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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Organizational Culture in Technology Transfer Offices: From Exploratory Insights to Extended Evidence across LERU Member Universities

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents results of an organizational culture study conducted in Technology Transfer Offices (TTO) at the League of European Research Universities (LERU) members using the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) to identify key cultural characteristics within these organizations. It is an extension of the exploratory study by Gambi and Debackere published in this journal in 2025. The aim of both studies is to understand how TTOs could better function as an effective bridge between University and Industry (U-I) considering and spanning the cultural differences among all the stakeholders involved in the technology transfer process. Based on 34 valid questionnaires from 12 LERU TTOs, the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and non-parametric tests. The findings indicate that TTOs currently exhibit a balanced cultural profile embracing an interrelated and multidimensional set of cultural characteristics. For the ideal state, respondents demonstrate a preference for strengthening characteristics of the Clan and Adhocracy cultures, associated with collaboration, flexibility, and innovation, while reducing characteristics of Hierarchical culture such as control, uniformity and formalization, and maintaining the Market culture characteristics.

Keywords: TTO, Competing Values Framework, Inclusive culture, U-I collaboration.

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INTRODUCTION

Universities play a pivotal role in entrepreneurial ecosystems by fostering innovation, economic growth, and societal development through education, research and knowledge transfer (Zinecker et al. 2024, Baglieri et al. 2018). University-Industry (U-I) relationships have evolved significantly, as firms increasingly seek to accelerate innovation by outsourcing R&D activities, while universities expand their entrepreneurial role driven by scientific, financial and societal drivers (Ghauri and Rosendo Rios, 2016, Baglieri et al. 2018).

However, several studies highlight that misaligned expectations and cultural differences among U-I stakeholders constitute major barriers to effective technology transfer (Huyghe & Knockaert, 2015; Grzegorczyk, 2019).

As interest in this topic has grown (Bengoa et al., 2021), scholars have increasingly emphasized the role of organizational culture in contributing to an effective technology transfer process (Gambi & Debackere, 2025a). In this context, technology transfer offices (TTOs) are expected to act as institutional boundary spanners, bridging cultural gaps between academia, industry, and other stakeholders.

Findings of a preliminary exploratory study developed by Gambi and Debackere (2025b) show that an effective TTO culture should be inclusive and pluralistic, enabling the organization to pragmatically and professionally engage with the diverse culture of its stakeholders. Although the study was conducted in a well-established and successful technology transfer office, it examines only the context of a single TTO.

Therefore, building on findings from their earlier studies, the present work seeks replicating and extending the empirical scope of the previous exploratory work by examining the organizational culture of TTOs at League of European Research Universities (LERU) member universities. LERU is an association of twenty-four European research-intensive universities formed in 2002 (www.leru.org/).

Moving from a single exploratory analysis to a multi-organizational examination, the present study enhances the scope of prior insights and provides a more robust empirical foundation for understanding organizational culture in leading TTOs. This study also aims to deepen the discussion on current versus ideal organizational culture, shedding light on cultural alignment and aspirational change at the TTOs studied. In doing so, it not only expands the empirical base of earlier findings but also refines the conceptual understanding of cultural dynamics in TTOs.

The League is committed to advancing education, fostering fundamental research as a driver of innovation, strengthening research excellence across domains, and

influencing European policy through the exchange of best practices (Maes et al. 2011; Abdi et al. 2021).

Given the ambitions of the LERU members in the European and global research context by advancing science, shaping innovation ecosystems, influencing policies, and addressing major challenges, this study focuses on the TTOs related to the League, and addresses the following research question: *To what extent do LERU TTOs also operate adopting a balanced and pluralistic culture rather than a single dominant one?*

To answer this research question, a survey research design is implemented encompassing LERU members. Cultural characteristics are operationalized using the well-established, well-validated and widely used Competing Values Framework (CVF) by Quinn and Rohrbaugh, 1983; and Cameron and Quinn, 2006.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Competing Values Framework

Organizational culture is understood as a pattern of shared basic assumptions and values that organizational members internalize and use to guide their work practices (Schein, 1984). Research and practice have increasingly recognized the importance of organizational culture in shaping how organizations operate, influence individual behaviour, and ultimately affect performance (Schein, 1984; Gregory et al. 2009; Hogan and Coote, 2014).

While several studies in the technology transfer literature have examined dimensions such as individual competences, motivations (Micozzi et al. 2021; Soares and Torkomian, 2021; Vilani and Grimaldi, 2024), as well as governance mechanisms (Siegel et al. 2003; Tolin et al. 2025) influencing TTO effectiveness, these dimensions can also be understood as both influencing and being influenced by the organization's culture, which provides the broader context in which such dimensions are shaped.

Therefore, the focus of this study is on organizational culture itself, examining the cultural orientation that characterizes the TTO environment. Several models of organizational culture have been described in literature such as *Onion Model* (Hofstede et al., 1990); *Organizational Culture Profile* – OCP (O'Reilly et al, 1991); - *Personal, Customer Orientation, Organizational and Cultural* – PCOC (Maull et al, 2001, *Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness* - GLOBE (House et al. 2002) to name a few.

In this study, we use the *Competing Values Framework* - CVF (Quinn and Rohrbaugh, 1983; Cameron and Quinn, 2006) which is not only a well-established and theoretically well-grounded model but also widely used in the management studies. In addition, the CVF is particularly appropriate for this study as it allows for a structured assessment of different organizational culture profiles. According to Büschgens et al. (2013), the CVF provides a meaningful structure to systematically classify cultural characteristics, ensuring clear and consistent comparison across defined criteria.

The CVF defines organizational culture by distinguishing whether organizations prioritize stability and control *versus* flexibility and change, and whether their focus is on internal environment *versus* external environment, therefore, representing two main competing values. Crossing these two dimensions leads to the identification of four cultural profiles, namely: Clan, Adhocracy, Hierarchy and Market. Figure 1 summarizes the organizational culture profiles and their characteristics.

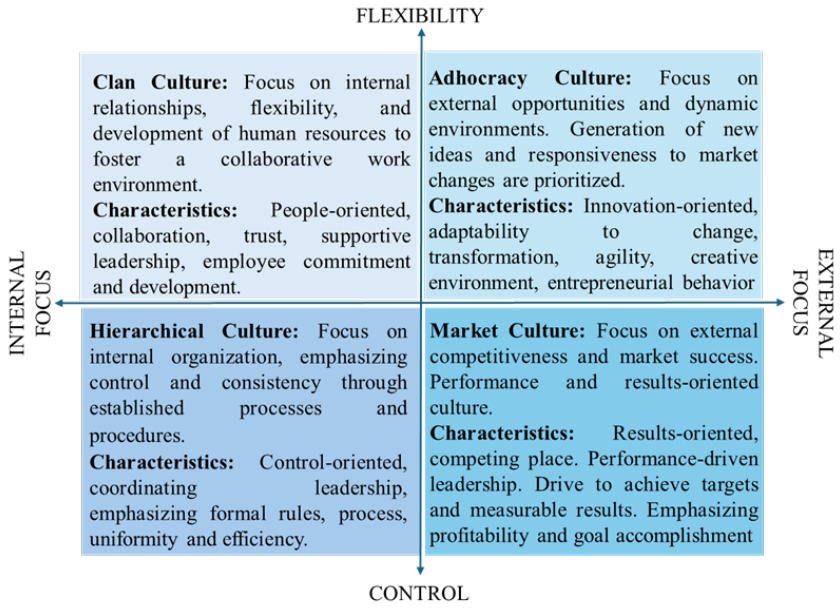

Fig. 1. Organizational culture profiles and characteristics (Adapted from Cameron and Quinn, 2006)

The CVF has been used to study organizational culture profiles across a wide range of contexts, including manufacturing companies (Prajogo and McDermott, 2011), healthcare organizations (Sloth et al. 2025), small and medium-sized enterprises (Kuhn and Bhatiasevi, 2024), multinational corporations, higher education institutions (Ramachandran et al. 2011), to investigating, for instance, how different cultural profiles support firms' strategy, coordination, innovation, and organizational effectiveness (e.g. Büschgens et al. 2013; Gregory et al. 2009; Zu et al. 2010; Cao et al 2015). However, in the context of TTOs, except for the exploratory study of Gambi and Debackere, (2025b), the CVF has not been used.

Technology Transfer Office and Organizational Culture

It is widely recognized that the technology transfer process involves multiple stakeholders (e.g. researchers, university administrators, firms, investors, policymakers, technology offices) each with distinct roles, interests, and objectives. Prior studies show that differences in goals, motivations, and behaviours, together with the diverse organizational contexts in which these stakeholders operate, often lead to misalignments and misunderstanding regarding how the technology transfer process should be managed (Siegel et al. 2004, Bjerregaard, 2010).

TTOs play a central role in bridging and reducing cultural gaps in U-I collaboration (Huyghe et al. 2014), but their embeddedness in academic institutions that are subject to public oversight may lead to bureaucratic organizational cultures characterized by inflexible, controlled and conservative practices, which can hinder effective communication and collaboration among diverse stakeholders (Siegel et al, 2003, 2004). These characteristics are aligned with the hierarchical and market culture profiles presented in the CVF.

According to Kreiling and Bounfour (2020) and Uctu and Essop (2022), overcoming these limitations requires TTOs to adopt a more flexible and adaptative cultural orientation by strengthening social networks, improving staffing and skills development. These findings suggest that TTOs should combine aspects of Clan and Adhocracy cultures.

In addition, Compagnucci and Spigarelli (2024) state that TTOs should act as agents of change by managing and addressing cultural differences among stakeholders, while promoting a culture of innovation and knowledge sharing. In this sense, a culture of responsiveness and agility is fundamental, as TTOs are expected to act as agents of cultural change.

Pohlman et al. (2024) argue that universities can leverage the dual nature (business and academic) of their TTOs by linking academics to firms through outbound strategies and fostering entrepreneurial culture through inbound strategies. Thereby enhancing technology transfer effectiveness and addressing cultural differences across different CVF culture profiles.

Although organizational culture has frequently been cited as an important factor in supporting technology transfer processes, it has rarely been examined as a core construct in empirical analyses of TTOs. It is only in recent works, such as Gambi and Debackere (2025b), that organizational culture has been systematically conceptualized and empirically examined as a central dimension of TTO activities.

Based on a systematic literature review, Gambi and Debackere (2025b) identified twelve core articles encompassing the topic culture in the context of TTO. Among these studies, ten examine culture from an organizational perspective, while two adopted a national culture perspective.

The studies addressing organizational culture argue that TTOs must act as agents of change, actively managing and reducing the cultural gaps among stakeholders involved in the technology transfer process. Consequently, the literature emphasizes the importance of fostering characteristics related to flexibility-oriented cultures such as adaptability, risk-taking, collaboration, trust, knowledge sharing as key elements for developing effective TTOs.

From a national perspective, the studies highlight that TTOs are embedded within broader cultural contexts that shape for instance entrepreneurial attitudes, managerial styles, and relational behaviours. Although this represents a macro-level perspective, it ultimately influences organizational culture itself, as national cultural values affect the behaviours and attitudes of individuals operating within TTOs.

In their study, Gambi and Debackere (2025b) used the Competing Values Framework (CVF) to characterize the organizational culture profile of a single European TTO and highlight the importance of TTO managers understanding and integrating the cultural characteristics of diverse stakeholders and embracing competing culture types to bridge differences and enhance the effectiveness of technology transfer processes. They argue that organizations need to accommodate characteristics of all cultural profiles described in the CVF, even when these characteristics are at first sight contradictory.

METHOD AND DATA

In line with the previous study developed by Gambi and Debackere (2025b), the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) was adapted to the context of TTOs (p.34-35), and used to assess four different cultural profiles, namely: Clan, Adhocracy, Market, and Hierarchy, based on the Competing Values Framework (CVF). The OCAI uses an ipsative scale, where respondents must distribute 100 points among four cultural statements in six different dimensions (e.g.

dominant characteristics, leadership, strategic emphasis, criteria of success), indicating the relative strength of each cultural attribute for the current state and then, for the ideal (preferred) state.

Data was collected through a web-based questionnaire e-mailed to the LERU ENTE network representing 23 TTOs. The unit of analysis is the TTO of the university that is a LERU member. One of the members of LERU did not have a TTO representative within the network and was therefore excluded from the email list used to invite participants to the study; as a result, our final sample comprised 23 of the 24 universities that comprise the League.

The study is based on 34 valid questionnaires returned from representatives of 12 TTOs, out of 23 TTOs initially invited to participate (actually, one of the LERU universities was removed from the sample, since its representative informed us that the university does not have a TTO as an organizational unit) achieving a response rate of 54,5%. Regarding experience within the TTO, 44% of respondents have more than 10 years of experience, 21% have between 6 and 10 years, 32% have between 1 and 5 years, and 3% have less than one year. As the respondents hold positions within the TTO, their answer was based on their direct experience of the TTO's organizational culture, rather than the broader university culture. Their years of experience were explicitly reported to establish their seniority and to validate the credibility of their knowledge on TTO's organizational culture. See Appendix I for details of the sample demographics.

In addition, respondents currently work, or have previously worked, across multiple fields within the TTO, including for instance management, intellectual property, invention identification and evaluation, business evaluation, commercial agreements, among others. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, and nonparametric Wilcoxon and Friedman tests in SPSS v. 24. Respondents are asked to rate the OCAI dimensions for their TTO as currently perceived ('Current state') and as preferred ('Ideal state') by them.

RESULTS

Results of descriptive analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive analysis

	Current Culture			
	Clan	Adhocracy	Market	Hierarchical
N	34.00	34.00	34.00	34.00
Mean	28.11	25.56	20.77	25.55
Median	26.67	23.33	20.00	26.25
SD	11.27	10.44	6.72	10.53
	Ideal Culture			
	Clan	Adhocracy	Market	Hierarchical
N	34.00	34.00	34.00	34.00
Mean	29.75	27.87	20.89	21.50
Median	27.50	27.08	20.83	21.25
SD	10.24	8.69	6.44	7.21

Data shows that, in the Current state, the culture profile of the TTOs is rather balanced, with a slight predominance of the Clan culture, followed by Hierarchical, Adhocracy, and Market cultures. This is in line with the results obtained with the preliminary study (Gambi and Debackere, 2025b). For the Ideal state, respondents expressed a preference on strengthening the Clan and Adhocracy profiles which are more related to collaboration, flexibility, and innovation, and decrease the Hierarchical culture profile, which represents control and formal procedures, while maintaining the Market dimension at its current level. Figure 2 shows the Radar Chart comparing Current and Ideal culture of the studied TTOs.

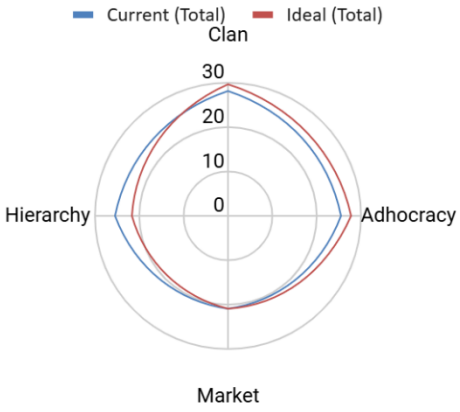

Fig. 2. Current and Ideal LERU TTO's organizational culture.

Differences among the cultural profiles

A Friedman test was used to analyse the differences among the cultural profiles. Results show that the differences among the four cultural profiles are not statistically significant for the current state. However, for the ideal state, the analyses show statistically significant differences among the profiles (Table 2).

Table 2. Friedman Test

	Current	Ideal
N	34	34
Chi-Square	7.532	27.856
df	3	3
Asymp. Sig.	0.057	0.000

In the Ideal state, Wilcoxon Tests confirm significant differences between the people and flexibility-oriented cultures, and the other cultures (Table 3). Respondents express a clear preference for reducing hierarchical cultural characteristics and strengthening aspects related to collaboration, flexibility, people development and innovation, all of them characteristics related to Clan and Adhocracy cultures.

Table 3. Pairwise Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Tests for Ideal Culture

	Ideal Culture		
	Adhocracy - Clan	Market - Clan	Hierarchical - Clan
Z	-0.402	-3.395	-3.656
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.687	0.001	0.000
	Ideal Culture		
	Market - Adhocracy	Hierarchical - Adhocracy	Hierarchical - Market
Z	-3.583	-2.896	-0.318
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.004	0.750

Differences between current and ideal culture

Differences between Current and Ideal cultures were analyzed using Wilcoxon Tests for Current and Ideal Culture Profiles show a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between the Current and Ideal states for the Hierarchical and Adhocracy cultures (Table 4). This suggests a collective preference for decreasing cultural characteristics related to control-oriented values, uniformity, rules and regulations, and a greater emphasis on cultural characteristics associated with innovation, flexibility, and creativity, which are aspects of organizational environments oriented to adaptability, while at the same time maintaining the characteristics of a results- and performance-driven environment (i.e. the Market culture profile).

Table 4. Pairwise Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Tests for Current and Ideal Culture Profiles

	Clan Ideal - Clan Current	**Adhocracy Ideal - Adhocracy Current**
Z	-0.746	-2.030
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.456	0.042
	Market Ideal - Market Current	**Hierarchical Ideal - Hierachical Current**
Z	-0.227	-2.380
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.820	0.017

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results replicate and extend the insights of the Gambi and Debackere paper and confirm that the TTOs currently operate under a balanced mix of cultural profiles according to the CVF. This highlights the importance for TTO managers to better understand the organizational culture of their diverse stakeholders, which means to embrace competing cultural characteristics such as balancing control with flexibility, or stability with innovation to bridge differences across stakeholders' groups (e.g. faculties, firms, policymakers, university administration, governments). However, in the ideal state, although competing cultural characteristics continue to coexist in a way that supports an inclusive environment, the results indicate a need for cultural adjustments that prioritize flexibility, participation, innovation, and results-orientation over control-oriented and bureaucratic practices.The demonstrated preference for reducing hierarchical aspects of culture, while reinforcing innovation-oriented, results-oriented and people-centered cultural characteristics, indicates a need for TTO managers to refine internal practices, governance routines, communication, and strategy process. By shifting toward greater flexibility, collaboration, performance-orientation and innovation, managers can enhance TTO capabilities to respond to emerging opportunities, build stronger relationships with diverse stakeholders, and improve technology transfer effectiveness. This cultural adjustment may also strengthen team motivation and support a more agile and adaptative culture.

Strengthening Clan and Adhocracy cultures requires attention to people, particularly in terms of motivation and skills development, while simultaneously developing governance mechanisms capable of dealing with dynamic tensions inherent to the operational environment of TTOs, which require operating under a variety of competing cultural characteristics.

For instance, a TTO operates in a complex cultural environment that requires professionals with diverse skills and backgrounds to bring different individual capabilities (Soares and Torkomian, 2021). In this context, individual motivations play an important role, as values oriented towards autonomy, achievement, and recognition tend to foster the long-term commitment needed to support the technology transfer process (Vilani and Grimaldi, 2024).

Studies on technology transfer also emphasize the importance of governance mechanisms underpinning TTO effectiveness. Features related to the alignment of stakeholders' interest through clearly defined goals, people-centered management that supports expertise and engagement of TTO professionals, and availability of organizational and financial resources to enable effective technology transfer are important organizational factors supporting effective technology transfer (Siegel et al. 2003, Micozzi et al. 2021, Tolin et al. 2025). In this context, organizational culture shapes how governance mechanisms operate within TTOs. Cultural orientations influence how strategic goals are articulated and prioritized, how professionals are supported and rewarded, and how resources are mobilized to facilitate technology transfer activities.

Hence, the notion that successful TTOs operate under a balanced mix of cultural profiles reflects their capacity to manage tensions between competing organizational orientations with implications for dedicated governance mechanisms. In this sense, culture and governance should be understood as co-evolving features shaping both the functioning and strategic orientation of TTOs.

By moving beyond a single-case context to a broader empirical setting, the findings provide stronger evidence

regarding the cultural characteristics and aspirations of TTOs within leading research universities. The explicit distinction between current and ideal cultural profiles offers additional insight into how cultural alignment is perceived within TTOs highlighting cultural differences that may shape the evolution of technology transfer practices.

Figure 3 summarizes characteristics of the four cultural profiles based on the CVF, and characteristics of an inclusive TTO culture.

As discussed in the Gambi and Debackere paper (2025b), and evidenced by this study, an inclusive and multipolar TTO culture plays a central role in mitigating risks in R&D contexts characterized by intangible assets and incomplete contracts. By recognizing and reconciling the incentive systems of academia and industry, such a culture enables the TTO to assess, manage and bridge the mechanisms governing both sectors.

This inclusive orientation fosters transparency and mutual understanding in technology transfer processes. More broadly, in a context where interdisciplinarity is increasingly emphasized in academia and society, the TTO functions as a boundary-spanning, transdisciplinary organization.

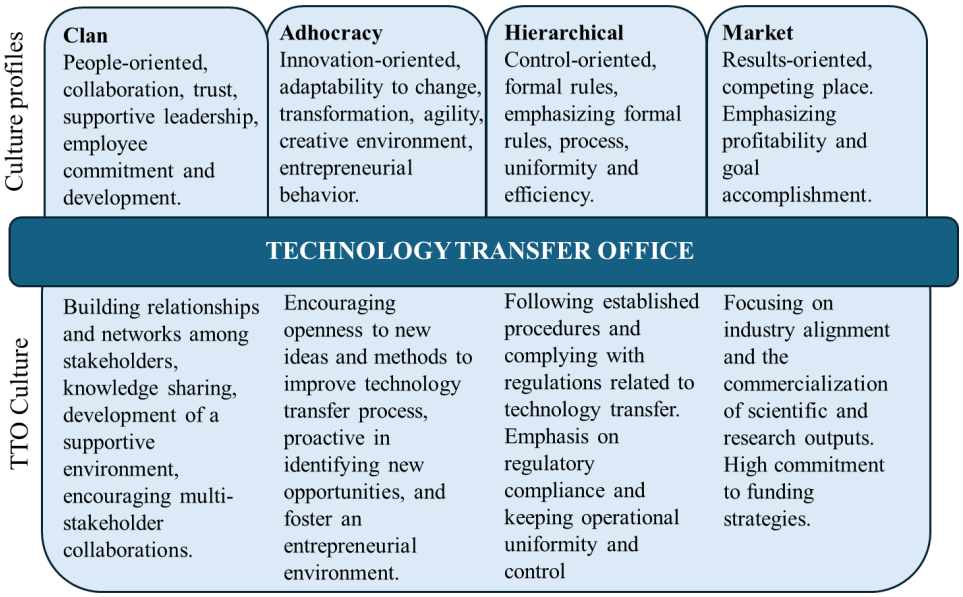

Fig. 3. CVF-based cultural profiles and inclusive TTO culture characteristics (Adapted from Gambi and Debackere, 2025b; Cameron and Quinn, 2006)

The sample was composed of a sample of LERU TTOs, representing well established, professional, and mature TTOs in Europe. Their organizational structures, best practices, and accumulated experience enable TTOs to accommodate and blend seemingly competing cultural characteristics thereby balancing expectations and needs of multiple stakeholders.

Those findings provide practical and readily applicable insights for TTO managers, who routinely operate across organizations characterized by distinct cultural profiles. Although U-I collaboration drives innovation, its effectiveness hinges on the quality of relationships among the actors involved in the technology transfer process.

Accordingly, integrating the cultural dimensions and profiles identified in this study into the design of a multipolar TTO organization is critical to the success of technology transfer strategies, as they support greater alignment and shared understanding among participating stakeholders.

From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that fostering a multipolar culture within the TTO requires appropriate organizational actions. For example, TTO managers may encourage collaboration and knowledge exchange by creating multidisciplinary and cross-functional teams, establishing regular formal and informal interaction mechanisms such as meetings with research groups or industry engagement workshops. At the same time, strengthening cultural characteristics that support innovation may involve adopting more flexible approaches for decision making, providing strategic and operational autonomy to research groups (Bailyn, 1985; Debackere et al., 1996) and implementing incentive systems that reward proactive engagement with industry.

Finally, some limitations of the research method must be mentioned: the study focuses on organizational culture at the TTO level, but the data were obtained from individual respondents working in these offices. While this approach is common in organizational culture research it does not allow for the analysis of intra-organizational variations or formal aggregation of

responses at the organizational level. Future research could address this limitation by collecting larger samples in each TTO, enabling the examination of potential differences across organizational units within the same TTO.

In addition, future studies could develop comparative analyses across different institutional and national contexts to provide broader insights into how cultural orientation interacts with governance mechanisms, incentive systems, and staffing configurations in the TTO and influences their performance. Moreover, the development of longitudinal studies will be valuable to examine how organizational culture and TTO governance and practices co-evolve over time.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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APPENDIX

I. Sample demographics

ID	University's TTO	N	Years of TTO experience
1	Imperial College London	1	6 – 10 years
		2	More than 10 years
2	KU Leuven	3	More than 10 years
3	Universitat de Barcelona	4	6 – 10 years
		5	More than 10 years
		6	More than 10 years
		7	More than 10 years
		8	More than 10 years
4	Université de Genève	9	More than 10 years
		10	More than 10 years
		11	1 – 5 years
		12	More than 10 years
5	University of Amsterdam	13	1 – 5 years
		14	1 – 5 years
		15	1 – 5 years
		16	6 – 10 years
		17	6 – 10 years
6	University of Copenhagen	18	1 – 5 years
		19	1 – 5 years
		20	6 – 10 years
		21	Less than 1 year
7	University of Edinburgh	22	More than 10 years
		23	6 – 10 years
8	University of Helsinki	24	1 – 5 years
9	University of Milan	25	1 – 5 years
		26	1 – 5 years
		27	More than 10 years
		28	6 – 10 years
10	University of Strasbourg	29	More than 10 years
		30	1 – 5 years
		31	More than 10 years
11	University of Zurich	32	More than 10 years
12	Utrecht University	33	1 – 5 years
		34	More than 10 years