stage of its development and requires a deeper and more detailed study involving the methodological tools of various social sciences.

In sociology, the discussion of organizational culture problems in the system of higher education began in the 1980-1990, and still has not lost its relevance. Based on the concepts describing the characteristics of organizational culture in business [2, 15, 4-5, 10] in a series of their works consistently touch upon the distinctive features of a

universities or colleges' corporate culture, typologies of cultures in education, the influence of ethnic culture on the type of organizational culture and its leveling due to the internationalization of universities. The influence of organizational culture can also be seen in the intensity and innovations' direction in the university environment. The majority of studies were conducted on examples of American universities and colleges.

Contemporary literature rather actively raises the issue of corporate culture as a managerial mechanism for the development of a university, aimed at improving its competitiveness in terms of entering the world educational space, middle ground of understanding between different groups of the university community [4], the relationship of the "trust", "understanding" and "justice" [6, 8, 9]. Among foreign philosophers and sociologists of recent times are K. J. Gergen [7], M. Castells [4], G. Petrova [11] who raises relevant question about the possibilities and attitudes of corporate culture: does it enter the university for the purpose of better material support from the state, or is its purpose to serve the cause of education with its high values and ideals? G. Petrova [11] is raising a question about the danger of reincarnation of a university into an economic corporation. In modern conditions, the university has to decide the question of identity, what the university has in common with other organizations and how it differs from them; and, preserving itself, adapt to the new social and economic reality of the autonomy status. There is the difficulty of creating a new academic culture [1]. Since professorial culture serves education, science, culture; corporate culture serves the market, increasing competitiveness in terms of access to the world educational space [13]. The clan organizational culture modification is the key to the implementation of organization strategies.

## 2. Methods

The configuration of the university's corporate culture was specified by the combination of qualitative and quantitative sociological methods. Based on the data of these methods, the problem configuration field was formulated. On its base the recommendations are developed. Thus, the main task is to identify the type of dominant culture, its potential, as well as the dynamics of changes under the influence of competing values.

Every year, from the moment the university participates in the Russian excellence program 5-100 (2013-2019), Tomsk state university has been conducting the corporate culture configuration diagnosis, the results of which are discussed at an international conference HR-trend with the participation of the rector and the office of strategic management. On the basis of an analytical note on the configuration of corporate culture, related to changes in the culture of the university management decisions are made.

The three main groups of the university community (administrators \ managers, professors and students,  $n = 198$ , 10% of the total number of all recipients) are surveyed

annually using three methods of collecting information.

(1) Qualitative projective self-diagnostics method "Metaphor" developed by A. Prigozhin from Israeli-Russian business school [12] allows to see the general idea of employees about the functioning of the organization: its values, vision of the future, openness / closeness of the organization, degree of anthropocentricity, degree of customer focus, vision partners and competitors, awareness of the uniqueness of the university. The "Metaphor" self-diagnostic method clearly demonstrates corporate culture gaps. In this case specialists can talk about three main issues: "Does the organization have its own strategy?", "What is the situation with innovations?", "Does the organization develop?". The annual diagnostics give an objective cut of the main value-semantic fields that university lives in. One of the undeniable advantages of the "Metaphor" method is its ability to see the layer of basic values of the organizational corporate culture according to the E. Schein (E. Schein, 1985) conception.

(2) Quantitative and qualitative method OCAI by K. Kameron and R. Quinn [3] allows to see the correlation between competing values. K. Cameron and R. Quinn identified 39 indicators that define a complete set of measures of organizational effectiveness. Each indicator was subjected to statistical analysis, which made it possible to identify two main dimensions (horizontally and vertically). Both dimensions form four quadrants, corresponding to their ideas of efficiency, values, leadership styles, and form their own culture: hierarchical / bureaucratic, clan, adhocratic, market.

(3) Qualitative method of mixed focus groups with representatives of the university community allows to clarify the obtained qualitative and quantitative data and to get more detailed and deep reflections on the university corporate culture changes. Participants of the focus groups are the informal leaders of faculties and the staff who did not show interest in the transformation processes. The combination of these two groups gives the objective information.

In addition, the survey participants change every year.

This article provides materials and data for 2014-2016 as the most vividly demonstrating dramatic changes in the entire quadrant of the corporate culture configuration: the time to get used to constant changes.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. "Metaphor" Method

The organization drawings display the image of the organization as a separate world with its own ideas and laws. It is one of the diagnostic stages, however it should not be confused with the method of using pictures for personality diagnostics widely used in psychology. Here we have the highlighted aggregate images of the organization.

Thus, the most of the 2014 pictures (Figure 1) are devoted to the massive closed main university building without people. In such cases, it should be noted: "No dynamics."

Why is everything so static? Is the organization not developing? Does the organization have a strategy? What about innovations?" In contrast the pictures of 2015-2016 (Figure 2, Figure 3) have people, even though they are

disproportionately small compared to the size of the university image. We can see the dynamics on the two 2014 drawings depicting fire and lava (student and professor vision of the university).



Figure 1. Method "Metaphor" (by A. Prigozhin). Tomsk state university, 2014.



Figure 2. Method "Metaphor" A. I. Prigozhin. Tomsk state university, 2015.



Figure 3. Method "Metaphor" A. Prigozhin. Tomsk state university, 2016.

The prevailing static image of the deserted main building of the university indicates the absence of the idea of development although by the time the university was actively involved in the program 5-100. The drawing of a truck, which rushes at high speed carrying knowledge in the back, indicates the negative perception of the whole university transformation period: there is no driver of the truck. This situation literally shows the lack of control. The image of volcano eruption is the sign of the stress and emotional surge between university community members.

The crisis and changes in the education system revealed many conflicts between the old and the new culture. The elements of the negative part of education for students are connected with the legacy of the Soviet period and the distribution of diplomas, the lack of opportunity for students to influence their own education and the lack of effective feedback between students and professors. The elements of the negative part of the transformation period for professors are related to the situation of increasing bureaucracy, paperwork and red tape, an increasing number of controlling managers and administration. For instance, in 2013 there were 3 vice rectors, in 2015 their number increased to 12 vice rectors. There were services that duplicated the functions of each other, which often caused confusion with reports and documents for people.

The transformation of the university for the administration meant an increase in the requirements for managerial competence, increased responsibility. The government, the Excellence program operator and the world global trends implemented additional challenges as a constant pressure. It became obvious that the university would need to become an ever-changing, self-learning organization and the quiet times would stay in the past: only through development, support for

diversity, and breakthrough changes are possible.

Since 2013, we have seen the signs of increasing tension, disintegration and stress between three main categories of the university community: professors, university administrators, and students.

In 2015 (Figure 2) closed, impersonal drawings of the main university building performed by the university administration, problem-free drawings by university professors and open and the pictures full of people and words in different languages drawn by students.

Analyzing such evidence, we can say: "The management and employees of the company do not see organizational problems." And further, it should be noted that no organization is without difficulties, there is always and there should always be something troubling. And if the university's managers fail to catch signs of existing problems in a timely manner, that can mean the problems might become more acute, and it might be more difficult to solve them without huge losses.

It is curious that it was during this period of growing tension that open seminars for the entire university community took place with discussions of the most acute issues of university transformation. Both administration and university professors took part in these events. But the drawings still testified to the absence of real changes in the education system.

And only in the students' pictures values, mission and goals declared by the university were embodied in 2015 and were successfully supported in the drawings of students in the 2016 (integrity of parts as a system, planet and holding hands of all nationalities and races of the Earth) and professors in the 2016 drawings (Figure 3).

It can be said that the values declared by the university

first appeared in the drawings of students, and only after that they can be noticed then appeared in the drawings of professors. Additional positive semantics of internationalization, globalization, global scale of change is associated with the appearance of words in English in the students' drawings.

According to diagnostics, we can conclude that members of the university community relate superficially to the process of change, "do not see" them, do not identify the main strategic tasks of the university's development in a large flow of information, and do not associate the ongoing changes in the university with themselves. This results in a barrier implement the changes and the form of a new market-adhocratic culture at the university. The lack of clients, partners, direct competitors of the university in the drawings indicates a "blindness", unwillingness to realize the scope of changes to be made. All the pictures are devoted to inner life of the university. And the question "Where is the clients, partners and other members of the city community here?" remains unanswered. "How can an organization function without others? What could be more important than interaction?" Especially in the times of Excellence program that implies competition with other universities.

The figures show the obvious answer, why the market culture does not take root: here university is focused on the inner world and does not see anything outside of it. The focus on the inner world of the university, the contemplation of the former power, fixation on the traditions, even if they are no longer relevant: this is the evidence of the clan culture.

### 3.2.OCAI Method

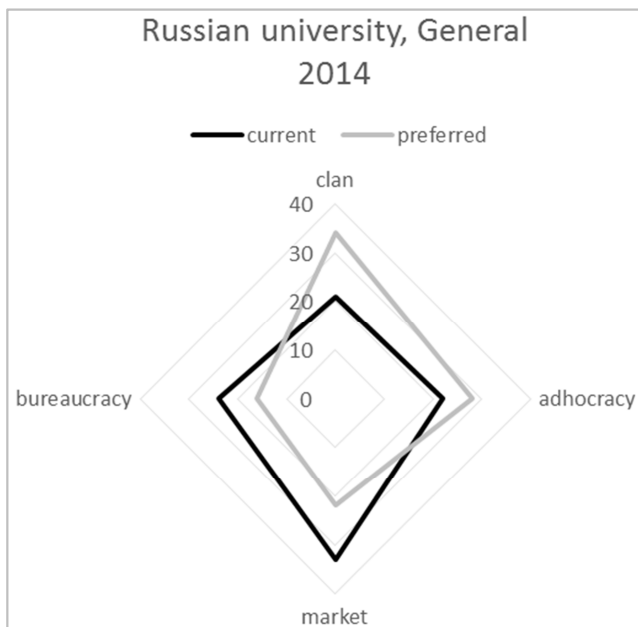


Figure 4. OCAI diagnostics of corporate culture of TSU, 2014.

According to OCAI method by K. Cameron and R. Quinn profiles of 2014 (Figure 4) and 2016 (Figure 6) consistently demonstrate the dominance of preferred clan culture and conflict stretching between two types of organizational

cultures: market and clan one. It is a conflict between a new dynamic market culture with performance indicators and the old professorial culture of attention to generating new scientific knowledge, and quality of education.

In 2015 (Figure 5) the organizational culture profile changed dramatically due to the university's international and internal accreditation and the increased number of reports and bureaucracy. In 2015 the preferred profile of organizational culture stretched between two other types: between bureaucratic and adhocracy culture. The latter represents the values of the project management and management teams, the meanings of dynamic projects.



Figure 5. OCAI diagnostics of corporate culture of TSU, 2015.



Figure 6. OCAI diagnostics of corporate culture at TSU, 2016.

The dominant clan culture is a family-type organization,

imbued with the values of cohesion, complicity and a sense “we” in the organization. Such organizations are like large families. “Instead of the rules and procedures of hierarchy or competing profitable market centers, typical characteristics of clan-type firms are teamwork, programs for involving employees in business and corporate obligations to them” [3]. The main task of management in this type of the organizational culture is to delegate the authority to employees and to facilitate their participation in business, to manifest their dedication and commitment to the organization. Leaders in these cases can be compared to the figure of a parent or a teacher. In this type of organization team cohesion and the moral climate are of outmost importance.

Thus, we observe a conflict in the three groups of the university between the current situation and at the preferred one.

So, in 2014-2016, from the point of view of the administration, the clan and bureaucratic cultures dominated in the “current university situation” But, however, from the point of view of professors and students market culture and bureaucracy dominated. A common culture that is “scolded” by everyone is a bureaucratic. In other words, at the level of the second dominant culture, all members of the university community point out one “enemy”: bureaucracy. In such cases we can use the common energy to form the unity by making the work of the university services more effective.

In 2014-2016, in the preferred culture of the university, the administration saw a combination of market culture and adhocracy, and professors and students saw the future in the clan and adhocracy culture. Thus, if the first dominant cultures are different, then the second dominant culture becomes common to all members of the university community. This is adhocracy. The culture of independent management of university community members’ creative projects and the formation of a reasonable risk culture.

In this case it makes sense to focus on the formation of a bank of internal initiatives of the university, internal competitions and grants for supporting projects of employees, it is necessary to provide support for research activity of professors and students, young researchers, to support full-cycle projects from the design to the release of innovative product.

Thus, University OCAI diagnostics in general represents a stretch between conflicting clan and market cultures (with the clan culture strongly prevailing). The university discourse translates the meanings and semantics of teamwork, and joint achievement of a common goal (values of the clan culture), but in reality, we have strict implementation of the “world-class” university KPI indicators (values of the market culture).

### 3.3. Focus Group Method

Focus groups of 2016 with leaders and people not actively participating in the transformation of the university confirmed the main conclusions about the stressful transformation period. The theme of the focus groups was

devoted to the university written and unwritten rules conflict during the transitional period, as a huge gap indicator between the desired and the real situation at the university.

By means of focus groups the core values of university professors were identified:

- i the creative nature of work,
- ii autonomy in the implementation of professional tasks and academic freedom;
- iii having your own interest in the content of the work,
- iv solidarism and humane attitude of employees towards each other.

Among the latent norms of university professors were identified:

- i autonomy, the tendency to independently decide how to implement a professional activity,
- ii backstage, non-public and informal resolution of conflicts,
- iii focus on respect, solidarity and cohesion with colleagues,
- iv personal acquaintance is more important than formal instructions and positions,
- v violation of the hierarchy in resolving issues,
- vi the rate of overtime and multi-functional work for employees.

Such a set of unwritten rules reflects the dominance of the clan type of organizational culture of the university. This means that employees are focused on TSU as an organization with a creative atmosphere, with the possibility of flexible setting of professional tasks and ways to carry them out solve them, combined with the desire for cohesion, complicity and a sense of the team as a “we”.

Thus, the results of the research allowed to fix the problem of underdevelopment of conventional (agreed between the administration and scientific and pedagogical workers and legitimized by both sides) norms at the university.

Caused by the need to achieve the ambitious goal of entering TSU among the top 100 leading universities in the world creates a gap between the present and the desired future.

Accordingly, in order to legitimize the new norms of the university, it is necessary to ensure constant communication between the administration and academic staff in order to critically discuss these norms and identify mechanisms for their implementation. This can be done by organizing regular meetings of top management with teams of structural units, as well as by organizing public discussions within the university.

Employees should feel the positive changes occurring as a result of the introduction of new standards. Hence, a system of measures is needed to improve the working conditions of scientific and pedagogical workers, capable of improving their perception of the situation at the university.

## 4. Discussion

On the collected data basis, the main gaps in the corporate culture of a changing university were revealed: the conflict of

old and new norms; the conflict of written and unwritten rules; the gap between the vision of the administration, professors and students; a different discourse of three main groups of the university community. The dynamics of the data shows that there is a growth of meaningless red tape, which places a heavy burden on the psyche of university staff.

The clan culture domination confirmed by three independent research methods, and does not imply that the university achieve rapid changes that university superiority operators expect. A university is too large and long-lived organization (900 years of the university existing as a social institution), that can be changed with the help of advanced, flexible structures and divisions with a focus on the experience of the best university practices, so called postmodernist university.

The main task of the university corporate culture for the period of 2017–2020 is to preserve innovative brands while preserving the classical traditional heritage of the university. Despite the new benchmarks associated with commercialization and competition, the corporate culture of the university is still focused on maintaining its high purpose and forming of professional and personal identity of employees.

The sociological approach to the diagnosis made us realize the role and positive advantages of the collaborative management style and focus on the clan culture.

In this regard, the following steps are possible in the design of further changes in the university:

(1) In order to legitimize the new norms of the university, it is necessary to ensure constant communication between the administration and the teaching staff in order to critically discuss the new norms and determine the mechanisms for their implementation. Regular meetings of top management with teams of structural units, as well as public discussions within the university community;

(2) Employees should feel the positive changes resulting from the introduction of new standards. Therefore, a system of measures is needed to improve the working conditions for scientific and pedagogical workers which can better their perception of the situation at the university.

(3) Inclusion of the student community and feedback from students is also needed due to the student communities “growing up” global trend when education becomes a practice that lasts a lifetime.

As a result of the work, the Road Map and the University's Code of Ethics was tested and approved with adjustments. The annual review of the local documents is a key to discuss the university standards, to discuss corporate culture gaps and ways to overcome them. In the future, the developed system of methods can be applied to other universities participating in the excellence programs and more widely in studies of any organizational cultures during transformation period.

## 5. Conclusion

Analytical support of the university corporate culture

transformation processes has applied results and contributes to the analysis of global processes in the system of higher education. The set of techniques allows to detect open and latent conflicts and to stimulate constructive overcoming of said conflicts both at the level of top management and at the level of individual groups of subjects, which ultimately contributes to the development of the organization.

The challenges of the global higher education agenda help to interpret the corporate culture as a management mechanism that ensures not only the competitiveness of the university but also ensures the formation of the identity of the university person who is able to live in the world of the networks which based on understanding, cooperation and collaboration, so called modern interpretation of the clan culture.

The potential of the new university clan corporate culture modification, reconciling conflicting types of corporate culture and is associated with the personal and professional identity of the modern member of the university community. The new type of clan culture of the university contains tasks of economic interests and at the same time builds a culture of trust, cooperation and collaboration.

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## Biography



**Natalia Gulius's** (PhD, associate professor at Tomsk State University, Russia) research interests include university organizational culture transformation and sociology research methods in practice. She investigates how changes in the university corporate culture influenced on the university members during

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