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AI detection report

Assessment Report - 02 Oct, 2025

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14%

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Assessment

Winston has detected the text as 14% human. The content contains strong indications of AI authorship, though a small possibility of human authorship remains.

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AI prediction map

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Organisational Culture as an Asset and a Liability Organisational culture refers to the shared assumptions, values, and practices that guide behaviour in the workplace. Schein (2010) describes culture as the "pattern of basic assumptions" that a group learns as it solves problems of external adaptation and internal integration. A strong organisational culture can therefore provide direction, motivation, and unity of purpose. At the same time, when misaligned with the external environment or when based on toxic values, culture can become a barrier to success. This dual nature means that culture can be both a powerful asset and a serious liability.

Culture as an Asset One of the main advantages of a strong culture is that it creates clarity and cohesion. Employees know what is expected of them and understand the values that drive decisions. This shared understanding reduces uncertainty and aligns behaviour with strategic objectives.

A clear example is Google, which has cultivated a culture of innovation, openness, and collaboration. Employees are given autonomy, encouraged to take risks, and rewarded for creative contributions. This culture not only attracts top talent but also supports continuous innovation in a fast-changing technological landscape (Bock, 2015). Similarly, Southwest Airlines has built its reputation on a strong culture of friendliness and service. By encouraging employees to inject humour and fun into their work, the airline creates an engaged workforce and delivers high-quality customer experiences, even in an industry known for low morale (Gittell, 2003).

Toyota offers another instructive example. Its Kaizen culture of continuous improvement and teamwork has enabled it to maintain world-class manufacturing standards. Employees at all levels are empowered to identify inefficiencies and propose solutions, fostering innovation in processes and ensuring long-term competitiveness (Liker, 2004).

A strong culture can also be an asset in building a distinctive brand identity. For instance, Apple has cultivated a culture centred on design excellence, secrecy, and perfectionism. This culture has allowed Apple to consistently produce innovative products with strong customer loyalty. The alignment between its internal culture and external brand image reinforces its competitive advantage.

Furthermore, research supports the performance benefits of culture. Kotter and Heskett (1992) found that firms with adaptive, performance-oriented cultures significantly outperformed those with weaker or misaligned cultures. Thus, when values align with strategy and the environment, culture is a critical driver of organisational success.

Culture as a Liability Despite its potential strengths, a strong culture can become a liability when it fosters rigidity, discourages diversity of thought, or incentivises harmful behaviour.

A key example is Nokia. Once the global leader in mobile phones, Nokia's strong engineering-driven culture became resistant to new ideas. Top managers failed to recognise the disruptive potential of smartphones and were reluctant to challenge established practices. This cultural rigidity contributed to Nokia's dramatic decline in the face of competition from Apple and Android (Vuori & Huy, 2016).

Similarly, Blockbuster had a culture strongly tied to its traditional retail model. Leaders and employees alike were heavily invested in the legacy business, which created inertia when confronted with Netflix's digital streaming innovation. What was once a source of consistency and operational success became a liability, preventing timely adaptation.

An even more damaging case is Enron, whose strong but toxic culture glorified aggressive profit-seeking and high-risk behaviour. Employees were rewarded for short-term financial performance regardless of ethical considerations. This culture normalised dishonesty and rule-breaking, ultimately leading to one of the biggest corporate scandals in history (Sims & Brinkmann, 2003). In this case, culture did not just slow adaptation; it actively drove destructive behaviour.

Even organisations with admired cultures can face challenges. Uber, for example, initially built a culture of boldness, risk-taking, and disruption. While this supported rapid growth, it also fostered unethical practices, a hostile work environment, and reputational damage. The company was forced to undergo cultural transformation under new leadership to restore trust and legitimacy. These cases illustrate that the very strength of culture can be dangerous. When employees strongly internalise shared assumptions, dissenting voices may be silenced, and organisations may fail to recognise the need for change. This phenomenon, known as cultural inertia, makes even successful firms vulnerable to external shocks.

Balancing and Managing Organisational Culture The dual nature of culture highlights the importance of cultural adaptability. Kotter and Heskett (1992) argue that adaptive cultures—those open to change, feedback, and innovation—are more sustainable than rigid ones. Leaders play a central role in ensuring that culture evolves in line with strategy and environmental conditions.

This can involve reinforcing positive aspects of culture while addressing harmful or outdated practices. For example, after the 2008 financial crisis, many banks sought to shift away from aggressive, profit-maximisation cultures toward more risk-conscious and customer-focused values. Similarly, Microsoft under Satya Nadella transformed its culture from one of internal competition to one of collaboration and learning. This cultural shift revitalised innovation and helped Microsoft regain its position as a technology leader.

Organisations also need to recognise the importance of subcultures. In large firms, different divisions may require different cultural emphases. For instance, a research and development unit may need a culture of risk-taking and experimentation, while a compliance team requires one of caution and rule-following. Strong cultures that fail to accommodate such diversity may limit effectiveness.

Conclusion Organisational culture is a powerful but double-edged force. When aligned with strategy and environment, it creates cohesion, motivation, innovation, and competitive advantage, as seen in companies like Google, Toyota, and Southwest Airlines. However, when culture becomes rigid, toxic, or misaligned, it can obstruct change, normalise unethical practices, and even cause organisational failure, as shown by Nokia, Blockbuster, and Enron.

The challenge for leaders is not simply to build a strong culture, but to cultivate one that is adaptive, ethical, and strategically aligned. This requires ongoing reflection, open communication, and a willingness to evolve. A strong culture can be the greatest asset an organisation possesses—but if left unchecked, it can just as easily become its most dangerous liability. References Bock, L. (2015). Work Rules!: Insights from Inside Google That Will Transform How You Live and Lead. Twelve. Gittell, J. H. (2003). The Southwest Airlines Way. McGraw-Hill. Kotter, J. P., & Heskett, J. L. (1992). Corporate Culture and Performance. Free Press. Liker, J. K. (2004). The Toyota Way: 14 Management Principles from the World's Greatest Manufacturer. McGraw-Hill. Schein, E. H. (2010). Organizational Culture and Leadership (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass. Sims, R. R., & Brinkmann, J. (2003). Enron ethics (or: Culture matters more than codes). Journal of Business Ethics, 45(3), 243–256. Vuori, T. O., & Huy, Q. N. (2016). Distributed attention and shared emotions in the innovation process: How Nokia lost the smartphone battle. Administrative Science Quarterly, 61(1), 9–51.