

## **The Academic Identity Changes Through the Post-Merging Process of Tampere University (Faculty of Management and Business)**

Tamar Chkhartishvili<sup>1</sup>, Mariam Lagundaridze<sup>2</sup>, Aysel Muradova<sup>3</sup> and José Luis Riega Cayetano<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Business Management and Social Sciences, Osnabrück University of Applied Sciences, Germany, [chkhartishvilitamara@gmail.com](mailto:chkhartishvilitamara@gmail.com), **ORCID:** 0009-0004-0285-9369

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Education and Psychology, Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary, [lagundaridzetaryam@gmail.com](mailto:lagundaridzetaryam@gmail.com), **ORCID:** 0009-0000-2884-9506

<sup>3</sup> Faculty of Business Management and Social Sciences, Osnabrück University of Applied Sciences, Germany, [aysel.amuradova@gmail.com](mailto:aysel.amuradova@gmail.com), **ORCID:** 0009-0005-2186-2333

<sup>4</sup> Faculty of Management and Business, Tampere University, Finland, [jose.riegacayetano@gmail.com](mailto:jose.riegacayetano@gmail.com), **ORCID:** 0000-0002-1552-3934

**Suggested citation:** Chkhartishvili, T., Lagundaridze, M., Muradova, A., & Riega Cayetano, J. L. (2025). The Academic Identity Changes Through the Post-Merging Process of Tampere University (Faculty of Management and Business). *Journal of Research and Innovation in Higher Education*, 6(2), 34-71.

The article is available online at: [www.rihe-journal.com](http://www.rihe-journal.com)

**Acknowledgement**

This article contribution is based on coursework the authors submitted in the Master in Research and Innovation in Higher Education (MARIHE), supported by the Erasmus Mundus programme of the European Commission.

Copyright © 2025 Tamar Chkhartishvili, Mariam Lagundaridze, Aysel Muradova, José Luis Riega Cayetano



### Abstract

University mergers have become a significant reform tool in European higher education, aiming to enhance efficiency, international competitiveness, and research capacity. However, such structural transformations often bring profound implications for academic staff identity, professional roles, and institutional culture. This study examines the transformation of academic identity in the post-merger context of Tampere University, focusing on the Faculty of Management and Business.

The research adopts a qualitative case study design, combining semi-structured interviews with faculty members and document analysis of strategic plans, governance frameworks, and institutional policies. The analysis is guided by the framework of New Institutionalism, applying its three pillars (regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive) to investigate how regulations, norms, and shared beliefs shape academic identity in a post-merger university environment.

Findings show that the merger has reinforced Tampere University's strategic ambition to integrate diverse disciplinary traditions into a multidisciplinary research university with global visibility. The study concludes that post-merger academic identity at Tampere University is characterized by both continuity and change. Faculty members maintain strong disciplinary identities while adapting to new institutional norms emphasising interdisciplinarity, efficiency, and performance.

The paper suggests that strategic communication, inclusive dialogue, and enhanced support systems are important for building a cohesive institutional culture that balances structural reforms with the lived experiences of academics.

**Keywords:** University Mergers, Academic Identity, New Institutionalism, Institutional Change, Governance and Strategy, Faculty Roles, Interdisciplinarity.

## **Introduction**

Over the past few decades, higher education has undoubtedly encountered significant changes. Globalisation has impacted Europe, and the characteristics of these changes are similar in different countries. However, finding the unique characteristics of the Finnish higher education system and the merger of universities is relatively easy. More than a decade ago, Finnish higher education undertook significant changes to improve the quality of education, allocate resources more wisely, and create world-class universities.

Tampere University is a clear example of the changes that have contributed in the last decade; this second-largest public university in Finland has operated as a merged university for more than five years already. Merging was challenging for the University of Tampere and the Tampere University of Technology, particularly in terms of academic identity. This paper explores the academic identity changes through the post-merging process of Tampere University from the perspective of academic staff. Respectively, the purpose of this paper is to address the research question of how, from the perspective of the academic staff of the Faculty of Management and Business, the academic identity has changed in the context of post-university merging.

The article opens with an introduction that gives an overview of the topic and purpose of the research. Next, it outlines the problem description and explains Tampere University's merger within the broader Finnish higher education reform agenda. The following chapters describe the analytical framework and offer the case analysis of Tampere University's Faculty of Management and Business, examining the regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive dimensions of academic identity. Section 7 discusses the findings and proposes solutions for addressing the challenges identified. The last chapter concludes by summarising the main findings and reflecting on implications for higher education reform and academic identity in merged universities.

## **Problem Description**

In recent years, we have seen many colleges and universities merge, driven by education policies or internal organisational changes occurring in the HEIs. Before moving to Tampere University case, in this context, it is essential to clarify what is meant by a

merger. Goedegebuure (1992, as cited in Hall et al., 2004, p. 14) describes a merger in higher education as:

The combination of two or more separate institutions into a single new organisational entity, in which control rests with a single governing body and a single chief executive body, and whereby all assets, liabilities, and responsibilities of the former institutions are transferred to the single new institution.

Since 2010, Finland alone has experienced seven mergers in the higher education sector (among universities and polytechnics). In the early 2000s, the Finnish higher education system consisted of two sectors: universities (20) and polytechnics (29). In a country like Finland, small and regionally spread units were seen as inefficient use; instead, “world-class” universities were needed, and this demand provoked the beginning of the universities’ merging process. The Finnish government launched a reformist higher education agenda to respond to external pressures and demographic changes. It began to forcefully promote mergers, particularly since the establishment of the new Universities Act of 2009, which came into force in 2010. In the Finnish education context, the reforms and education policies aimed at diversification of universities’ funding base, advanced competition for international research funding, development cooperation with foreign universities, and ensuring the quality and effectiveness of university-based research and teaching activities (Ursin, 2017). Furthermore, existing literature shows that in Finland, performance-based funding affects institutional behaviours (Nygård, 2024). The literature also indicates that performance-based funding can achieve its intended outcomes if only it is designed “in the light of perspectives from sociology, political science, anthropology, and social and organisational psychology that provide a richer analysis of policy design and implementation” (Dougherty & Natow, 2020).

Universities Act (558/2009) points out how the Ministry of Education supported the mergers, which relied on more autonomy for the higher education institutions, including financial independence or academic autonomy. However, it is essential to emphasise, according to some empirical evidence, that as a consequence of these cumulative changes, Finnish academics are becoming polarised into different categories, consisting of those who benefit from the changes and those who do not (Ylijoki & Ursin, 2013, 2015).

On 1st January 2019, the University of Tampere and the Tampere University of Technology merged, creating the second-largest university in Finland by student enrollment: Tampere University. As discussed by Zinovyeva et al. (2018), the uniqueness of this merger also lies in its multi-disciplinarity, successfully merging a research university with a university of applied sciences, driven by the shared goal of boosting internationalisation, increasing research output, effectiveness, and competitiveness. The new Tampere University also became the largest shareholder of Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK) (Vellamo, 2022). Tampere University's post-merging process is a significant case study for examining the complexity of academic identity dynamics within the broader context of organisational restructuring. Vellamo (2022), in their doctoral study, discusses the technical identities of merged universities from institutional, disciplinary, and individual perspectives. Inspired by this doctoral study, our research focuses specifically on the Faculty of Management and Business in Tampere University, where academic staff members try to cope with the evolving landscape of their professional roles, affiliations, and transformation of academic identity after the merger.

The merging was a challenging process that began almost a decade ago. Previous studies on mergers have highlighted that creating a joint culture is complex (Norgård & Skodvin, 2002) and requires well-functioning leadership and open communication. Even though the University of Tampere and the Tampere University of Technology had teaching collaboration experience, joining higher education from different sectors required developing a new multidisciplinary strategy. This strategy aimed to deliver more effective responses to global challenges and open up new opportunities for science and its applications (Tampere University, 2018). An interdisciplinary approach has been chosen as a transformation strategy for Tampere University's organisational reform. However, multidisciplinary views and boundary-crossing cooperation may challenge the university's identity and affect its role in the eyes of stakeholders (Geschwind et al., 2019, p. 205). Carayannis and Campbell (2021), in their recent research, suggest that different profile universities are well capable of cooperating, i.e., an arts university and a science university, since the arts themselves frequently refer to science, in the name of innovation. This ultimately brings innovation to organisational structures and boosts creativity (Carayannis & Campbell, 2021).

In addition to structural changes and modifications in the university's strategy, the research explores the transformations adopted in teaching and learning aspects. However, in the Finnish context, the actual changes in education, teaching, and learning are to be adopted quite slowly, although the structural framework tends to change more rapidly (Ursin et al., 2010). Nevertheless, different structural and organisational modifications inevitably impact how academics perceive their roles and places in academia. In the Finnish context, institutional mergers played an essential role in creating larger units that have transformed the external conditions of academic work. This, together with a growing managerial movement, seems to call for a more hybrid and adaptable comprehension of academia as a workplace and a site for constructing one's career and professional identity (Ursin, 2017).

Recognition of the academic identity changes in the Tampere University post-merger context is important for multiple stakeholders, including faculty members, institutional leaders, policymakers, and the broader higher education community. From the academic staff perspective, at the individual level, the challenges related to role ambiguity and institutional belonging can influence job satisfaction, career trajectories, and overall well-being. For institutional leaders, insights into the dynamics of academic identity can inform strategic decision-making, resource allocation, and faculty development initiatives. Furthermore, a comprehensive understanding of how organisational restructuring processes shape professional identities and practices within academic settings benefits the broader higher education community.

### **Research Gap**

The literature on the merger topic has expanded in recent years due to the increased number of university mergers. It is perceived as a challenging process in higher education: "Mergers always result in a complex situation, one that presents a considerable challenge to the development of an effective leadership team and appropriate management in the post-merger period" (Cai, 2007, p.181). Defined as the irreversible process of integrating separate legal entities under a unified governing body, mergers reflect a broader trend toward neoliberal and managerial ideologies in Finnish higher education (Bennett Pruvot, Estermann, & Mason, 2015; Rinne & Jauhiainen, 2012). Scholars have shed light on the

significance of historical context, internal organisational dynamics, and cultural factors in understanding the complexities of higher education mergers (Cai et al., 2015).

University mergers often aim to develop efficiency, improve academic standards, and foster institutional competitiveness (Harman & Harman, 2003; Frølich et al., 2016). However, pursuing these goals is contingent upon various factors, including effective leadership, transparent communication, and institutional identity formation (Hay & Fourie, 2002). Academic identity, in particular, emerges as a central theme in university mergers discourse (Ylijoki & Ursin, 2013).

Studies have pointed out the essential role of academic identity in shaping responses to structural reforms and organisational change (Ylijoki, 2014). The distinction between ‘conformist’ and ‘resistant’ identities emphasises the diverse ways academics navigate the challenges posed by mergers (Wollscheid & Røsdal, 2021). Furthermore, Finnish academic identities’ narratives reflect regressive and progressive storylines, indicative of the many-sided nature of identity construction in the post-merger context (Ursin, 2017). In the context of our study, academic identity is defined as the:

Internalization of scientific attitudes and behaviors by academicians, making speeches and explanations based on scientific information, being able to question the events and phenomenon, defending science and open-mindedness against dogmatism, and prejudice. (Erdem, 2023, p. 296).

Based on this definition, the dimensions of academic identity include (i) “internalizing scientific attitudes and behaviors,” (ii) “making discourse based on scientific knowledge,” (iii) “questioning events and facts,” (iv) “defending science against dogmatism,” and (v) “defending open-mindedness against prejudice.”

Despite the significant organisational changes associated with mergers, studies suggest that the impact on academic activities, such as research and teaching, may be relatively modest, particularly in the implementation phase (Ursin et al., 2010). Besides that, the changes happening within academic activities take longer than the administrative transformations. However, the long-term effects of mergers on academic identity still

need to be explored, highlighting the need for longitudinal research to capture the evolution of identity over time (Umbach & Mathies, 2023). Recent empirical research in Finland underscores how university mergers disrupt academic time regimes by imposing organisationally controlled schedules and diminishing academics' self-determined professional time, thereby affecting their sense of identity, autonomy, and agency in the post-merger context (Poutanen, 2025).

The research body on university mergers and academic identity is expanding; however, several gaps remain to be addressed. First, there is a need for updated research that explores contemporary mergers, considering the evolving landscape of higher education. Moreover, comparative analyses of academic identity pre- and post-merger across different disciplines and departments can provide insights into discipline-specific variations and uniform changes (Cai, 2006). Integrating perspectives from non-academic staff can offer a more detailed understanding of organisational culture and identity changes. By addressing these gaps, our study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on university mergers and academic identity, aligning with the objectives outlined in the research proposal.

### **Research Method**

The study uses a case study approach to explore the changes in academic identity among the two faculty members at the Faculty of Management and Business of Tampere University after the merger of the University of Tampere and the Tampere University of Technology. The case study method was chosen for its strength in providing deep and detailed insights into the complex phenomena of merging universities. Creswell (2013) suggests using a case study design when the researcher seeks to explore a real-life, contemporary bounded system over time, drawing on multiple sources of in-depth data, with the case understood as a "bounded system, bounded by time and place" (pp. 93–94, 97). In the present study, two data collection methods were used to gather rich and comprehensive data: semi-structured in-depth interviews and document analysis. In-depth interviews with academics from the Faculty of Management and Business captured their personal experiences and reflections on academic identity changes after the post-merger process. This method elaborates on the flexibility of the interview process and allows for a deeper understanding. Document analysis complements the interviews by

comprehensively reviewing relevant documents, such as policy papers and university strategies related to the merger. This method provides institutional context for the research, helping to identify differences or similarities between policy and practice. Data from in-depth interviews and documents are analysed using thematic analysis, which allows for identifying, analysing, and reporting themes within the collected material. Its flexibility makes it particularly suitable for exploring complex research topics.

Although our study provides valuable insights into the changes in academic identity within the Faculty of Management and Business at Tampere University, certain limitations must be acknowledged. Firstly, our research focuses exclusively on one academic discipline within the merged institution. The attitudes and opinions of different faculty representatives can be controversial, limiting the generalisability of our findings to other faculties or disciplines. Additionally, the dynamic nature of organisational change processes within mergers implies that our study captures a picture of academic identity dynamics at a particular time. Since the post-merger period represents an evolving phase, including ongoing adjustments, our findings may only partially identify the long-term trajectories. Future longitudinal studies could provide significant insights into how academic identities develop and stabilize or transform in response to organisational restructuring.

### **Analytical Framework: New Institutionalism**

The analytical framework for this research is based on New Institutionalism. This suitable theory provides a comprehensive view of how institutions influence human behaviour and organisational dynamics. This perspective appeared as part of the framework of Institutional Theory as a response to the rejection of models of social and organisational views that portrayed individuals as operating with boundless rationality to pursue their self-interests. March and Olsen (1983) described New Institutionalism as a shift from earlier theories that showed political institutions as reflective of societal or economic conditions. In addition, they highlighted the inherent value and influence of institutions, considering their autonomy and significant role in shaping political life.

Moreover, Meyer and Rowan (2006) underline the theory's focus on the importance of institutions in shaping organisational behaviours and outcomes. They argue that

organisations are not just passively responding to external pressures, but they are also actively shaped by institutional norms and expectations. In addition to this, according to Cai and Mehari (2015), New Institutionalism focuses on the idea that institutions shape the actions of individuals and organisations, assessing, in this way, the impact of institutions on human behaviour and societal functions. This contrasts with Old Institutionalism, which primarily emphasised the organisation-environment relationship, focusing on organisations achieving legitimacy by fulfilling societal expectations and norms rather than pursuing efficiency.

### ***Three Pillars of Institutional Forces***

New Institutionalism is described as the process by which organisations become increasingly homogeneous despite the diverse conditions under which they operate. This homogenisation is attributed to institutional isomorphism, the process through which organisations within a particular field become more similar in structure, culture, and output, as outlined by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). They identify three mechanisms driving isomorphic change: coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism. These mechanisms correlate with the three pillars of institutional forces, Regulative, Normative, and Cultural-Cognitive, each playing a crucial role in shaping organisational practices and identities. Lin (2016) synthesises various descriptions of these pillars, presenting them as follows:

#### ***The Regulative Pillar (Coercive Isomorphism)***

This pillar states that institutions influence their behaviours through formal rules, laws, and sanctions. Organisations comply with these regulations to avoid penalties, leading to uniformity in behaviours and practices among institutions subjected to the same regulatory framework. Legal compliance and the direct influence of government and legal systems on organisational behaviour are essential in this pillar.

#### ***The Normative Pillar (Normative Isomorphism)***

This pillar highlights the social obligations and expectations that guide organisational behaviour. It involves the values and norms that are supposedly appropriate within a societal or organisational context. This pillar suggests that organisations adopt certain

practices not just due to legal mandates but also to adhere to societal norms and values, including professional standards, industry best practices, and cultural expectations. This leads to isomorphism as organisations strive to be perceived as legitimate and responsible community members.

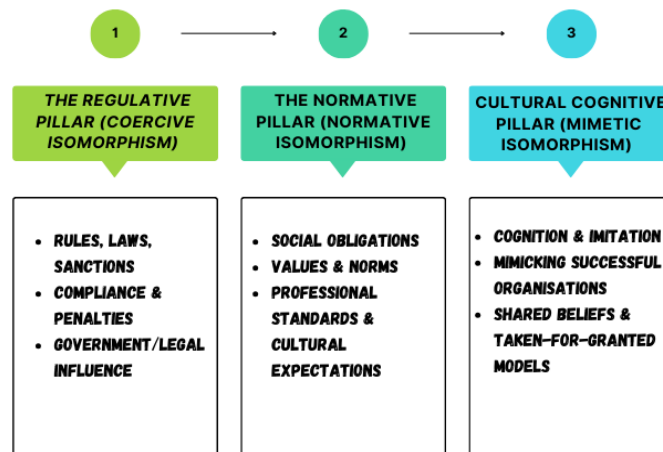
### ***The Cognitive or Cultural Cognitive Pillar (Mimetic Isomorphism)***

This pillar emphasises the role of cognition and imitation among organisations. When faced with uncertainty, organisations often mimic the practices and strategies of others, especially those that are considered successful or legitimate. This imitation, which can be conscious or unconscious, leads to similarity across organisations as they adopt models and strategies that are taken for granted or the norm within their field. The cognitive pillar highlights the importance of cultural understanding and shared beliefs in shaping organisational actions and decisions.

This analytical framework provides a strong structure for exploring the complex dynamics of changing academic identities after university mergers. It offers insights into how institutions shape and are shaped by their members in the context of significant organisational change. The relationship between the three pillars and their corresponding forms of isomorphism is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Three Pillars of Institutional Force. Source: Created by the authors based on DiMaggio & Powell (1983) and Lin (2016).

## Three Pillars of Institutional Force



### *Application of the Analytical Framework*

This study systematically examined how each of the three pillars of New Institutionalism has influenced the academic identity of faculty members post-merger. This involves collecting and analysing data on changes in regulations, norms, and cultural understandings within the Faculty of Management and Business and assessing their impact on academic practices, values, and identities. The research aims to find the multidimensional effects of university mergers on academic staff and contribute to a deeper understanding of institutional change in higher education.

## **Case Analysis**

### ***Regulative Pillar: Analysis of Tampere University's Regulatory Framework***

The post-merger Tampere University represents a synthesis of the missions, visions, values, and strategic goals of the University of Tampere (UTA) and the Tampere University of Technology (TUT). The examination of the dimensions of the combined institution can give us a valuable understanding of how the unique attributes of UTA and TUT have been employed to form a unified identity that capitalises on both institutions' advantages.

### ***Mission and Vision***

TUT's mission focused on being at the forefront of technological development, serving as a key partner in science and business, and producing graduates equipped to meet societal needs. In contrast, UTA's mission was committed to contributing to the global scientific community, leading in social sciences within Finland, and generating knowledge to tackle complex global issues sustainably and ethically. The merged mission combines TUT's emphasis on technological development and societal service with UTA's focus on global scientific contributions and ethical decision-making (Tampere University of Technology, 2017; University of Tampere, 2016). It reflects a comprehensive approach that values both scientific and artistic higher education and aims for societal impact, closely aligning with the broad objectives of both original institutions.

TUT's vision is centred on enhancing well-being and environmental health through research and education, shaping the Finnish industry's competitive edge through technology, and embracing internationalisation and open science. On the other hand, UTA's vision for 2020 aimed to establish itself as an innovative educational and research hub, enhancing its international research university profile and being a source of transformative knowledge. The post-merger vision of Tampere University embraces a commitment to excellence and societal collaboration, which are reminiscent of TUT's objectives while also embracing UTA's dedication to lifelong learning and international reputation. The emphasis on building a distinctive prominence reflects a merger-enhanced ambition to excel in diverse scientific and artistic fields.

### *Strategic Goals and Indicators*

Tampere University of Technology (TUT) had clear strategic goals that emphasised the development of technology (TUT, 2017). This focus was not merely on creating new technologies but doing so with people and the environment in mind. They aimed to nourish a culture that encourages courage, responsibility, and inclusivity. These principles guided the university in its academic and research pursuits, shaping its identity and setting the direction for its future endeavours. On the other hand, UTA's strategic goals focused on creating a sustainable world (University of Tampere, 2016). They aimed to ensure that all university affiliates enjoy equal rights to well-being. Their focus was on generating knowledge that would significantly impact health and society. The university highlighted the importance of community well-being, championing participatory decision-making processes and fostering a spirit of collaboration within the higher education ecosystem in Tampere.

Despite having different areas of focus, TUT and UTA shared a common goal of shaping a better future through their respective academic and research endeavours. They recognised the importance of inclusivity, sustainability, community well-being, and the generation of impactful knowledge in their strategic goals. The post-merger Tampere University's strategic goals holistically integrate TUT's technological orientation and UTA's social science focus. The emphasis on creating a thriving university community, achieving an international research reputation, and educating world-changing experts mirrors the collective ambitions of both institutions pre-merger. Moreover, the goal of being a strong partner and societal influencer captures the essence of both universities' engagement with society and the practical application of research and education.

### *Strategic Plan 2023-2030 and Academic Profile*

The strategic plan of Tampere University serves as a regulative pillar that influences its academic identity. The university's strategic goals include conducting high-quality and impactful research, promoting open science, and addressing significant societal challenges through basic and multidisciplinary research. Tampere University aims to be internationally esteemed as a research university by 2030 (Tampere University, 2023). Integrating strategic goals with measurable indicators, adherence to core values, and commitment to cross-cutting themes of sustainability and digitalisation collectively guide

the university's trajectory toward achieving its vision. In the Tampere3 planning, digitalisation was explicitly framed as a way to overcome cross-campus distance and enable cross-disciplinary collaboration; even with a tram link, staff movements between sites still impose a (at least) 30-minute transfer, so virtual teaching and research solutions were proposed to sustain collaboration and ensure service availability across all campuses (Teini, 2016). This framework sets the direction for the university's academic and research endeavours and influences the institution's identity and culture. Based on the interviews with the Faculty of Management and Business members at Tampere University, the institution's focus has, to some extent, shifted towards finding its financial stability. When asked about the possible academic profile changes, respondents replied that the changes are only career-related or discipline-bound. Respondent 2 stated explicitly that the merger has little effect on their researcher identity. The university's strategic goals include indicators such as high-quality scientific publications, success in acquiring competitive research funding, and performance in university rankings. These indicators reflect the university's commitment to research quality, impact, and international recognition (Tampere University, 2023).

Tampere University aims to create a thriving community where everyday processes run efficiently, students and staff are empowered, and the institution is financially stable. The university strives to be the best place to study and work in Finland, fostering a sense of pride and community. The governance of Tampere University is deeply intertwined with its academic identity. The institution follows ethical standards, supports sustainability, inclusivity, and truthfulness in data, makes decisions together, and acts ethically. All these shapes a system of rules that guide and improve its academic profile. The Principles of Good Governance at Tampere University outline how the university is managed, reflect its values, and help shape its academic identity (Tampere University, 2022). The document presents the university as a leading example of responsibility, honesty, and inclusivity in higher education.

As stated in its strategic plan for 2023-2030, Tampere University's mission highlights a commitment to supporting academic research, providing research-based education, and preparing students to make meaningful contributions locally and globally. A vital component of this mission is the university's articulated set of core values: courage,

critical thinking, diversity, erudition-building, openness, responsibility, and student-centredness (Tampere University, 2022). Established post-merger values signify a broader, more multidisciplinary approach to academic identity, aiming to reflect the institution's evolved nature. Before the merger, the 2018 Annual Report of Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK, 2020) highlighted a more concise set of values, focusing on innovation, partnership, and responsibility. Expanding core values post-merger presents a comprehensive framework that guides the university's interactions within the community and with stakeholders. However, it also introduces complexity in understanding and internalising these principles. According to insights from faculty member Respondent 2, while reflective of the university's ambitious scope, the extended list of core values poses challenges in maintaining a clear, cohesive understanding of the institution's foundational principles. This shift has sparked discussions on the practical implications of such an extensive value system, especially regarding the university's academic and research direction in a post-merger landscape.

Decision-making is decentralised and participatory, enabling staff and students to contribute to institutional governance. This way, all choices about teaching and running the university are made openly and with everyone's input. This shows the university's commitment to a democratic way of doing things.

Tampere University engages in multidisciplinary research activities to address significant scientific challenges and positively impact society. The university maintains high-quality standards in research projects, collaborates with various partners, and commercialises research results. It emphasises effective collaboration, cost-effective processes, and high-quality support services (Tampere University, 2022). Recent evidence shows that universities' knowledge-transfer performance is strongly influenced by how their knowledge transfer offices (KTOs) organise people, culture, governance, and collaboration, suggesting that governance design is a lever for innovation outcomes (Compagnucci & Spigarelli, 2024).

### *Academic Freedom and Innovation*

The governance model at Tampere University plays a vital role in shaping its academic identity, especially in creating an environment where academic freedom and innovation

thrive. The institution's governance principles, which emphasise ethical standards, sustainability, inclusivity, and truthfulness in data, create a framework that supports and guides its academic profile.

This participatory decision-making process ensures that the university's strategic direction, including its emphasis on critical debate, scientific inquiry, and innovative pedagogical practices, is aligned with the values of academic freedom.

Moreover, transitioning to a new post-merger recruitment strategy, focusing on nurturing talent through assistant researcher or associate professor positions, aims to promote academic excellence. This approach seeks cost-efficiency and encourages a merit-based progression, potentially enhancing productivity and establishing an innovative academic culture. However, the practical implications of these governance principles on maintaining academic freedom amidst the complexities of a merged institution warrant further exploration. Questions remain on how Tampere University navigates the challenges of upholding these values in practice, ensuring they transcend aspirational statements to influence the university's academic and research endeavours actively. For instance, the shift in recruitment strategies presents an opportunity to examine how the governance model supports or constrains academic freedom and innovation, particularly in how it impacts faculty morale and the university's ability to attract and retain top-tier talent.

### ***Normative Pillar Analysis: Impact on Academic Identity***

As described above, studies suggest that the impact on academic activities, such as research and teaching, may be modest despite the significant organisational changes associated with mergers, particularly in the implementation phase (Ursin et al., 2010). The merger gave universities the autonomy to promote independent academic research and provide research-based higher education to educate students to serve the country and humanity (Universities Act, 558/2009). Also, the Universities Act points out that universities can interact with the surrounding society and promote university research findings/artistic activities. To sum up, mergers were not only intended to improve the country's economic growth but also promoted globalisation, the correct allocation of

resources, and high-quality education with financial and academic autonomy (Universities Act, 558/2009).

To increase international competition, balancing working life and regional development pressure to improve the efficiency of higher education institutions was clear: merging universities was crucial for further increased economic growth, efficiency, and productivity (Nokkala, Välimaa, & Westerheijden, 2016, p. 6). The first finding of analysing norms and values before the merger is that they became comprehensive and underwent significant changes; as a result, the university became more efficient. Currently, Tampere University has a list of values: courage, critical thinking, diversity, erudition-building, learner-centredness, openness, and responsibility. One of the respondents points out that having a comprehensive list of norms and values can distract academics.

I have a little criticism of that list because you cannot have too many values. And now I am a good example. I do not even remember values based on a list. When you have too many on the list, you should have. I prefer the values you say, just 2-3 values you always remember. Now we have a longer list. This means that it is clear what the core values are. (Respondent 1)

Respondents' openness, transparency, academic freedom, and sustainability are at the core. The new Tampere University strived to be perceived as a legitimate and responsible community member. While norms and values have not changed dramatically, openness with stakeholders, partner universities, and general society has increased; the new, merged university is a research university, and it enjoys status, prestige, and possibilities as a whole. The merger brought Tampere University to new partners and knowledge management.

The normative pillar of new institutional theory emphasises the influence of social norms, values, and expectations on academic identity and practices. Understanding these impacts on the Faculty of Management and Business is crucial for Tampere University, which is undergoing a post-merging process. Even though it is difficult to see the direct effect on the academic processes within the merger process, specific changes indirectly influence

the academic identity from the teachers' perspective. One critical insight obtained from the reflective discourse of respondents is the transformative effect of external pressures on academic identity: "So, it takes time, more time. However, does it change identity? I think your identity and academic identity become stronger when you realise that external pressures are coming to your identity area." (Respondent 1)

Since Tampere University became Finland's second most prominent university, the focus has shifted to efficiency. Accordingly, the external pressure of pursuing efficiency goals has become the main driving force for academics to be aware of their identities. So, the expectation that the new university should become efficient strengthened the academic identity.

Furthermore, as we have mentioned before, it is challenging to identify the changes in norms and values in academic activities. The respondents have noted that the changes after the merger are mainly related to governance and administrative reforms. For example, respondent 1 emphasised the growing administrative work, and respondent 2 highlighted the complications of task divisions. However, these administrative changes indirectly influence academic identity. Specifically, both respondents reflect cultural and normative transitions following the merger.

There is an emphasis on understanding the normative challenges of fostering unity and multidisciplinary collaboration within a newly merged university. For example, Respondent 1 mentioned that the merger had been the main driving force that brought new disciplines into the faculty, like Engineering and Information and Knowledge management, widening perspectives and developing multidisciplinary. This indicates a normative shift toward embracing a more multidisciplinary perspective, supporting a culture where various academic backgrounds are valued. However, these changes have created challenges for academics. For instance, respondent 1 mentioned that even understanding the different field-related terminology is difficult in some cases, and it is a long process that requires respect and effective communication:

It's a learning process, how you communicate, and you need to be patient, as you do not immediately understand each other. You try to communicate to understand

each other and use the terms and terminology so that both parties understand.  
(Respondent 1)

One of the findings is the changes in financial stringency and performance orientation after the merger. The merger introduced a more performance-oriented culture, and it highlighted a focus on economic sustainability and efficiency. A shift in normative expectations demonstrates the growing importance of tangible outcomes from academic work, aligning with financial viability and performance metrics that are increasingly driving strategic decisions. Respondents point out that the faculty is pushing to secure project funding and external academic grants. Therefore, a shift in norms toward a more financially accountable and performance-driven academic environment is a visible reflection.

As shown in Table 1, the normative pillar reflections compare pre- and post-merger norms and values, outlining resulting changes and highlighting their impacts on identity, challenges, and opportunities.

Table 1: Post-Merger University Normative Pillar Reflections. Source: Authors' own conceptualisation.

Aspect	Pre-merger Norms and Values	Post-merger Changes	Impact on Academic Identity	Challenges	Opportunities
<b>Professional Roles</b>	Defined within disciplinary boundaries	Increased focus on interdisciplinary collaboration	Shift towards a more collaborative identity	Guiding new collaborations	Enhanced innovation in research
<b>Financial management</b>	Focus on discipline-specific funding and resources	Centralisation of the budget and increased emphasis on	Pressure to contribute to financial sustainability	Management of tighter budgets and financial deficits	Opportunity to seek innovative funding sources

		external funding			
<b>Administrative Efficiency</b>	Clear roles and specific administrative support	More self-reliance on administrative tasks by academic staff	Increased administrative workload	Loss of specialised administrative support	Streamlining of administrative processes
<b>Academic Freedom</b>	Autonomy within disciplinary and departmental frameworks	Maintaining academic freedom amidst structural changes	Preservation of core academic values	Ensuring academic freedom in a centralised structure	Sustaining the integrity of academic inquiry
<b>Cultural Integration</b>	Cultures and identities shaped by distinct disciplinary and institutional legacies	Efforts to blend and integrate diverse academic cultures	Evolution toward a shared university culture	Balancing diverse academic traditions and expectations	Creation of a more diverse and inclusive academic environment

### ***Cultural Cognitive Pillar***

This section explores the third pillar, the Cultural-Cognitive one, as described in our Analytical Framework, and following the insights of Lin (2016). This analysis focuses on examining the shared beliefs, perceptions, and mental frameworks of the academic staff at the Faculty of Management and Business of Tampere University regarding the merger and its following institutional identity transformation. Our exploration aims to reveal how the merger reshapes faculty members' sense of place and belonging within the institution, influencing their academic identity and community ties.

### *Sense of Belonging*

Before the merger, the University of Tampere (UTA) and the Tampere University of Technology (TUT) had distinct identities, missions, and values. UTA focused on being an international research university with a strong profile in social sciences (University of Tampere, 2016), while TUT was technology-oriented, emphasising the benefit of technology for people and the environment (Tampere University of Technology, 2017). These differences might have contributed to a sense of belonging tied closely to each university's specific academic and cultural environment.

After the merging, the newly formed Tampere University (TAU) adopted a mission and values, intending to promote free research, scientific erudition, and higher education based on research. The emphasis on courage, diversity, and engagement with society suggests an attempt to merge the diverse cultures and identities of UTA and TUT into a cohesive one. However, the answers to the interviews reveal that while the merger was seen as a positive move for increased visibility and multidisciplinary collaboration, it also posed challenges for individual identity and belonging.

In the case of respondent 1, there is a strong personal academic identity that did not change significantly with the merger. The sense of belonging seems rooted in the previous academic work rather than the institutional identity of TAU. Respondent 1 acknowledges the potential benefits of the merger, such as multidisciplinary opportunities, but also notes the lack of significant interaction with new colleagues from different disciplines. Their sense of belonging appears more closely tied to their field of work than to the merged university's identity.

By contrast, the views of the merger for respondent 2 are positive and emphasise the opportunities for visibility and collaboration under a unified management. Their sense of belonging is influenced more by their role and responsibilities within the new organisational structure rather than the merger itself. Respondent 2 suggests that academic identity and belonging are more discipline-bound and career-related, which indicates that the merger has not fundamentally altered their sense of affiliation with the university.

The main findings about the sense of belonging dimension within the framework of the cultural-cognitive pillar, taking into consideration the normative documents and the interviews with the professional staff, are about continuity and change, challenges in promoting belonging, and opportunities for improved belonging:

- *Continuity and change*: Interviews reveal a dual sense of continuity in personal academic identity and change in institutional affiliation. Faculty members like respondent 1 maintain a strong connection to their disciplinary practices, and they also navigate the broader, merged institution's evolving identity.
- *Challenges in promoting belonging*: The merger has introduced challenges in creating a unified sense of belonging across diverse academic cultures. Despite strategic efforts to promote a cohesive institutional identity, feelings of belonging remain influenced by pre-merger affiliations and the practical realities of working within the newly merged entity.
- *Opportunities for improved belonging*: Some faculty members view the merger as an opportunity to expand their professional networks and engage in interdisciplinary collaborations. However, these opportunities depend on the successful integration of academic cultures and the development of shared institutional goals and values.

The sense of belonging among TAU's academic staff demonstrates the complex relationship between individual identities and the collective institutional identity. The merger aims to create a unified academic community; however, in order to achieve this, it is necessary to address the historical legacies and current expectations of faculty members from both former universities. The findings highlight the importance of acknowledging and addressing the diverse needs and perspectives within the academic community to promote a stronger sense of belonging.

### *Perception of the Merger*

The merger was anticipated to bring about significant changes in the structure and culture of the new university. The normative documents collected reflect a vision of a unified, multidisciplinary institution aiming for international excellence and societal engagement. Both interviewees initially saw the merger as a positive development, with potential for increased visibility and collaboration opportunities. Respondent 1 expressed that the

merger was not a huge surprise due to historical discussions about the possibility of doing it. The expectations were calmed by an understanding that universities change slowly, and the respondent was cautiously optimistic about the potential benefits of creating a larger, more multidisciplinary institution. In the case of respondent 2, the merger was also viewed as a positive process, and it focused on the advantages of operating under one name and governance system. The respondent believed that the merger would improve the university's visibility and provide opportunities for more effective use of resources and collaboration across different fields.

Both interviewees acknowledged the challenges in realizing the anticipated benefits of the merger. The experience of collaboration and integration across different disciplines and campuses was more complex and slower than expected, despite the initial appeal of a multidisciplinary institution. Respondent 1 noted that despite the merger, there had been limited interaction and cooperation with new colleagues from different disciplines and highlighted the maintenance of disciplinary isolated groups. Their perception of the merger evolved to recognise the practical challenges of fostering true multidisciplinary collaboration. The case of respondent 2 initially showed support for the merger, and it remained, but they recognised the administrative and financial challenges that arose. They pointed out the complexities of integrating different academic cultures and managing the expectations and realities of financial sustainability post-merger.

The interviews reveal a complex insight into the merger's impact, based on individual and disciplinary perspectives. Both interviewees maintain a strong attachment to their academic identities, suggesting that individual and disciplinary cultures remain dominant, despite the merger aimed to create a unified institutional culture.

The perceptions of the merger among academic staff reflect visible themes within New Institutionalism, such as the role of shared beliefs and understandings in modeling organisational change. The slow pace of cultural integration and the challenges of aligning diverse academic traditions with the strategic goals of the new university highlight the complexity of achieving a cohesive institutional identity.

The main findings about the perception of the merger dimension within the framework of the cultural-cognitive pillar, considering the normative documents and the interviews with the professional staff, are about initial reactions and expectations, evolving perceptions over time, and alignment with strategic goals.

- *Initial reactions and expectations*: The staff and Faculty members had different initial reactions to the merger, influenced mostly by historical discussions and the distinct cultures of UTA and TUT. There was a sense of cautious optimism about the potential for improved visibility and interdisciplinary collaboration.
- *Evolving perceptions over time*: The faculty members' perceptions of the merger have evolved. This reflects a complex relationship between strategic aspirations and practical realities. Some challenges related to integration, culture blending, and financial sustainability have moderated initial enthusiasm, and the potential for creating a stronger, interdisciplinary institution remains intact.
- *Alignment with strategic goals*: The analysis reveals a mixed estimation of the merger's efficacy in achieving its intended goals. Some faculty members see progress towards creating a more collaborative, internationally competitive university. In contrast, others note persistent challenges in realising these ambitions fully.

The "Perception of the Merger" dimension highlights the faculty members' views on the merger process and its outcomes, demonstrating the importance of managing expectations and effectively communicating the strategic vision and achievements of the merger to improve alignment and support among the academic staff. The findings suggest that while the merger has opened opportunities for growth and development, continuous efforts are needed to address the concerns and fully integrate the diverse cultures and practices of the former institution.

### *Shared Beliefs and Values*

UTA and TUT possessed distinct cultural identities before the merger, and this was influenced by their historical focuses on social sciences and technology, respectively. Their missions and values reflected these focuses, with UTA emphasising social development and community engagement, and TUT prioritizing technological advancement for societal benefit. The documentation provided defines TAU's mission

and values post-merger, emphasising free research, scientific and artistic erudition, and higher education based on research (Tampere University, 2023). Values such as courage, critical thinking, diversity, and responsibility indicate an effort to blend the strengths and core principles of UTA and TUT into a cohesive new identity for TAU.

In the interviews, respondent 1 highlighted a sense of continuity in their academic work, suggesting that their personal values and beliefs about research and education remain aligned with the university's mission. At the same time, they expressed concern about the extensive list of values post-merger, indicating a potential dilution of core principles when too many values are emphasised simultaneously. Their reflection suggests a belief in the importance of a focused set of values that truly defines the university's core identity. Meanwhile, respondent 2 was positive about the merger's potential for increased visibility and collaboration, but did not explicitly address changes in shared beliefs and values post-merger. Their focus on practical and financial aspects of the merger, such as managing deficits and encouraging project funding, suggests a pragmatic approach to addressing the merged university's goals. However, their mention of the need for a performance-oriented shift in academic identity suggests the evolution of the values within the university's culture, possibly towards greater emphasis on productivity and financial sustainability.

The analysis of normative documents and both interviews reveal challenges in fully integrating the diverse academic cultures of UTA and TUT within TAU. While the stated values aim to create a unified identity, the actual experience of merging distinct academic traditions reveals tensions and complexities in promoting shared beliefs and values across different disciplines and campuses.

The merger appears to create a change towards a more interdisciplinary, collaborative, and financially aware university culture. However, this shift is gradual and not uniformly experienced across all members of the academic community. The emphasis on a strong set of values, and at the same time reflective of the merged university's diverse disciplines, might require further improvement to ensure that core values are effectively communicated and internalized by all stakeholders.

The process of merging universities involves not only the integration of administrative and operational structures but also the alignment of deeply shared beliefs, values, and norms that define the academic community's identity. The cultural-cognitive lens of New Institutionalism highlights the importance of shared understanding in facilitating organisational change (Lin, 2016). For TAU, it is important to promote a sense of shared identity and values among its diverse academic staff to achieve the strategic goals envisioned in the merger.

The main findings about the shared beliefs and values dimension within the framework of the cultural-cognitive pillar, taking into consideration the normative documents and the interviews with the professional staff, are the following:

- *Consolidation of values:* The merger presented an opportunity to redefine and consolidate the values across the merging institutions. Normative documents of TAU formulate a set of values intended to replicate across the newly formed academic community, aiming for an appropriate integration of diverse disciplinary perspectives.
- *Faculty perspectives:* Regarding the merger, respondent 1 acknowledges the broad spectrum of values outlined by TAU and expresses concerns about their clarity and prioritisation. This perspective highlights a potential gap between the institutionally declared values and how they are reflected in the views of individual faculty members. Respondent 2, conversely, perceives the merger as an administrative and strategic initiative with limited direct impact on their core academic values. Their comments suggest a pragmatic acceptance of the merger, with a continued focus on their disciplinary commitments and professional practices.
- *Alignment and discrepancies:* The analysis reveals a complex environment where individual and institutional values overlap and sometimes diverge. Staff faculty members go through this new setting, balancing institutional aspirations and professional ethos.

The exploration of "Shared Beliefs and Values" post-merger explains the challenges and opportunities in encouraging a cohesive set of values within TAU. This dimension highlights the critical role of transparent communication and inclusive dialogue in aligning the academic staff's values and beliefs with the merged university's strategic

vision. The findings demonstrate a need for ongoing efforts to integrate and celebrate the plurality of perspectives within the university community, promoting a rich, shared culture that improves the institution's identity and mission.

### *Impact on Professional Roles*

UTA and TUT had distinct academic cultures reflecting their disciplinary focuses before the merger. These cultures influenced their academic staff's professional roles and identities, with UTA faculty members likely more engaged in social sciences and humanities, and TUT faculty focused on engineering and technology. TAU's mission and values emphasise interdisciplinary research, societal impact, and international excellence (Tampere University of Technology, 2017). These goals suggest expanding professional roles to include more collaborative, cross-disciplinary research and education initiatives.

Respondent 1 explains that their work as a senior lecturer, combining teaching and research, has remained largely unchanged post-merger. They emphasise the importance of research-based education, which is consistent with TAU's mission. They also note an increase in administrative tasks due to restructuring support services, which indicates a change in their professional role towards more self-administration. Respondent 2 does not report significant changes in their academic work post-merger but acknowledges the broader administrative restructuring and the focus on financial sustainability. They suggest that while their core academic responsibilities have not altered, there is an increased emphasis on performance, particularly in securing external funding and contributing to the university's financial health.

The main findings about the impact on professional roles post-mergers within the framework of the cultural-cognitive pillar, taking into consideration the normative documents and the interviews with the professional staff, are the following:

- *Continuity and change:* The interviews suggest continuity in core academic roles, with respondent 1 and 2 continuing their teaching and research activities. However, notable changes in the administrative landscape and expectations around financial contributions and efficiency reflect a shift in the wider professional environment at TAU.

- *Increased administrative responsibilities:* The merger has led to changes in support structures, with academic staff taking on more administrative tasks previously handled by planning officers or unit support. This change impacts professional roles by expanding the scope of faculty responsibilities beyond traditional teaching and research.
- *Pressure for interdisciplinary collaboration and performance:* TAU's strategic goals encourage multidisciplinary research and education, and aim for societal impact and international recognition. This strategic orientation may influence professional roles by prioritizing collaborative projects and performance metrics, such as external funding success and publication output, as critical indicators of academic contribution.
- *Cultural-Cognitive implications on professional roles:* The cultural-cognitive framework highlights how shared understandings and norms within an institution shape individual and collective behaviour (Lin, 2016). Post-merger, the evolving culture at TAU towards interdisciplinary collaboration, financial sustainability, and efficiency needs adjustments in professional roles. Academic staff may need to go through these changes and, at the same time, maintain their disciplinary identities and commitments to research and education quality.

The "Impact on Professional Roles" analysis shows a complex picture of continuity and change. Faculty members drive an environment where their fundamental academic identities remain intact. However, the outlines of their professional roles are expanding to include greater administrative oversight and a push towards interdisciplinary and performance-oriented activities. This shift emphasises the need for support systems and clear communication from university leadership to ensure these new expectations align with faculty capabilities and institutional goals.

### **Discussion and Proposed Solutions**

The three-pillar analysis suggests that post-merger identity change at Tampere University is influenced by the interaction of regulative steering and normative incentives, with people's understanding (cultural-cognitive) falling behind structural change. In addition to this, our findings show a stronger emphasis on performance and external funding after the merger, which aligns with broader shifts toward performance-based steering in

Finnish higher education (e.g., academics reporting pressure to secure projects and grants). This shift is consistent with the literature showing that performance-based funding regimes influence institutional behaviour and academic priorities (Dougherty & Natow, 2020; Nygård, 2024). Recent studies on universities' third-mission activities also stress that the interaction between teaching/research and knowledge-exchange goals is marked by "tensions and trade-offs" that often stay implicit (Marzocchi et al., 2023).

Identity work progresses slowly and unevenly across disciplines, reflecting institutional theory's expectation that deep cultural-cognitive change falls behind formal restructure (Meyer & Rowan, 2006; March & Olsen, 1983). The resulting tensions between efficiency pressures and disciplinary belonging are exactly what new institutionalism predicts when coercive and normative forces collide during significant change or shift (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Lin, 2016).

Therefore, one of the central themes that appears from this analysis is the important role of strategic communication and inclusive dialogue to address the gap between faculty expectations and the university's strategic aspirations. In order to achieve a unified institutional identity post-merger, a rigorous effort to engage faculty members in shaping the merged university's culture is required to ensure their active participation in the ongoing development of TAU's mission, vision, and values. This participatory approach not only improves the sense of belonging and alignment with institutional goals but also ensures that faculty members feel valued and recognised for their contributions to the university's evolving academic environment.

Moreover, the findings highlight the necessity of providing adequate support systems and professional development opportunities to help faculty members face the changes in their roles and responsibilities. As TAU continues to plan its future in the competitive landscape of global higher education, the insights gained from this cultural-cognitive analysis offer important lessons on managing organisational change, improving academic excellence, and building a resilient and dynamic academic community. Evidence shows that general-purpose, centralised incentive schemes rarely promote broad engagement; however, discipline-tailored supports work better for mobilising academics in diverse knowledge-exchange roles (Marzocchi et al., 2023).

TAU must make efforts to integrate academic cultures and enhance transparency around values. In addition to this, it is very important to maintain an ongoing dialogue and feedback mechanisms to align perceptions with institutional objectives, and the promotion of a shared set of core values that the entire academic community could take. Finally, it should be considered to provide support and recognition for faculty going through these transitions to ensure alignment with TAU's strategic goals.

### **Conclusion**

This study explored “how, from the perspective of the academic staff of the Faculty of Management and Business, the academic identity changed in the context of post-university merging” at Tampere University. Based on the three-pillar framework, we found that regulative changes were fastest, and normative and cultural-cognitive shifts developed more slowly and unevenly across disciplines. These patterns help to explain staff perceptions of rising performance orientation alongside persistent disciplinary belonging. In the following lines, we summarise the implications of these patterns for academic work, leadership, and future merger support at Tampere University.

The UTA-TUT merger has triggered a significant cultural shift, prompting faculty to re-evaluate their sense of belonging, perceptions of the merger's efficacy, and professional roles in line with new institutional norms. Each of these dimensions highlights the critical importance of developing a cohesive academic community capable of addressing the complexities of merging distinct educational and disciplinary traditions.

The comprehensive analysis of the Regulative Pillar shows how the merger between the University of Tampere and Tampere University of Technology has resulted in a unified institution that capitalises on the strengths of both entities. The strategic plan for 2023-2030 reflects a commitment to high-quality research, societal impact, and inclusivity, guided by democratic decision-making and a dedication to academic freedom and innovation. Challenges remain in balancing aspirational ideals with practical implementation, particularly in recruitment strategies. Moving forward, navigating these complexities will be crucial for Tampere University to achieve its vision as an internationally esteemed research institution rooted in ethical principles and societal advancement.

This study highlights, in the context of the normative pillar, the crucial interplay between the university's shifting normative framework and its academic staff's individual and collective identities. The notion of academic identity remains constant for academics, with changes occurring primarily in administrative procedures and the values, vision, and mission of the university. Academics are increasingly encouraged to secure external funding to support their research. However, many point out that it takes more than a decade to see significant changes in academic identity.

The comprehensive analysis of the Cultural-Cognitive Pillar, mainly focusing on the dimensions of Sense of Belonging, Perception of the Merger, Shared Beliefs and Values, and the Impact on Professional Roles at Tampere University, revealed a complex portrait of academic identity transformation in the institution's merger. Based on the detailed examination of normative documents and faculty interviews, this exploration provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics of cultural integration, identity evolution, and the reshaping of professional roles within the newly merged university.

To sum up, the merger of Tampere University has transformed its academic landscape by integrating diverse cultures, disciplines, and traditions into a unified entity striving for excellence in research, education, and societal impact. The multifaceted analysis across regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pillars indicated the changes across academic identity and community within Tampere University.

***Tamar Chkhartishvili*** recently graduated from the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Programme in Research and Innovation in Higher Education (MARIHE). Her academic and professional interests focus on European University Alliances, Third mission, and HE management. Her master's thesis examined institutional identity transformations within the context of the European Universities Initiative. Tamar has experience as a project officer in Erasmus+ KA2 Cooperation Partnerships projects and has been actively involved in developing and writing the grant proposals, with a particular interest in innovation and engagement in higher education.

***Mariam Lagundaridze*** is a recent graduate of the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Programme in Research and Innovation in Higher Education (MARIHE). She currently works as an Erasmus+ Coordinator Intern at the International Office of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Split, Croatia. Her professional experience spans HE quality assurance, international project management, and training and facilitation in non-formal education contexts. Her master's thesis examines the barriers women face within higher education institutions' organizational cultures as they approach leadership positions. Her main interests include inclusive higher education, teaching and learning, non-formal education, quality assurance, and internationalization in academia.

***Aysel Muradova*** is a recent graduate of the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Programme in Research and Innovation in Higher Education (MARIHE), with a professional background in teaching and higher education administration. She currently works as a project assistant on EU-funded Erasmus+ KA higher education projects in Germany, contributing to project management and the development of key deliverables such as frameworks, policy briefs, and micro-credentials. Her master's thesis examines quality assurance mechanisms, focusing on accreditation activities and their impact on the educational quality of higher education institutions through the lens of principal-agent theory. Her interests include higher education management, quality assurance, engagement, and third mission activities.

***José Luis Riega Cayetano*** is a recent graduate of the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Programme in Research and Innovation in Higher Education (MARIHE) and holds a Master of Administrative Sciences. He currently works as a researcher at Tampere University and as Conference Secretary for the Development Days 2026 of the Finnish Society for Development Research (FSDR). His academic and professional interests lie at the intersection of artificial intelligence, higher education governance, and research and innovation policy. His master's thesis examined how universities operationalise AI policies across institutional and national levels in Finland. He has experience as a university teaching assistant and project manager in Peru and has collaborated with UNESCO IESALC and the Finnish University Partnership for International Development (UniPID) on policy communication and strategy-related projects.

## References

- Bennetot Pruvot, E., Estermann, T., & Mason, P. (2015). DEFINE thematic report: University mergers in Europe. *European University Association*.  
<https://www.eua.eu/publications/reports/define-thematic-report-university-mergers-in-europe.html>
- Cai, Y. (2006). A case study of academic staff integration in a post-merger Chinese university. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 12(3), 215–226.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11233-006-9002-7>
- Cai, Y. (2007). *Academic staff integration in post-merger Chinese higher education institutions* [Doctoral dissertation, Tampere University]. Tampere University Press.  
<https://trepo.tuni.fi/handle/10024/67742>
- Cai, Y., & Mehari, Y. (2015). The use of institutional theory in higher education research. In J. Huisman & M. Tight (Eds.), *Theory and method in higher education research* (Vol. 1, pp. 1–25). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/S2056-375220150000001001>
- Cai, Y., Pinheiro, R., Geschwind, L., & Aarrevaara, T. (2015). Towards a novel conceptual framework for understanding mergers in higher education. *European Journal of Higher Education*, 6(1), 7–24.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2015.1099457>
- Carayannis, E. G., & Campbell, D. F. J. (2021). Democracy of climate and climate for democracy: The evolution of quadruple and quintuple helix innovation systems. *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*, 12, 2050–2082.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s13132-021-00778-x>
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Compagnucci, L., & Spigarelli, F. (2024). Improving knowledge transfer and innovation services: A roadmap for knowledge transfer offices. *Journal of Innovation & Knowledge*, 9(4). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jik.2024.100577>
- Dougherty, K. J., & Natow, R. S. (2020). Performance-based funding for higher education: How well does neoliberal theory capture neoliberal practice? *Higher Education*, 80, 457–478. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-019-00491-4>

- DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review*, 48(2), 147–160. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095101>
- Erdem, A. R. (2023). Academic identity. *European Journal of Education Studies*, 10(4), 296–308. <https://doi.org/10.46827/ejes.v10i4.4788>
- Hall, M., Symes, A., & Luescher, T. (2004). *The governance of merger in South African higher education* (Research report). Council on Higher Education. <https://www.che.ac.za/publications/research/governance-merger-south-african-higher-education>
- Hay, D., & Fourie, M. (2002). Preparing the way for mergers in South African higher and further education institutions: An investigation into staff perceptions. *Higher Education*, 44(1), 115–131. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1015569229047>
- Harman, G., & Harman, K. (2003). Institutional mergers in higher education: Lessons from international experience. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 9(1), 29–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13583883.2003.9967091>
- Lin, M. Y. M. (2016). Switching focus between the three pillars of institutional theory during social movements. In T. S. Chan & G. Cui (Eds.), *Asian businesses in a turbulent environment* (pp. 21–39). Palgrave Macmillan UK. [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-48887-9\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-48887-9_2)
- March, J. G., & Olsen, J. P. (1983). The new institutionalism: Organizational factors in political life. *American Political Science Review*, 78(3), 734–749. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1961840>
- Marzocchi, C., Kitagawa, F., Rossi, F., & Uyarra, E. (2023). Reconceptualising knowledge exchange and higher education institutions: Broadening our understanding of motivations, channels, and stakeholders. *Studies in Higher Education*, 48(5), 673–682. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2023.2184791>
- Meyer, H.-D., & Rowan, B. (Eds.). (2006). *The new institutionalism in education*. State University of New York Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780791481080>
- Nokkala, T., Välimaa, J., & Westerheijden, D. F. (2016). *Finland – university mergers and institutional profiling* (One of twelve case studies produced as part of the project on structural reform in higher education, EAC-2014-0474). Publications Office of the European Union. <https://doi.org/10.2766/118884>

- Norgård, J. D., & Skodvin, O. J. (2002). The importance of geography and culture in mergers: A Norwegian institutional case study. *Higher Education*, 44, 73–90. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1015513111300>
- Nygård, J. H. (2024). Institutional impact of performance-based funding in Finnish higher education: Changes and effects on institutional behaviour. *Journal of Research and Innovation in Higher Education*, 5(1), 1–30. <https://rihe-journal.com/index.php/rihe/article/view/50>
- Poutanen, M. (2025). Accelerated academia: Time regimes of a university merger. *Minerva*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11024-025-09571-5>
- Rinne, R., & Jauhiainen, A. (2012). In the shifting sands of policy: University academics' and employees' views and experiences of Finland's new higher education policy. In S. Ahola & D. M. Hoffman (Eds.), *Higher education research in Finland: Emerging structures and contemporary issues* (pp. 89–110). Jyväskylä University. <https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-39-5189-4>
- TAMK. (2020). Annual review 2018: Strategy. <https://web.archive.org/web/20200812150827/https://annualreview2018.tamk.fi/strategy/>
- Tampere University. (2018, December 13). *Together we are greater*. Tampere University. <https://www.tuni.fi/en/news/together-we-are-greater>
- Tampere University. (2022, April 6). *Principles of Good Governance at Tampere University* [Presentation slides]. [https://content-webapi.tuni.fi/proxy/public/2022-04/principles-of-good-governance-\\_06042022.pdf](https://content-webapi.tuni.fi/proxy/public/2022-04/principles-of-good-governance-_06042022.pdf)
- Tampere University. (2023, January 31). *Strategy of Tampere University 2023-2030*. [https://content-webapi.tuni.fi/proxy/public/2023-02/strategy\\_presentation\\_2023-2030\\_eng\\_0.pdf](https://content-webapi.tuni.fi/proxy/public/2023-02/strategy_presentation_2023-2030_eng_0.pdf)
- Tampere University of Technology. (2017). *The strategy of Tampere University of Technology*. <https://web.archive.org/web/20171203231848/http://www.tut.fi/en/about-tut/strategy/index.htm>
- Teini, J.-P. (2016). *A digital campus in 2030: The case of three merging higher education institutions in Tampere* (Master's thesis, Tampere University of Technology). Tampere University of Technology. <https://trepo.tuni.fi/handle/123456789/24334>

- University of Tampere. (2016). *Towards a new university: Strategy of the University of Tampere 2016-2020* [Strategy].  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20160622194831/http://www.uta.fi/esittely/strategia/index/strategia.pdf>
- Umbach, P. D., & Mathies, C. (2023). Exploring the outcomes of a university merger: The case of Finland's Tampere University. *IIAI Letters on Institutional Research*, 3. <https://doi.org/10.52731/lir.v003.138>
- Vellamo, T. (2022). *Technical identities in a university merger: organizational, disciplinary, and individual perspectives* [Doctoral dissertation, Tampere University]. Tampere University Press. <https://trepo.tuni.fi/handle/10024/141400>
- Ursin, J. (2017). Transforming Finnish higher education: Institutional mergers and conflicting academic identities. *Revista de Investigación Educativa*, 35(2), 307–316. <https://doi.org/10.6018/rie.35.2.295831>
- Ursin, J., Aittola, H., Henderson, C., & Välimaa, J. (2010). Is education getting lost in university mergers? *Tertiary Education and Management*, 16(4), 327–340. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13583883.2010.533379>
- Wollscheid, S., & Røsdal, T. (2021). The impact of mergers in higher education on micro-level processes – a literature review. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 27, 257–280. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11233-021-09074-4>
- Ylijoki, O.-H. (2014). University under structural reform: A micro-level perspective. *Minerva*, 52(1), 55–75. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43550268>
- Ylijoki, O.-H., & Ursin, J. (2013). The construction of academic identity in the changes of Finnish higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 38(8), 1135–1149. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2013.833036>
- Yliopistolaki [Universities Act] 558/2009. (2009). *Finlex*. <https://www.finlex.fi/eli?uri=http://data.finlex.fi/eli/sd/2009/558/ajantasa/2025-06-27/fin>
- Zinovyeva, A., Kannianen, J.-P., Abbas, O. A., & Caliskan, Y. (2018). Institutional elements of success in Tampere3 merger process. *Journal of Research and Innovation in Higher Education*, 3(1), 29–50. <https://rihe-journal.com/index.php/rihe/article/view/25>