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### CORPORATE CULTURE OF A DISTRIBUTED TEAM КОРПОРАТИВНА КУЛЬТУРА РОЗПОДІЛЕНОЇ КОМАНДИ

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*The article examines the characteristics of shaping and sustaining corporate culture in distributed teams in the context of digitalization and the transformation of traditional forms of work organization. It is argued that the rapid proliferation of distributed teams, exacerbated by globalization, highlights the challenge of maintaining organizational identity in the absence of a shared physical space. E. Schein's classic three-layer model of corporate culture is examined, and it is shown that in a distributed format, each of its levels undergoes a significant transformation. It has been established that artifacts are transitioning to digital form, whilst basic assumptions are formed much more slowly due to a lack of shared experience and the fragility of trust at a distance. It has been revealed that the deep level of basic assumptions is most vulnerable, as a team may possess formalized digital artifacts and proclaimed values in the absence of genuine shared beliefs. External and internal factors in culture formation have been identified that take on new significance in the context of remote interaction, particularly a leader's digital competence, emotional intelligence, and role as an active architect of culture. It is demonstrated that culture formation in a distributed format cannot occur spontaneously, as the natural mechanism of 'cultural diffusion' is virtually non-existent in a virtual environment and therefore requires a proactive, managed approach. The correspondence between levels of corporate culture and the digital tools that support them has been systematized, and the dual role of digital platforms has been substantiated. The practical significance of the results lies in their applicability to managers of distributed teams for the targeted development and maintenance of corporate culture. Prospects for further research include empirically testing the proposed theoretical propositions using data from Ukrainian companies and developing practical tools to assess the level of corporate culture development in distributed teams.*

**Keywords:** corporate culture, distributed team, virtual team, digitalization, remote working, digital tools, organizational identity, leadership.

У статті розглядаються особливості формування та підтримання корпоративної культури в розподілених командах у контексті цифровізації та трансформації традиційних форм організації праці. Стверджується, що стрімке поширення розподілених команд, яке посилюється глобалізацією, підкреслює складність збереження організаційної ідентичності за відсутності спільного фізичного простору. Розглядається класична трирівнева модель корпоративної культури Е. Шейна. Показано, що в розподіленому форматі кожен з її рівнів зазнає значних змін. Встановлено, що артефакти переходять у цифрову форму, тоді як базові припущення формуються набагато повільніше через брак спільного досвіду та крихкість довіри на відстані. Виявлено, що саме глибинний рівень базових припущень є найбільш вразливим, оскільки команда може володіти формалізованими цифровими артефактами та проголошеними цінностями за відсутності справжніх спільних переконань. Визначено зовнішні та внутрішні чинники формування культури, які набувають нового значення в контексті віддаленої взаємодії, зокрема цифрова компетентність лідера, його емоційний інтелект та роль активного архітектора культури. Продемонстровано, що формування культури в розподіленому форматі не може відбуватися спонтанно, оскільки природний механізм «культурної дифузії» практично відсутній у віртуальному середовищі і тому вимагає проактивного, керованого підходу. Систематизовано відповідність між рівнями корпоративної культури та цифровими інструментами, що їх підтримують, а також обґрунтовано подвійну роль цифрових платформ. Практичне значення результатів полягає в їх застосуванні менеджерами розподілених команд для цілеспрямованого розвитку та підтримання корпоративної культури. Перспективи подальших досліджень передбачають емпіричну перевірку запропонованих теоретичних положень з використанням даних українських компаній та розробку практичних інструментів для оцінки рівня розвитку корпоративної культури в розподіленій команді.

**Ключові слова:** корпоративна культура, розподілена команда, віртуальна команда, цифровізація, дистанційна робота, цифрові інструменти, організаційна ідентичність, лідерство.

#### Statement of the problem

In the context of digitalization and globalization, traditional forms of work organization are undergoing a significant transformation. The adoption of cloud technologies, video conferencing tools, and collaboration platforms has eliminated most of the technical barriers to geographically distributed work, leading to a rapid increase in the number of so-called distributed teams. A distributed team is a work group whose members collaborate on shared tasks but are physically located in different cities, countries, or time zones. Such teams are characterized by cross-cultural diversity, the absence of a single physical office, and operation exclusively within a shared virtual environment.

This model of work organization gives rise to qualitatively new management challenges. Unlike traditional teams, distributed teams lack the informal communication channels that serve as the “connective tissue” of the corporate environment in conventional offices. The absence of these mechanisms complicates communication, coordination, and mutual trust among team members.

In this context, corporate culture takes on particular significance—a system of shared values, behavioral norms, and practices that shape the organization's internal environment. It not only sets strategic guidelines and defines development priorities, but also serves as a vital tool for social integration, fostering team cohesion and employee loyalty. For a distributed team, corporate culture can compensate for the lack of face-to-face interaction by fostering a sense of shared identity and belonging to the organization despite physical distance.

In Ukraine, the urgency of this issue has significantly intensified due to the full-scale invasion, which has led to mass forced relocation and migration of the workforce both within the country and beyond its borders. A significant portion of Ukrainian companies were forced to transition to a distributed work format within an extremely short timeframe, without adequate preparation or established management practices. Under such conditions, the issue of preserving and developing corporate culture takes on not only theoretical but also acute practical significance. All of the above factors underscore the relevance and practical significance of researching this specific topic.

In analyzing existing research on corporate culture, it should be noted that the concept entered the academic sphere in the second half of the twentieth century. It was during this period that researchers began to pay particular attention to the intangible aspects of an organization's activities. The concept of corporate culture was introduced by American sociologist E. Shane [9], who defined it as “a system of shared



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basic beliefs formed through the process of a group's adaptation to the external environment and internal integration."The shift toward distributed teams has significantly transformed models of communication and collaboration within organizations. Thus, J.K.J. Kahlow [7] noted that digital, remote communication has replaced face-to-face interaction, altering team dynamics. At the same time, L. Schlenkrich and C. Upfold [10] emphasized that such remote communication leads to significant problems due to the loss of the ability to interpret nonverbal cues. Researchers also specifically highlight the problem of information overload and digital fatigue. M. A. Garg and P. Ranga [6] suggested that organizations' dependence on technology requires a reassessment of collaboration strategies, with an emphasis on clarity, inclusivity, and the formation of a new digital corporate culture.

This idea was supported by J. V. Dinh [5], who suggested that companies organize virtual team-building events to maintain connections among members of distributed teams. Such social activities may include informal group interactions, one-on-one sessions with leaders, and group activities. This will strengthen a sense of belonging and foster a remote corporate culture.

Maintaining corporate culture in distributed teams requires significant resources and strong leadership skills, as emphasized by V. O. Akpa [4]. The absence of a shared physical space can complicate the formation of a unified organizational identity and shared values.

### The purpose of the research

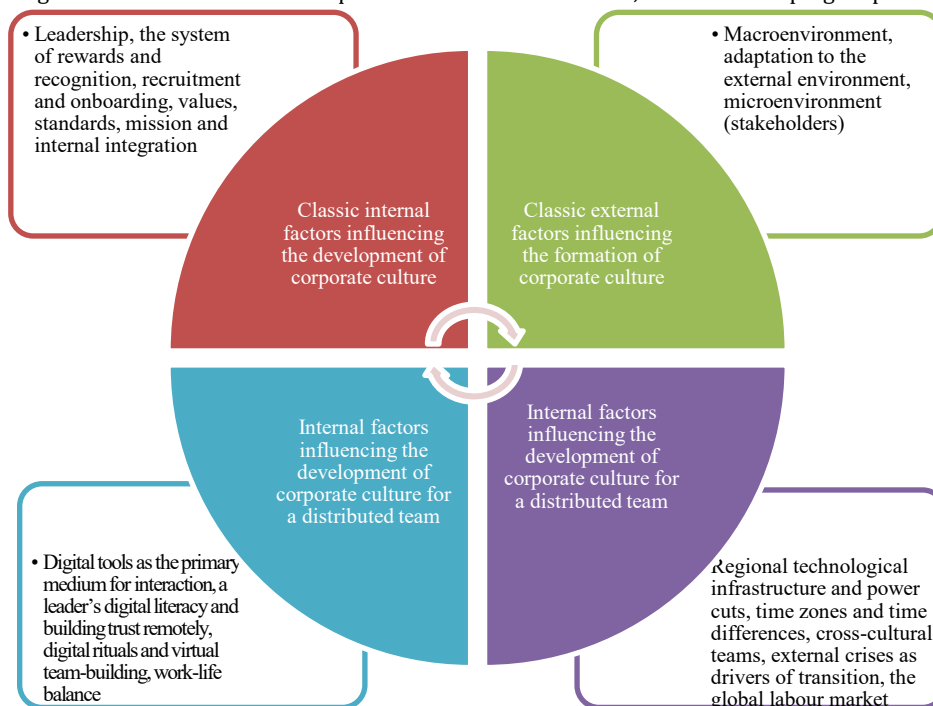
The purpose of this article is to examine the characteristics of building and maintaining corporate culture in distributed teams in the context of digitalization and the transformation of traditional forms of work organization.

### Presentation of the main research material

The development of organizational culture is a complex, multifaceted process, and this task is made particularly challenging when working with distributed teams. According to classical, widely accepted theories, the factors influencing corporate culture are divided into external and internal factors. Internal factors can be strategic or tactical and encompass the company's mission, its stage of development, level of technological capability, staff attitudes towards change, corporate traditions, and the human resources management system [1]. External factors, on the other hand, shape the overall context in which the organization operates. These may include legislative norms, the economic and political situation, scientific and technological progress, partnerships, and the level of competition and management culture within the industry.

However, in the context of digital transformation and the operation of distributed teams, the factors shaping corporate culture are taking on new significance (Fig. 1).

The organization's founders have the greatest influence on the development of its culture through their values and the methods they use to build it, which are later adopted by new leaders. However, in the context of distributed teams, a leader's digital competence is an additional requirement alongside their traditional leadership roles. Furthermore, in the context of a leader's role within a distributed team, building trust remotely is key; this requires, among other things, a high level of emotional intelligence, the ability to facilitate, and the capacity to build trust without face-to-face contact. All these additional leadership functions are driven by the absence of non-verbal communication in a virtual environment. Moreover, distributed teams are prone to digital fatigue and information overload, and it is the leader in



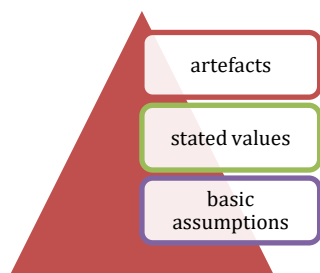
**Fig. 1. Factors influencing the development of corporate culture in a distributed team.** Source: developed by the author

such a team who must create a safe corporate culture environment to overcome these difficulties.

Thus, corporate culture represents a set of basic assumptions, values, behavioural norms and artefacts shared by members of the organisation and passed on to new employees as the 'correct' way of perceiving, thinking and acting [2]. In a distributed team, this transmission mechanism is complicated: a new employee is deprived of the opportunity to naturally 'pick up' the culture through daily observation of colleagues in the office, so assimilating shared concepts requires deliberate effort on the manager's part.

The most influential model of corporate culture was proposed by the American psychologist Edgar Schein. He describes culture as a three-layered structure (Fig. 2).

The first, top layer consists of artifacts, that is, visible elements – symbols, office design, dress codes, greeting rituals, and corporate celebrations. In a distributed setting, most traditional artifacts lose their foundation, as there is no shared physical space, dress code, or in-person rituals. They are replaced by digital artifacts – the design of shared workspaces, channels for recognizing achievements in messaging apps, virtual corporate events, and online greeting rituals.



**Fig. 2. Structure of corporate culture.** Source: compiled by the author based on [8]

The second layer comprises stated values – the mission, strategy, goals, and rules that the organization publicly proclaims. In distributed teams, these values are more often documented and communicated via digital channels, as there is no informal ‘office’ way of constantly reinforcing them.

The third layer is the foundational, deepest one: basic assumptions (unconscious, self-evident beliefs about human nature, time, space, and relationships that determine behavior) [8]. It is at this level that development is slowest in a distributed environment, as it arises from shared experience and interaction, which teams lacking physical contact lack.

It is important to note that there may be a significant discrepancy between these layers. A company may declare ‘openness and transparency’ as a value, whilst the actual culture involves a rigid hierarchy and fear of criticism. This discrepancy between ‘culture on paper’ and ‘culture in action’ is one of the most common and dangerous organizational phenomena. In distributed teams, the risk of such a discrepancy increases due to the lack of face-to-face contact. In such cases, it is harder for a manager to notice that the declared values do not work in practice, and for employees to sense the real culture rather than the proclaimed one. Therefore, an organization’s corporate culture is not merely corporate slogans, but a deep-seated system of guiding principles that genuinely influences the daily behavior of every team member. According to E. Schein [9], it is the basic assumptions that constitute the most powerful and enduring level of culture. They are rarely recognized, yet they determine how people perceive problems and find solutions.

Alongside E. Schein’s model, it is worth mentioning Charles Handy’s typology of cultures, which identified four types: a power culture (a ‘spider’ culture – the concentration of decision-making around a single center), role culture (bureaucratic, hierarchical), task culture (project-oriented, team-based), and personality culture (focused on an individual ‘star’ specialist) [9]. Understanding the type of culture is a prerequisite for any management decisions.

That is why it makes sense to examine each level of corporate culture in more detail, specifically in the context of distributed teams. Indeed, the artifacts level undergoes the most noticeable changes, as it has traditionally been tied to physical space. In the office, artifacts included the interior design, workstation layout, noticeboards, and communal break areas. In a distributed team, the digital environment becomes the carrier of artifacts: the interface and structure of corporate platforms (Microsoft Teams, Slack, Google Workspace), the design of shared channels, participants’ avatars and statuses, the format of video meetings, emojis, and internal memes as elements of informal communication. It is telling that digital tools become not only a technical but also a cultural resource for the team, shaping a shared digital identity [1; 3].

The level of declared values in a distributed format requires a significantly higher degree of explicitness. Whilst in a traditional team, values and behavioral norms can be conveyed informally, in a distributed team, this informal channel is almost non-existent. Therefore, values must be clearly documented, enshrined in team rules, regularly discussed at joint meetings, and reinforced by a transparent system of evaluation and recognition. Researchers emphasize that it is precisely the transparency of communication and the public recognition of achievements that become practical mechanisms for transmitting values in a virtual environment [3].

The level of basic assumptions is the most difficult to establish remotely. This deeper layer arises from shared experiences of overcoming difficulties, long-term interaction, and mutual trust in other words, precisely what a distributed team lacks most. Trust develops more slowly here and remains more fragile, and without it, basic notions of colleagues’ reliability, acceptable standards of behavior, and methods of conflict resolution do not have time to take root. This creates a specific risk: the team may have well-defined artifacts and clearly stated values, but an ‘empty’ deep level where genuine shared beliefs have not yet formed [2].

**Table 1. A Comparison of Corporate Culture Structures in Traditional and Distributed Teams**

Level of culture (according to E. Schein)	The traditional team	Distributed team
Artifacts (visible elements: symbols, rituals)	Office space, dress code, noticeboards, face-to-face greetings, and company parties	Digital platform interfaces, shared channels, avatars and statuses, channels for recognizing achievements, virtual corporate events
Stated values (mission, objectives, rules)	Informal learning through colleagues’ example, the manager’s feedback, and the overall atmosphere within the team	Documentation of values, clear team rules, transparent evaluation system, and regular discussion at meetings
Basic assumptions (unconscious beliefs)	These develop naturally through shared experiences, long-term interaction and physical presence	Forms slowly, trust is fragile, there is a risk of an ‘empty’ deep level without established shared beliefs

*Source: compiled by the author based on [1; 2; 7; 9]*

As shown in Table 1, E. Schein’s three-layer logic is retained in both formats, although the implementation of each level differs. Artifacts are digitized, values require conscious articulation rather than informal transmission, and basic assumptions take longer to form and require targeted efforts by the manager to embed them. This is precisely why culture-building in a distributed format cannot happen spontaneously – it requires a proactive, managed approach.

In a traditional office, culture largely forms on its own. Employees observe colleagues’ and their manager’s behavior daily, adopt unwritten norms, exchange information in informal conversations, and experience work situations together. This natural mechanism of ‘cultural diffusion’ is virtually absent in a distributed team, as there is no shared physical space or daily interactions. Therefore, what happened spontaneously in the office must become the subject of a conscious managerial effort in a virtual environment.

A proactive approach means that the manager does not wait for the culture to ‘develop on its own’, but purposefully designs its elements. The manager articulates and documents values, establishes clear norms for team interactions, establishes communication rituals, organizes newcomer onboarding, and maintains regular communication. In other words, the leader of a distributed team transforms from a passive bearer of culture into its active architect. It is precisely their digital competencies, leadership qualities, and ability to build trust across distances that determine whether a unified organizational identity will form despite physical distance. Digital tools play a key role in implementing this approach, becoming the primary medium for conveying and upholding corporate values.

In a distributed team, digital platforms serve a dual function: they are not only a technical means of exchanging information but also a cultural resource through which shared values are conveyed, reinforced, and cemented. Researchers emphasize that it is precisely the integration of digital tools into daily activities that enables corporate values to be upheld in circumstances where face-to-face contact is limited or absent [3].

Let us consider how specific tool sets support individual corporate values. In a distributed team, digital platforms serve a dual purpose. They are not only a technical means of exchanging information but also a cultural resource through which shared values are conveyed, reinforced, and cemented. Researchers emphasize that it is precisely the integration of digital tools into daily activities that enables corporate values to be upheld in circumstances where face-to-face contact is limited or absent [3]. Let us consider how specific tool sets support individual corporate values. Collaboration platforms (Microsoft

Teams, Google Workspace) provide a single information space where all important decisions, strategic updates and reports are accessible to every member. This supports the values of transparency and trust, as equal access to information reduces the sense of information isolation typical of distributed teams. According to research, the use of such platforms reduces the time spent on task coordination and increases the transparency of decision-making [3].

Messaging apps and instant communication channels (such as Slack and Telegram) foster a sense of team spirit and loyalty. Dedicated sections for recognizing achievements, announcing the successes of employees and departments, and informal communication make up for the lack of 'office chatter' and strengthen the sense of belonging to the team.

Task management systems (Trello, Asana, Jira) support the values of accountability and self-organisation. Visualizing progress, clearly defining roles, and transparently tracking deadlines make each member's contribution visible to the whole team, which is particularly important when colleagues cannot be directly observed at work.

Feedback and survey tools (Google Forms, internal chats) support the values of openness. Regular surveys on satisfaction and engagement create a two-way communication channel between management and employees, fostering an open culture.

Online learning platforms (LMS systems) support continuous development. Access to educational materials and courses fosters a culture of lifelong learning that is not dependent on physical presence in the office. Drawing on the corporate culture models discussed above, we systematize the correspondence between levels of corporate culture and the digital tools that support them in a distributed format (Table 2).

**Table 2. Digital tools as a means of maintaining corporate culture within a distributed team**

Culture level	How this manifest itself in a distributed setting	Digital support tools	Core corporate values
Artifacts	Symbols and rituals are transformed into digital form	Recognition channels on Slack/Telegram, virtual events, shared workspaces	Team spirit, a sense of belonging
Stated values	Rules are documented and explicitly articulated	Google Workspace, Microsoft Teams (shared strategy and reporting channels)	Transparency, trust
Interaction norms	The division of roles and responsibilities becomes clear	Trello, Asana, Jira (visualization of tasks and deadlines)	Accountability, self-organization
Feedback	It replaces the informal 'reading' of the office atmosphere	Google Forms, internal surveys	Openness
Basic assumptions	These take time to develop due to a lack of shared experience	LMS platforms, regular online meetings, and collaborative learning	Continuous development, mutual trust

Source: compiled by the author based on [1; 3]

The proposed framework demonstrates that digital tools support corporate culture not haphazardly, but at every level of its structure: from visible artifacts to deep-seated underlying assumptions. This confirms the thesis that, in a distributed format, culture is not formed spontaneously, but through the deliberate 'saturation' of each level with appropriate digital mechanisms under the guidance of a manager.

### Conclusions and prospects for further research

The research suggests that the corporate culture of a distributed team retains the classic three-tier structure described by E. Schein, yet fundamentally alters how each level is implemented. Artifacts move from physical space to the digital environment, declared values require conscious documentation rather than informal transmission, and basic assumptions form much more slowly due to a lack of shared experience and the fragility of trust across distances. It is this last, deepest level that proves most vulnerable: a team may have well-designed digital artifacts and clearly articulated values, but an 'empty' deeper layer where genuine shared beliefs have not yet taken root.

The key finding of the study is that the formation of culture in a distributed format cannot happen spontaneously. The natural mechanism of 'cultural diffusion', characteristic of a traditional office, is virtually absent in a virtual environment due to the lack of shared space and casual daily interactions. Consequently, the leader of a distributed team transforms from a passive bearer of culture into its active architect, a role that, in addition to classic leadership qualities, requires digital competence, high emotional intelligence, and the ability to build trust without personal contact.

It has been established that digital tools play a dual role - technical and cultural - acting as the primary channel for transmitting and reinforcing values. The proposed systematization shows that different tool groups support different levels of culture. Tools range from messaging apps and virtual events at the artifact level to learning platforms and regular meetings at the level of basic assumptions. At the same time, digital tools are merely a means to an end; they do not create culture on their own but serve as channels whose effectiveness depends on the manager's proactive stance.

Prospects for further research relate to the empirical testing of the proposed theoretical propositions using data from Ukrainian companies that have transitioned to a distributed format, as well as the development of practical tools for assessing the level of development of a distributed team's corporate culture and mechanisms for its purposeful formation in the context of crisis-driven transformations.

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