2021

State *of* Culture

Insights from an Unprecedented Year

This is the first in a series of annual research reports designed to help readers better understand and shape the cultures of their organizations in practical ways that yield significant and sustainable results.

W elcome to the 2021 State of Culture Report. The output of this study represents a tremendous amount of thought and effort on the part of our staff, partners, and the public who helped us set a firm foundation for an annual assessment of organizational culture on a global scale. We hope that the insights that this research uncovers serves to help readers to better understand and shape the cultures and climates of their organizations in practical ways that yield sustainable performance results.

As practitioners who have spent the last two decades supporting clients on multiple continents grappling with some extremely complex performance challenges, we appreciate the importance of balancing the line between research and practice. This balance allows for a best-of-both approach to the critical work that organizations around the globe are doing each day.

The increasingly rapid rate of technological innovation, increasing globalization, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the other complexities of modern-day organizational functioning all impact our collective ability to perform.

We hope that this ongoing research will shed light on the ways in which organizations are reacting to, adapting to, and intentionally shaping their cultures to thrive.

We hope you find the report easy to read and digest and we hope that it provides value as you work to drive success in your organizations. As this is an annual study and this is our inaugural year, we welcome your input and feedback so we can continue to provide the most value we can to the field as we continue to learn together.

Yours in Learning,
The gothamCulture Team

The 2021 State of Culture Report is the culmination of a year of research on a global scale of 241 respondents across local, national, and global organizations. From this research, we have extracted key insights into the aspects of organizational culture and climate that link to a variety of performance outcomes as well as the practices that drive results in the day-to-day.

This year, in particular, we sought to explore how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted organizational culture and how organizations navigated the challenges the pandemic posed.

It is our hope that with each passing year, as the sample size grows and our research is refined, we will continue to provide valuable insights and best practices to drive performance in all organizations regardless of sector or industry.

241
GLOBAL RESPONDENTS
Responding to this year's survey spanning six continents.

360°
ANALYSIS
Respondents hailed from all sectors and a wide variety of industries including technology, education, finance, government, healthcare, transport, retail, pharmaceuticals, hospitality, and manufacturing.

4⁺ DECADES

of empirical research has established the link between various aspects of organizational culture and performance.

Theoretical Background

In a world of constant change and dynamism, individuals, teams, and organizations must be capable of adapting to stay relevant. A wealth of empirical research shows that organizational culture is a key lever for organizations to adapt and excel as their environments continue to evolve. The authors of this report have extensive and deep expertise in creating and transforming thriving organizational cultures. Through years of experience with different teams across industries and continents, armed with decades of research, we developed the **Culture Mosaic**, a framework that enables us to understand and communicate culture and climate in ways that ensure organizations are equipped to manage change successfully.

The literature has consistently shown that organizational culture is a significant factor in determining organizational performance. Moreover, organizational culture has been linked to many aspects of sustainable performance in the workplace from productivity and adaptability, to customer satisfaction and loyalty, employee engagement, organizational citizenship behaviors, and organizational safety. More information about the theoretical underpinnings of this research may be found **here.**
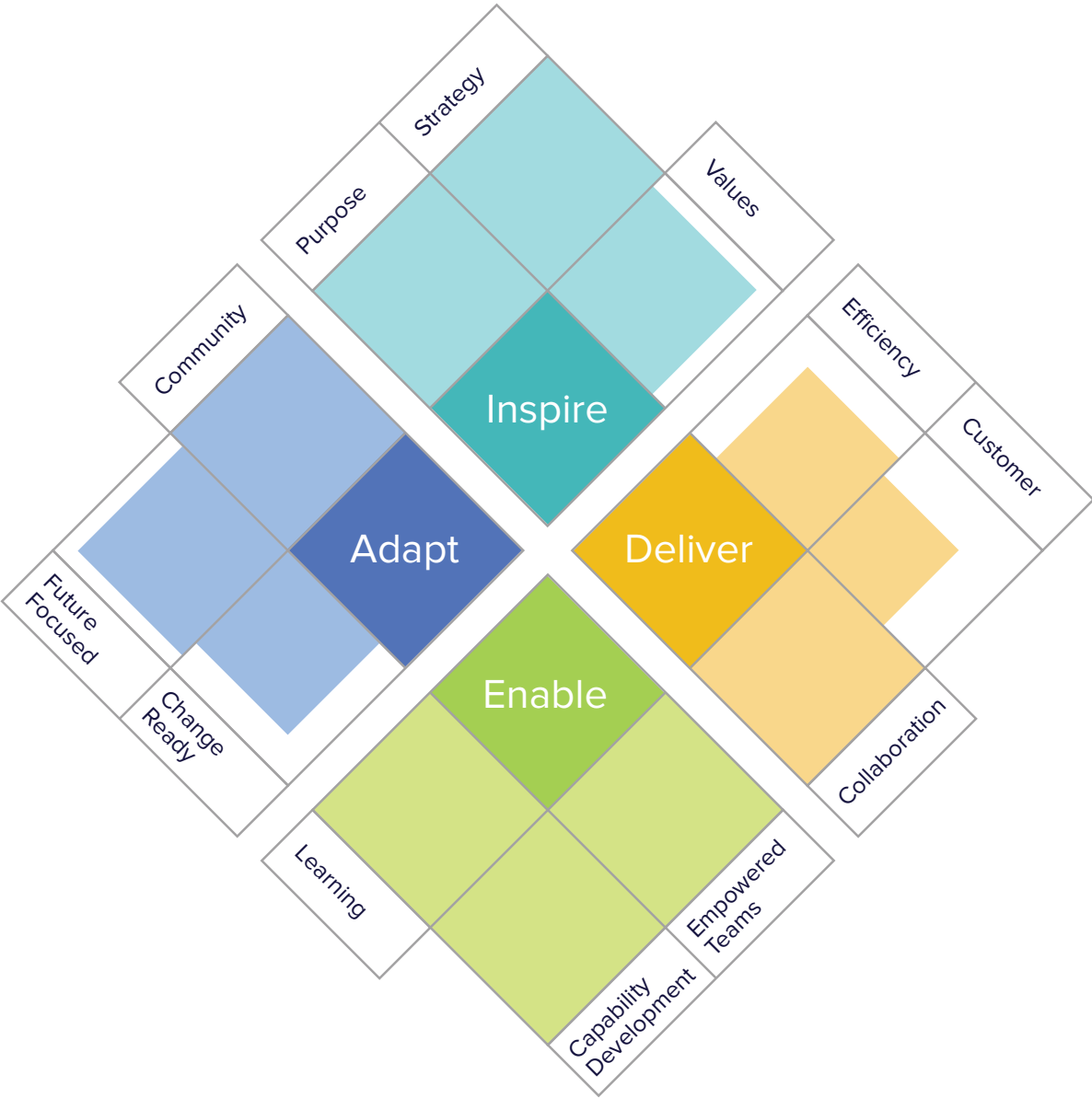
The Culture Mosaic

The Culture Mosaic is grounded in the idea that organizational culture is comprised of the underlying beliefs, assumptions, values, and ways of interacting and working. These factors contribute to the unique social and psychological environment of an organization which, in turn, contributes to organizational performance. Culture informs organizational performance through its impact on norms, collective work practices, and behaviors. We contend that it can be shaped over time by focusing on the work practices and behaviors employees engage in on a daily basis. These behaviors create clarity and alignment amongst group members about what 'right' looks like.

At this opportune time in history, when fundamental shifts in organizational culture are needed to ensure that organizations are best able to adapt to the myriad of internal and external changes at hand, the lessons from the past have crystallized the rules and tools critical to enabling culture change at scale. Based on the values framework as well as decades of research, the Culture Mosaic focuses on measuring the culturally relevant work practices and behaviors that operationalize organizational culture and serve as observable manifestations of the underlying beliefs, values, and assumptions that drive behavior.

The Culture Mosaic is comprised of four dimensions of organizational culture and climate that impact organizational performance: *(see diagram page 7)*

The Culture Mosaic is comprised of four dimensions of organizational culture and climate that impact organizational performance:

INSPIRE	DELIVER	ENABLE	ADAPT
A commitment to purpose and strategy that is underpinned by and aligned to values.	Disciplined and efficient execution enabled by collaboration and coordinated decision making.	An organization where learning and capability development are valued, and empowered teams thrive.	Customer intimacy coupled with an orientation towards the future and the capacity to enact change.

For more information regarding the Culture Mosaic Survey click **here**.

240+

*organizations are reflected
in this year's survey.
Respondents reflect
a diversity of roles,
industries, and regions.*

Methodology

Given the world-wide changes we have collectively experienced over the past year in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, political tension, and economic strife, we decided to embark on an exploratory journey of understanding the Global State of Culture. It was our intention to extract key insights and best practices that have a direct impact on organizational performance using the Culture Mosaic in addition to a variety of other measures.

Our exploratory research is primary in the sense that we launched our proprietary survey, collecting qualitative and quantitative data directly from 241 respondents representing over 200 organizations, across roles, industries, and regions.

Target Population

Our global sample of 241 respondents includes HR and Organizational Development (OD) professionals as well as non-HR and non-OD professionals to understand the potential differences in perspectives that may exist between the two groups. Moreover, respondents served in roles across their organizations including individual contributors, managers of individual contributors, managers of managers, managers of functional units, as well as executives and leaders.

The Survey

We developed a 70-item survey that consisted of a wide variety of items pertaining to organizational culture, climate, and performance including, items focusing on COVID-19 responses and impacts on business, social justice practices, values, and resources. Questions were either open-ended or presented on a Likert scale.*
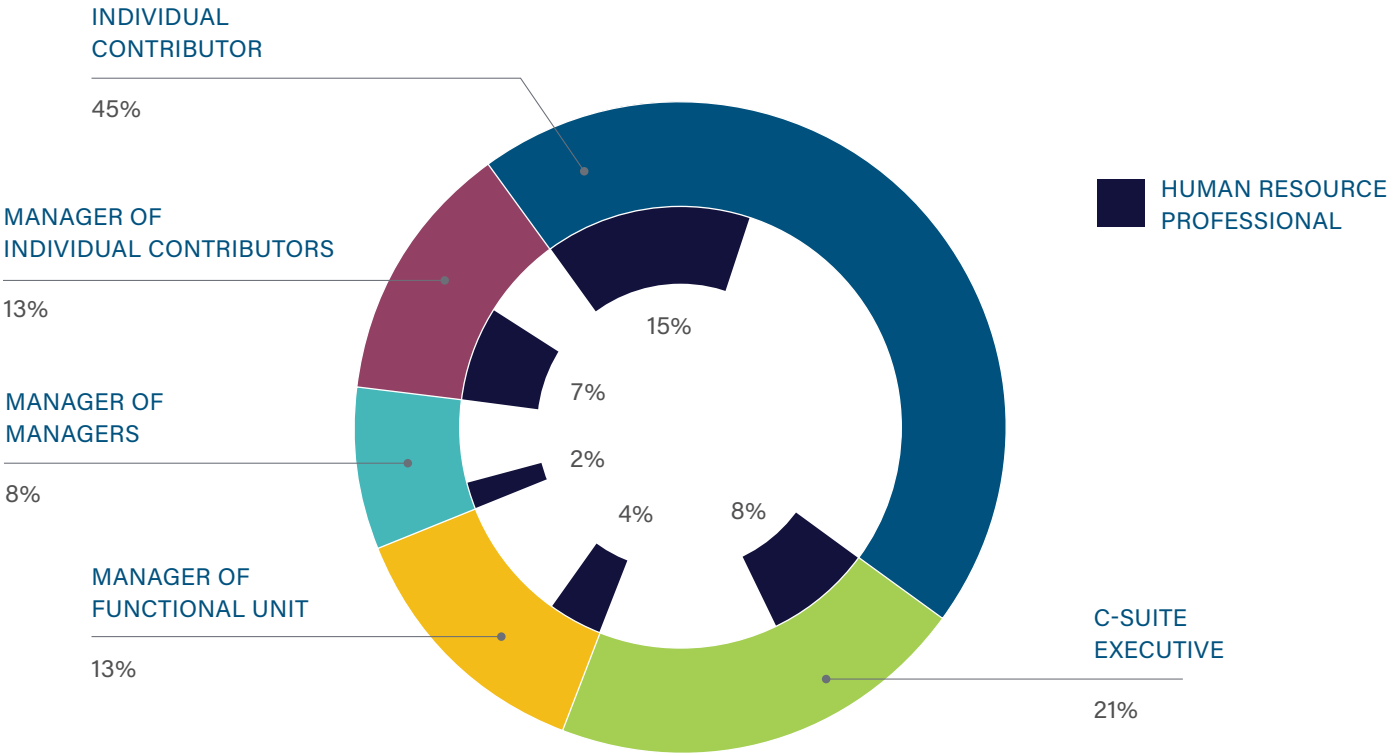
Data Collection

The survey was administered using an online survey platform and data was collected for a period of six weeks where we utilized our professional and personal networks, word of mouth, and social media to recruit respondents via a snowball sampling approach.

* A psychometric scale commonly involved in research that employs questionnaires. It is the most widely used approach to scaling responses in survey research.
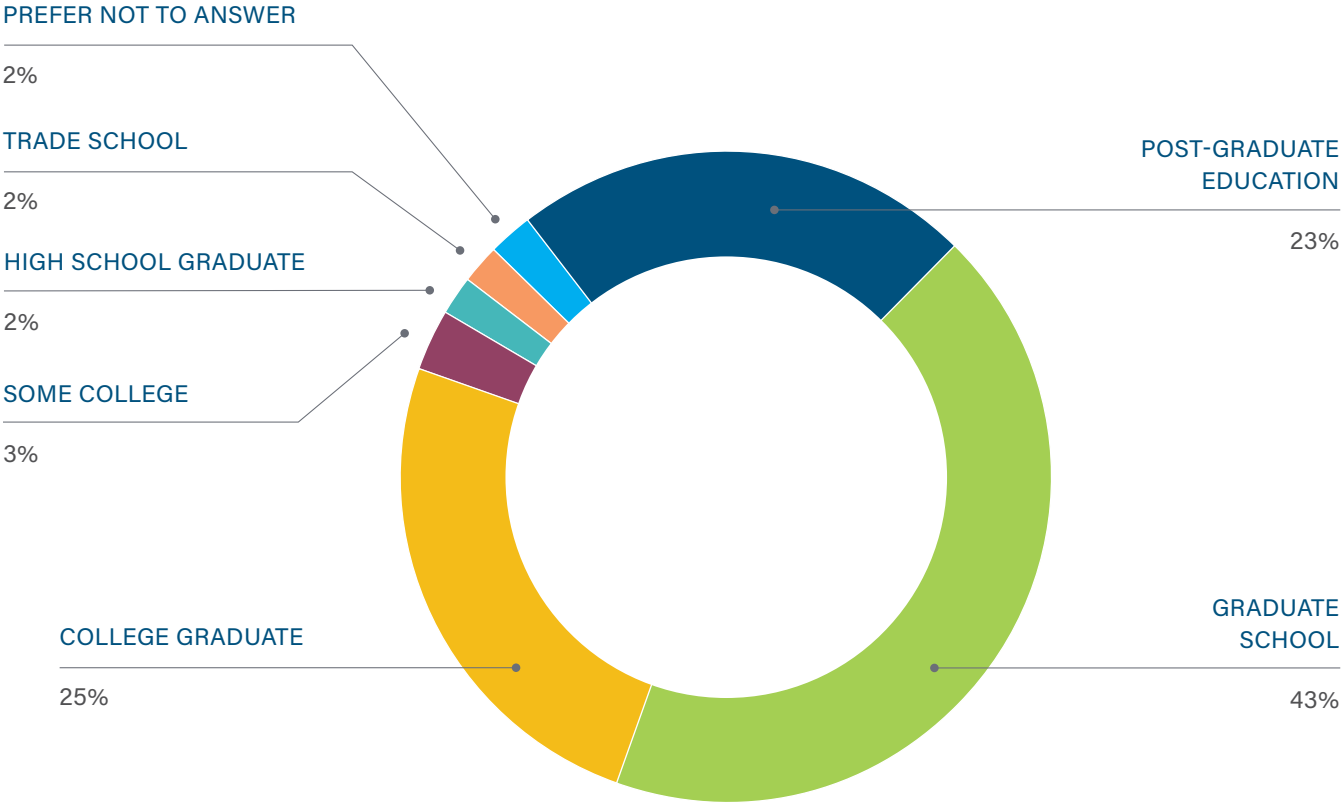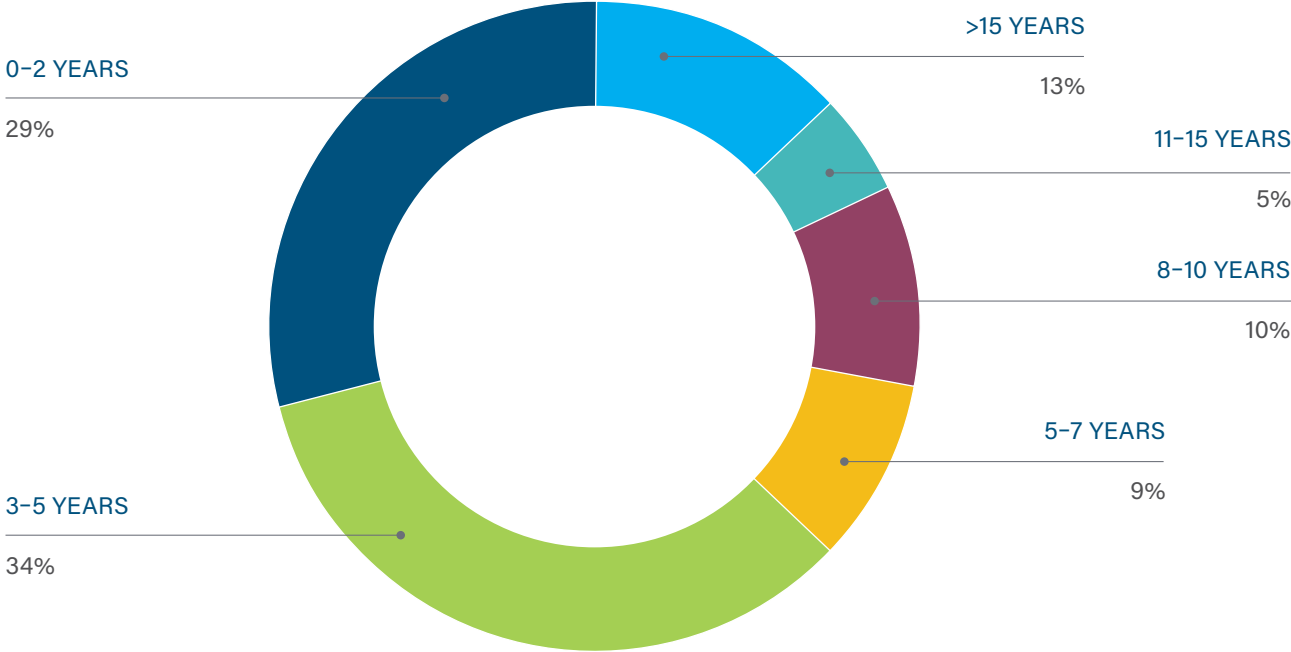
Demographics + Firmographics

Our 241 respondents serve as a solid foundation to build upon our longitudinal analysis in the years to come.

Respondents by Profession

INDIVIDUAL
CONTRIBUTOR
45%

HUMAN RESOURCE
PROFESSIONAL

MANAGER OF
INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTORS
13%

MANAGER OF
MANAGERS
8%

MANAGER OF
FUNCTIONAL UNIT
13%

15%

7%

2%

4%

8%

C-SUITE
EXECUTIVE
21%

Education

PREFER NOT TO ANSWER
2%

TRADE SCHOOL
2%

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE
2%

SOME COLLEGE
3%

POST-GRADUATE
EDUCATION
23%

COLLEGE GRADUATE
25%

GRADUATE
SCHOOL
43%

Tenure

0-2 YEARS
29%

>15 YEARS
13%

11-15 YEARS
5%

8-10 YEARS
10%

5-7 YEARS
9%

3-5 YEARS
34%

Ethnicity

PREFER NOT TO ANSWER
6%

TWO OR MORE
<1%

NATIVE OR INDIGENOUS
PEOPLES
<1%

MIDDLE EASTERN/
NORTH AFRICAN
2%

ASIAN
5%

HISPANIC OR LATINO
6%

BLACK
8%

WHITE
79%

Age

18-24 YEARS
<1%

25-34 YEARS
17%

23-44 YEARS
23%

65+ YEARS
10%

55-64 YEARS
24%

45-54 YEARS
26%
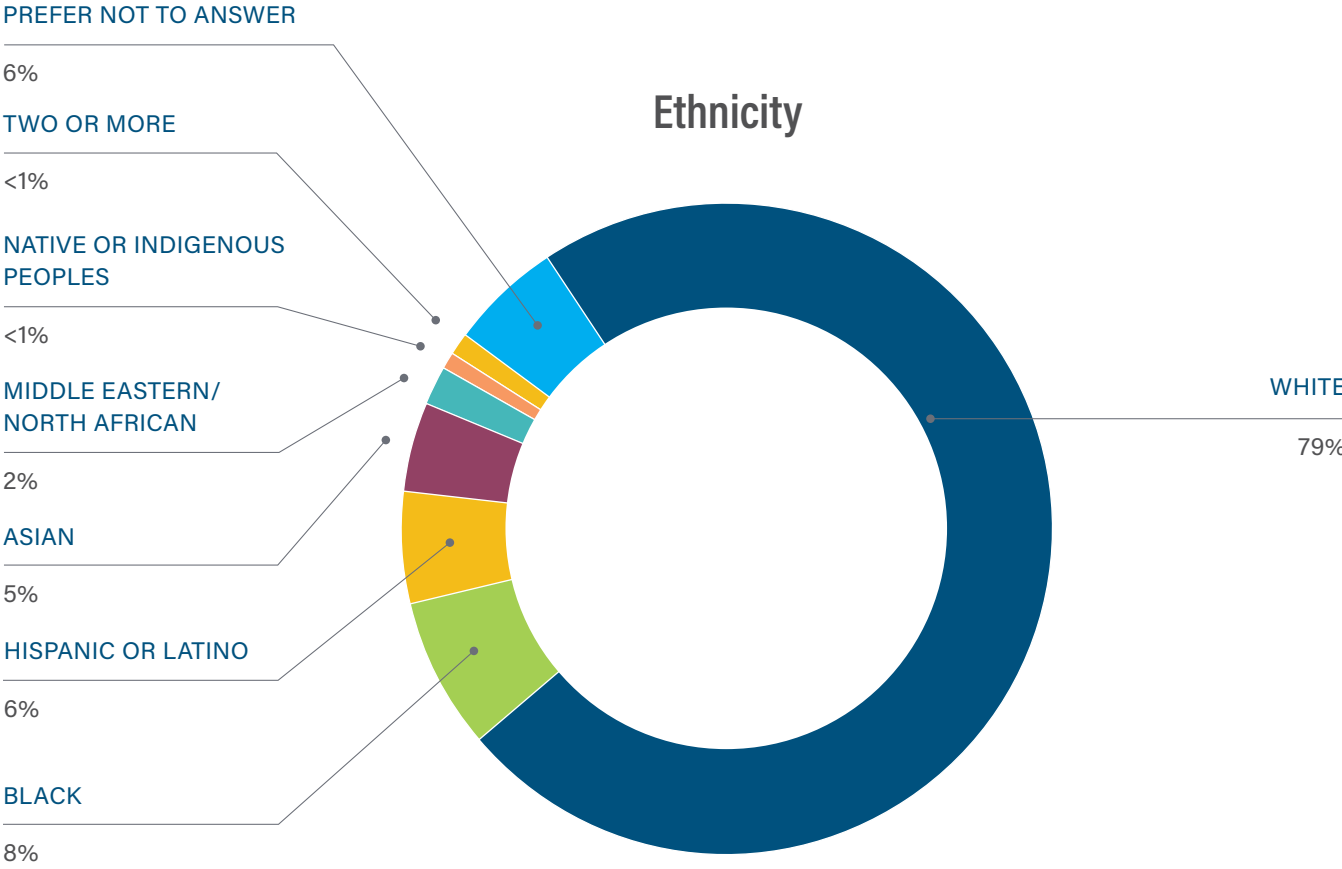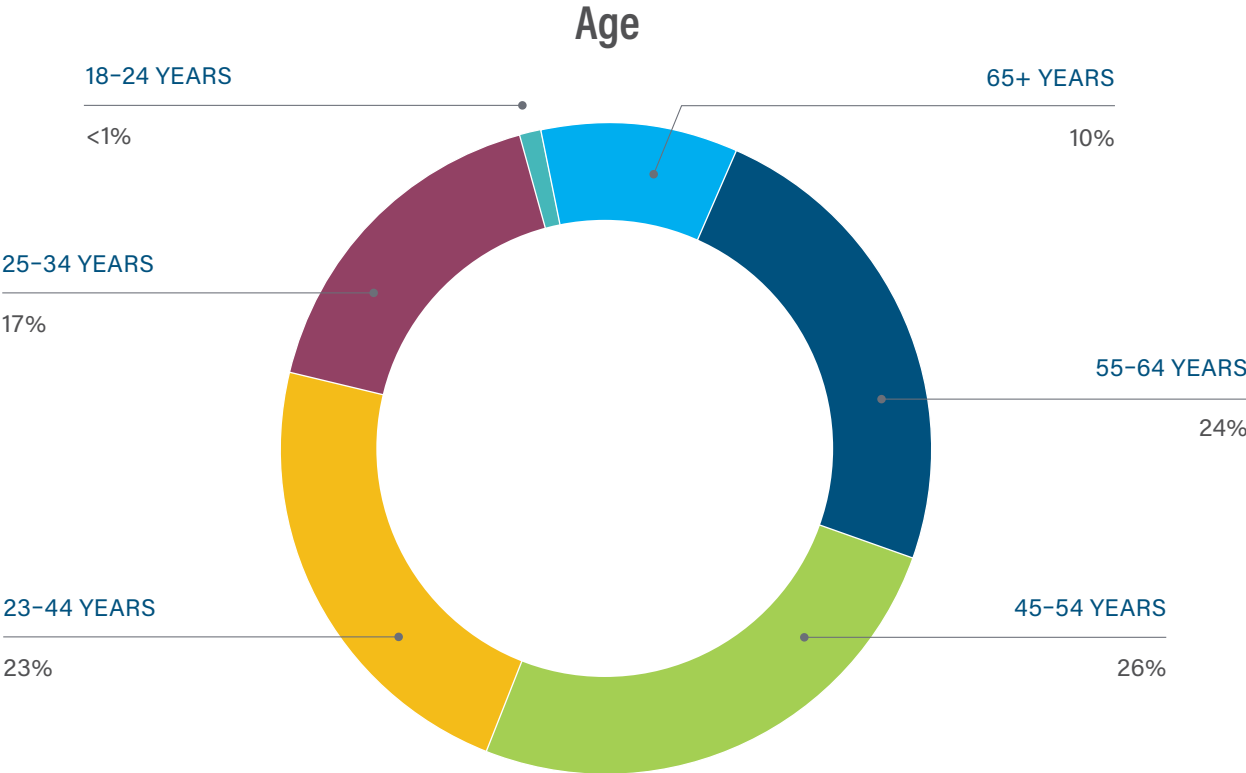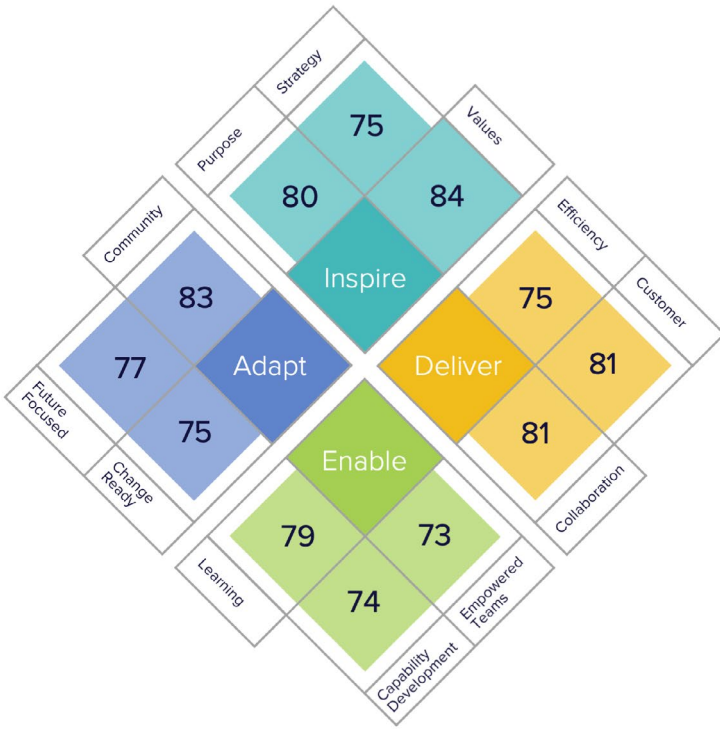
Findings:
Ability to Innovate

In this section, we explore the difference in scores on the Culture Mosaic between organizations that pivoted and organizations that had a reduced ability to innovate during the pandemic.

Data is presented in two categories:

- Low performers - The lowest 50% of respondents
- Top performers - The top 50% of respondents

Organizations that report a reduced ability to innovate

Organizations that report an increased ability to innovate

Figure 1. Culture Mosaic scores split by reported organizational ability to innovate during COVID-19 pandemic.

Inspire

This culture dimension examines how committed the members of an organization are to its purpose and strategy. Moreover, it explores how much these strategies are underpinned by and aligned to the values of the organization.

Based on our research, organizations that successfully pivoted and innovated during the pandemic scored significantly higher than those who did not in the Inspire dimension. They were more likely to have strategies with clearly aligned priorities as well as a clear purpose. Furthermore, these organizations were significantly more likely to have core values that consistently guide their work than organizations that were reported to have reduced abilities to innovate. This finding suggests that there is a positive correlation between an organization's commitment to outlining a strategy aligned with its values and ability to pivot.

Deliver

This dimension of the Culture Mosaic examines how disciplined and efficient an organization is with regard to delivering consistent and dependable execution. It examines how collaboration and coordinated decision-making enable the organization to achieve these efficiencies in a repeatable way.

In general, respondents from organizations that successfully pivoted and innovated reported significantly higher scores under the Deliver dimension than those who did not. These organizations reported an increased ability to collaborate across functions and locations as well as more coordinated decision-making. This ability to effectively work across boundaries may facilitate the ability to adapt to changing needs when required whereas organizations where team members operate in silos may find it much more difficult to coordinate organizational change efforts quickly and easily.

Enable

The third dimension of the Culture Mosaic measures the maturity of organizational functioning related to productive empowerment, organizational learning, and the extent to which employees have the knowledge, skills, abilities, and tools required to do what is being asked of them.

Again, organizations that pivoted and innovated scored significantly higher on this culture dimension *(79 average)* than those who experienced a reduced ability to innovate *(61 average)*. They were more likely to invest in capability development, learning and empowering teams. Therefore, there is something to be said about investing in the learning and development of people and teams during a time of change.

68%

*of respondents believe that
remote-work practices in their
organizations will continue to
be the norm post-pandemic.*

Adapt

This dimension of the Culture Mosaic looks at how future-focused and change ready an organization is as well as how deeply members of the organization understand the needs of their customers and community.

Organizations that pivoted and innovated during the pandemic seemed to have reported significantly higher scores (78 average as compared to 53 reported by low-performing organizations) in the areas of this dimension than organizations that were unable to innovate and adapt to the requirements imposed upon them by the COVID-19 pandemic. They reported being more focused on the future and more prepared to manage uncertainty and change than those who were unable to innovate. They were more likely to be flexible, adaptive, and highly capable of making the changes that the organization required to stay competitive in the new pandemic environment. More importantly, they were very connected to their customers and communities. This finding suggests that investing in a future-focused strategy, that keeps customers at the center, positively correlated with an organization's ability to pivot and innovate.

These findings suggest organizations with "clear and aligned" cultures, as defined by the Culture Mosaic, were more likely to thrive during turbulent times of change. While all aspects of these culture clusters are important, having clear values that guide work, having high levels of collaboration across teams, and being connected to the customers and communities organizations operate in were found to be the most highly correlated to an organization's ability to thrive.

The organizations that pivoted and innovated during this time operate across industries. However, they were centered predominantly in the Consulting and Professional Services (20%), Technology (13%), and Education (13%) sectors.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has definitely called for radical changes when it comes to the world of work, 63% of respondents reported that these experiences will affect their organizations' abilities to thrive in the future. 68% believe that remote-work practices in their organizations will continue to be the norm even post-pandemic. Organizations will need to assess how they are doing and work on inspiring, delivering, enabling, and adapting their organizations to continue to innovate and evolve regardless of what the future holds.

They will also need to consider what a "return to work" might look like, how flexible they will be in terms of remote work, and how they can assist their employees in readjusting to new expectations now that they have completely recoordinated their personal lives around their work requirements.

The "return to work", or more appropriately, the "return to the office" should not be underestimated. As organizations attempt to figure out what work will look like post-pandemic, anxiety levels amongst workers are increasing for a variety of reasons. It is imperative, based on our research findings, that leaders provide time, space, and flexibility to employees as they work through the logistics and anxiety related to these changing expectations. This will require leaders to resist the urge to create one-size-fits-all approaches to work in order to accommodate the wide variety of work-life situations that the pandemic created.

Findings:
Covid-19 Response

In this section, we outline some of the key findings related to the COVID-19 responses, values, and social justice stances of participating organizations and their implication on the culture of these organizations.

Data is presented in two categories:

- **Low performers -** The lowest 50% of respondents
- **Top performers -** The top 50% of respondents

20%

of respondents stated that their organizations developed new innovations and/or pivoted as a result of the pandemic.

COVID-19

While most organizations had to pivot to remote work and adjust their work strategies during the pandemic, not all were successful at adapting to the challenges posed by these changes. In this section, we set out to explore the elements of organizational culture that might have enabled or hindered organizations' abilities to perform during the pandemic.

Thirty-eight percent (38%) of respondents stated that their organization's ability to adapt to remote work requirements had a positive impact on their work as opposed to 37% who said it had a negative impact and 25% who said it had no impact on their work (*see fig. 2*). Based on this data, we can see that, there is a variation in how well organizations adapted to the changing needs of their workforce as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

When respondents were asked about the impact of the pandemic on their organizations, some pointed to unfavorable outcomes, such as announcing voluntary

(6%) and mandatory (13%) furloughs, layoffs (12%), and temporary closures (10%). Despite the unfortunate circumstances of many organizations, others seemed to thrive in the pandemic environment even hiring new staff to meet demand (8%).

Interestingly, 20% of respondents reported that their organizations had developed new innovations and/or pivoted as a result of the pandemic as opposed to only 10% who stated that their organizations' ability to innovate had narrowed. This data point triggered our interest in exploring if any significant cultural differences existed between these two groups.

Apply the Culture Mosaic

Using the Culture Mosaic framework, we conducted a deep dive to assess the difference in scores between those who developed new innovations and/or pivoted and those who did not on the four culture domains with the hopes of extracting key practices other organizations can utilize to pivot.

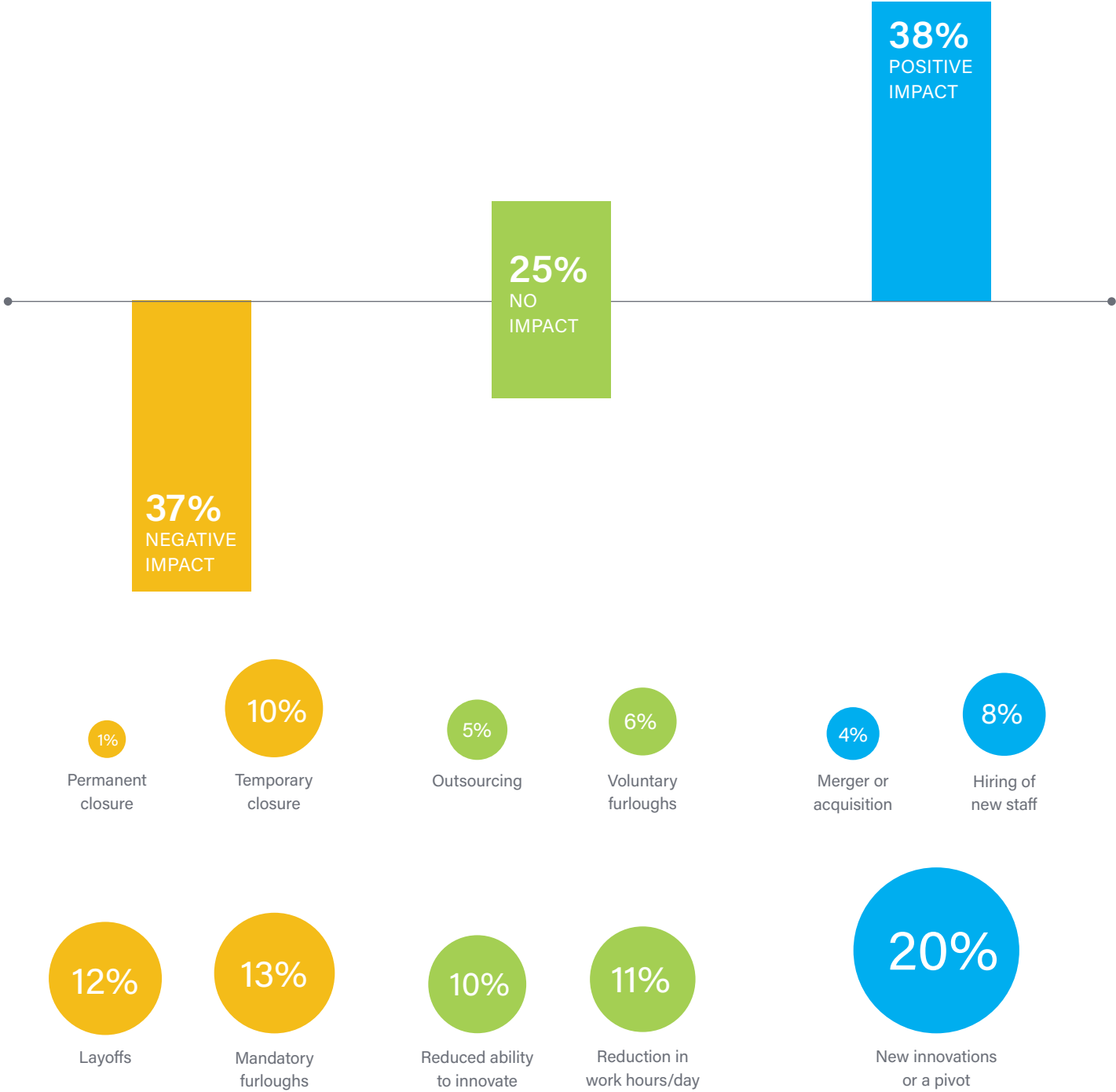## COVID-19 Corporate Impact

Figure 2. The visual above illustrates the performance outcomes reported by respondents in each of the three categories of impact resulting from COVID-19.

Creating a common understanding of how organizational culture is defined and ensuring leaders are actively involved in creating and supporting that definition can have a significant positive impact on performance.

Findings:
Operationalizing
Culture

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the role organizational culture plays in organizations globally, we must understand how organizations operationalize the concept in their day-to-day.

Culture Elements

In this study, we asked respondents multiple questions regarding how their organizations define, measure, and shape their culture. Based on the data collected, we were able to extract the following findings around culture and organizational performance.

Defining Culture

When respondents were asked about whether or not their organizations have a common or broadly accepted way of defining culture, 56% said they did not while 44% said they did. For organizations that did have a common definition for culture, 'how things are done', 'values', and 'behaviors' were the most used descriptors to define the concept.

Sixty one percent (61%) of respondents that stated that their organizations had a common definition for culture claimed that their organizations' executive leadership and Boards were involved in defining the culture.

When we looked at how these organizations scored on the Culture Mosaic, it appeared that they performed significantly better on all four dimensions of the framework than those who did not have a common definition and where leadership was not involved. *(See Fig. 3 & 4)*

This suggests that having a common culture definition and leadership involvement in setting the definition can have a significantly positive impact on organizations' performance.

Measuring Culture

Only 36% of respondents claimed that their organizations have a formal way of measuring and assessing organizational culture, where the most commonly utilized tools included open feedback and annual culture, climate, and engagement assessments. While 75% of overall respondents claimed that culture is absolutely critical for business performance, less than a quarter (24%) of respondents with an HR or OD background stated that their organizations measure the evolution of their cultures. Interestingly, when we compared these organizations with others that did not measure culture, we once again found significant differences in organizational performance.

Organizations that measured their culture scored significantly better on all four dimensions of the Culture Mosaic, indicating that taking a proactive approach to understanding and shaping one's culture may have long-term benefits across the organization in a variety of ways behaviorally. This finding also suggests that it is valuable for organizations to invest in appropriate assessment of culture in order to proactively shape it to meet the needs of their situation.

However, when respondents were asked about whether or not their current methods of culture assessment led to proportionate culture changes and outcomes, only 21% said yes. This finding suggests that a significant gap exists between data and action which can be caused by any number of things. The assessments that are being utilized may not be measuring the right things,
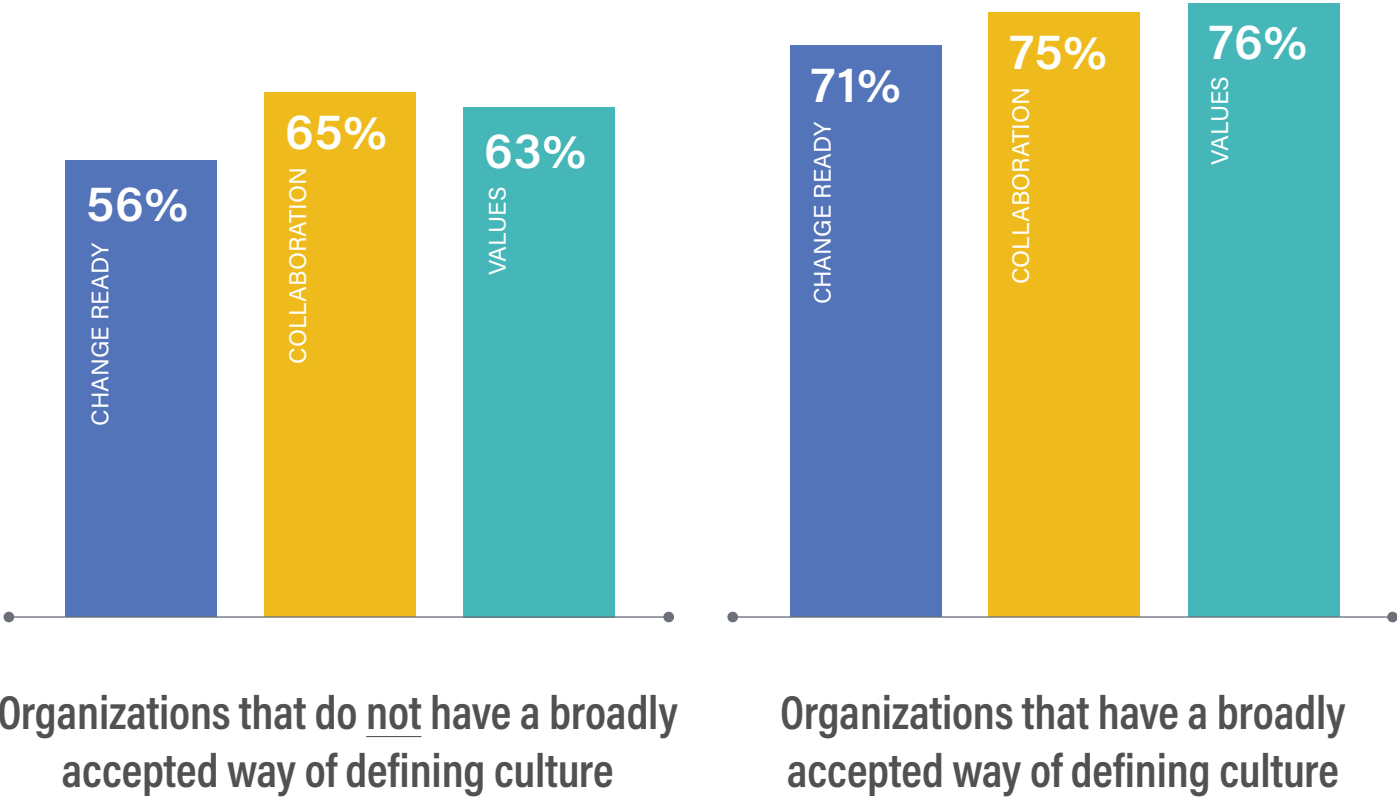
56% CHANGE READY   **65%** COLLABORATION   **63%** VALUES

71% CHANGE READY   **75%** COLLABORATION   **76%** VALUES

Organizations that do <u>not</u> have a broadly accepted way of defining culture

Organizations that have a broadly accepted way of defining culture

Figure 3. Differences between high and low scoring organizations based on having a broadly accepted way of defining culture.

56% CHANGE READY   **62%** LEARNING   **63%** VALUES

67% CHANGE READY   **72%** LEARNING   **72%** VALUES

Organizations that report leaders <u>not</u> being involved in defining culture

Organizations that report leaders being involved in defining culture

Figure 4. Differences between high and low scoring organizations based on leadership involvement in defining culture.

75%
of respondents claimed that culture is absolutely critical for business performance.

the process used to collect data may be flawed, the level of psychological safety in the organization may affect how willing people are to share their true feedback, etc. Furthermore, many processes focus so much on the data collection aspect of the process and spend much less effort focusing resources and attention on using the data to drive action and decision-making in ways that yield tangible change. This finding suggests a need to deeper study the disconnect between data and action in future research.

Culture as a Strategic Enabler

There is no doubt that we are at a point of inflection where organizations can expect to be encountering major forms of disruption that can impact their cultures and, in turn, their organizational performance. The most common disruptors mentioned by respondents that will impact their organizations in the next three years included funding issues, ability to secure contracts, the ability to shift from remote work to new work expectations, the ability to innovate, and the amount of leadership support that members of organizations will receive to face these new challenges and demands.

While 39% of respondents believe that their organizations are ready to face these disruptions, 52% do not believe that the culture change within their organizations is happening at the pace required to stay competitive. Some of the reasons cited for this drop in pace included lack of adaptability, inexperience

or dysfunction at the leadership level, lack of vision, lack of communication and being stuck in habits and fixed mindsets. This is a rather profound piece of data which begs the question of how long many organizations will be able to stay competitive in today's highly volatile world and will be an area of deeper study for us in the future.

As the pace of change continues to escalate, this finding is troubling. As organizations continue to evolve and adapt to changes in the market, as technological innovations increase in speed, and as globalization continues to shift opportunities and economic realities the people that serve as the lifeblood of these organizations are struggling to keep up.

When asked about how organizations can best support their teams through this level of change, recurring themes brought up by respondents included collaboration, communication, leadership engagement and openness, trust in employees, and transparency from all levels.

Furthermore, what seems to be disrupting the ability to successfully keep pace with change is one and the same as the set of skills needed to support culture change. These skills included communication, leadership development, the ability to evolve, empathy, and formal HR training.
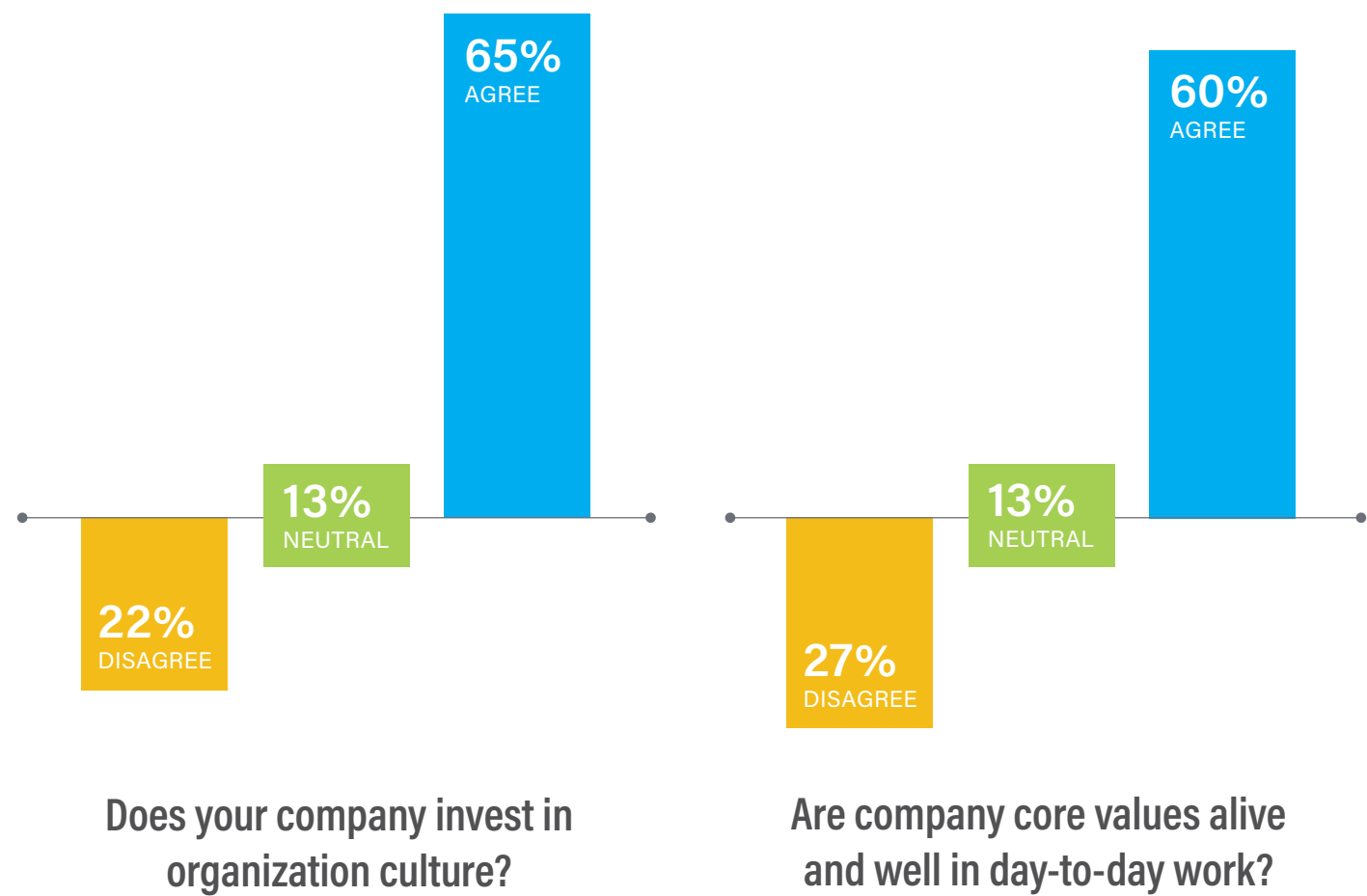
65%
AGREE

13%
NEUTRAL

22%
DISAGREE

Does your company invest in organization culture?

60%
AGREE

13%
NEUTRAL

27%
DISAGREE

Are company core values alive and well in day-to-day work?

Figure 5. This finding should be explored more deeply as those who responded to the study may have been those who generally were more interested in the topic of organizational culture and thus would naturally respond more positively to this item.

Values

Approximately 66% of respondents stated that their organizations invest an adequate amount of resources, time, attention, and money in creating a culture that helps employees succeed.

This finding, while heartening, illustrates a continued need to prioritize the intentional shaping of organizational culture in order to thrive.

We asked respondents about the core values of their organizations. Some of the most commonly reported core values were, integrity (13%), customer service (8%),and innovation (6%). However the three most

common core values that were reported by top performers were integrity (11%), excellence (5%), and commitment (4%).

Sixty-six percent (66%) percent of respondents believe that their organizations' core values are embedded and actualized in their experiences at work. Core Values, no doubt, serve to align peoples' behaviors and expectations about what is most important to the group and our research confirms this. Unfortunately, for many organizations, Core Values are either not articulated or are espoused and not actualized in the day-to-day which can result is a variety of negative outcomes.

Findings:
Social Justice

In this section, we explore how the topic of social justice were brought up in organizations this year and the impact it had on organizational performance.

Organizations that report being disingenuous when discussing social justice topics

Social Justice

In order to better understand the relationship between perceptions of social justice and organizational culture, we included key survey items to measure the impact of social justice on employees from around the world. Social justice has become one of the most important and widely discussed topics over the last decade, especially in the workplace. Our interest within this survey was to determine the impact that a strong, or weak, sense of social justice may have on employees in an organization and the effects that are observed and experienced when working in different parts of the world.

We asked respondents how important diversity, equity and, inclusion are in the workplace. Approximately 23% of non-HR employees answered that these specific topics are only discussed "as lip service or brought up superficially". Approximately 20% of HR employees answered with the same response.
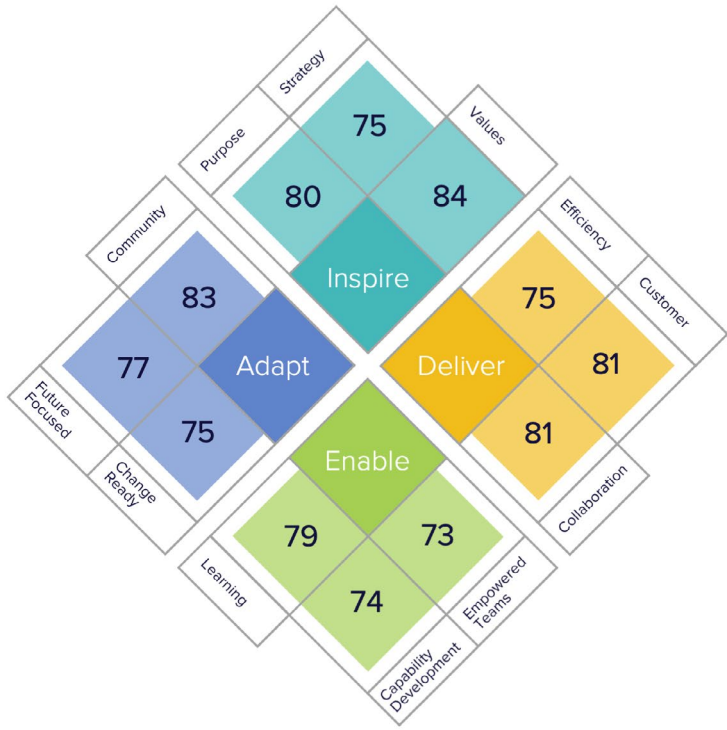
There was a significant difference in organizational performance when we compared organizations that openly and honestly explored social justice issues and those that only discussed them superficially or brought them up as lip service, where the former significantly outperformed the latter. This suggests that it is important for organizations to demonstrate serious consideration and thought when it comes to social justice issues and

also may indicate that organizations that are better able to create psychological safety required to openly and meaningfully engage in complex dialogue on this topic.

However, when the data was examined by geographical region, the majority of responses saying that social justice was openly and honestly explored came from respondents working in the North American region. Almost 42% of respondents from South America said the topics were brought up superficially. In Europe and Australia, one in every four respondents stated that these topics were brought up as "lip service." We might think that North American-based organizations are more likely to discuss social justice issues and, in turn, outperform organizations in other regions; however, such inferences cannot be made. Social Justice issues have been at the forefront of American society this year, which naturally seeped into their organizational lives. The authors of this report recognize that some of the questions were written with the American context in mind which might not resonate with other regions and cultures. It is important to contextualize discussions on social justice in ways that resonate with people working in organizations that operate in different regions. Nevertheless, the significant difference in organizational performance poses a need for further research that adopts a more global and then contextualized outlook on social justice and its impact on organizational performance and culture.

Organizations that report openly and honestly discussing social justice topics

Figure 6. Culture Mosaic scores split by organizations' openness to discuss social justice topics.

While many of the insights identified have been found in previous literature, we are pleased to have further validated the significance of these relationships while further exploring the impact of COVID-19 and social justice on the topic of organizational culture. These findings support the notion that creating a clear and aligned culture that is able to manage the competing tensions that exist in a dynamic business environment are those that are best positioned to thrive in the long-term.

While there are a variety of ways to create clarity and alignment with regard to assessing and understanding organizational culture and climate, the current study has shown that the Culture Mosaic serves as an accurate indicator of aspects of organizational culture that drive a variety of performance outcomes.

The 2021 State of Culture Study represents the start of an ongoing research effort to explore how culture and climate serve to support or derail organizations and their efforts to achieve their strategic imperatives.

As our team transitions to preparing for next year's study, we look forward to increasing the overall response rate and developing clear insight of how things change over time.

In demanding and dynamic times such as we find ourselves in today, it is imperative for us to work together to understand what aspects of culture and climate are driving the performance outcomes we desire. Unfortunately, understanding is not enough. Without the ability to make timely and effective decisions based on that understanding and without being able to drive sustainable change in organizations, many leaders and organizations will find themselves continuing to struggle as the world around them continues to evolve.

We hope that the annual State of Culture Study and Report will serve as a valuable tool for leaders to understand what best-in-class organizations are doing as a way of adapting their practices to drive success.

Click here if you would like to get a link to the 2022 Global State of Culture Study survey or report when they are available.

Final Thoughts

In this section, we share our final thoughts and expectations

for future reports.

About gothamCulture

gothamCulture is a management consulting firm that draws on our associate's comprehensive expertise and experience in the areas of culture, leadership, and people strategy to provide innovative solutions and client-service excellence. Our work is guided by our deeply held shared values, including a commitment to each other and our clients, Unwavering Integrity, Maniacal Pursuit Of Excellence, Relatable Expertise, and Authentic Community. For more information, visit:

www.gothamCulture.com

About the Global Organizational Culture Institute

Founded in 2020, the Global Organizational Culture Institute (GOCI) is dedicated to conducting research on the topic of organizational culture in order to understand what factors drive performance outcomes. GOCI's research serves as the foundation for the annual State of Culture Study and associated reports. Learn more at:

globalstateofculturestudy.com/

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Our Sponsors

We would like to extend a special thanks to our sponsors who helped make the 2021 State of Culture Report a reality. These organizations are committed to continuing to develop our collective understanding of the topic of organizational culture and helping organizations shape the cultures of their organizations. If you would like to sponsor the 2022 State of Culture Study and Report, email us at:
info@gothamculture.com

Acknowledgments

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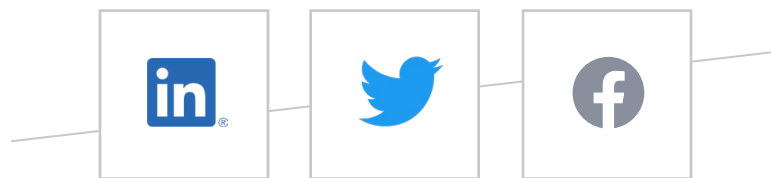Chris Cancialosi

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