



Workplace Culture and its impact on Organisational Efficiency
BMSW5105

The impact of organisational culture on Marks and Spencer's organisational performance

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Executive Summary

Organizational culture serves a variety of purposes in a company and is a way of looking at how a company operates and how its employees live their lives within the organisation. M&S culture comes from its founders being a family driven culture which later was adapted to more customer-based culture

The main aim of this report was to investigate the culture of a chosen organisation and the impact it had on performance considering the environmental factors, the covid impact and ethical dilemmas faced. The study was done on Marks and Spencer, one of the retail companies in the UK.

For the external factor analysis a PESTEL was conducted, and it showed that each factor had a positive or a negative impact on M&S performance due to them being influenced by the pandemic and Brexit. With the use of Porter's 5 forces model showed that M&S is facing a harsh competition but is not afraid of the new entrants in the market. Should pay attention at the substitution of products and services as customers tend to replace them with ease. These had a certain level of impact on the performance and profitability of M&S, but the company was able to pass through the pandemic and is pushing ahead with their plans to revive their online presence and give customers a better experience in the future.

It was concluded that the culture of M&S was around customers, investing in colleagues and following an ethical behaviour that is instilled in the company, colleagues, suppliers, and executive board that aims to do the right thing.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this report is to assess the workplace culture of a chosen organization and the impact it has on performance, with the help of theories and tools discussed in the module taking into consideration the external environment.

The organisation chosen for this study is Marks and Spencer, one of the UK's leading retailers. M&S is a British retailer that focuses on own businesses, including Food, Clothing & Home, in the UK and internationally (Marks and Spencer plc, 2021). The reason for choosing Marks and Spencer is the experience and knowledge acquired while working there as a shop floor customer assistant and operations customer assistant. During a period of almost two years I was part of the M&S team and learnt their ways of doing things within the company, a team within one of the most successful leading retailers that offers incredible customer service and quality products.

To assess how culture impacts on M&Ss' performance in the retail business, a thorough industry analysis will be conducted using Porter's 5 forces to analyse the structure of the business and a PESTLE analysis will help to identify the external environment M&S is operating in. Also to understand how M&S is working, the Cultural Web model is the perfect tool to find the culture it has at present, if this is going in the right direction for the company and how it can be changed for the better.

This report will be sectioned into four areas. The first section will cover the company background to have a thorough understanding of what type of business M&S is and the services it offers and how it operates. And a brief introduction of the tools used to analyse the workplace culture. The second section will include a thorough analysis of the external environmental factors and the industry M&S is operating in to find out what are the key drivers that led to any changes in the performance of the company. The third section will be covering the findings around the Cultural Web model that will show what is the culture inside M&S and how this present culture relates to the financial and non-financial performance of the company. In the last section the term ethical dilemma will be described and identified in the organisation as well. All this followed by a conclusion and any suggested actions M&S can consider overcoming the challenges ahead.

The outcome of this analysis is to find any cultural gaps within M&S and provide any recommendations that can be used to improve workplace culture and performance in the future.

2. ANALYSIS

2.1 Background of the chosen organisation

With their main office in London, M&S has come to grow into one of the biggest retailers in the UK employing more than 70 thousand people in their 1500 stores around the world. Since their beginning in 1884, M&S continues to sell own-brand products that are made and sold under their name and are focused on quality, innovation, and value. Their food is responsibly obtained, and they only export the best; their clothing and homeware are fashionable, and they are delighted to offer the best "value for money" to their thirty million clients. No wonder they claim to be "Britain's best loved retailers" by their customers (Marks and Spencer plc, 2021). But how is M&S able to do that? How are they doing things in the company that are making them stand out in the competitive retail market, especially now at a time when the world has been taken over by a pandemic and not to mention the famous Brexit?

Because of these two issues, a lot has changed, especially in the corporate world. Leaders used to think about crisis management but now they need to come out of this mindset and adapt and think how to continue the business differently. Like switching from one culture to another, doing things differently in the company. They have to think differently on how to manage their culture and respond to the external changing factors. M&S is the example to show how it will overcome the challenges post COVID and respond to the situation differently to ensure a positive outcome. In order to see how M&S is responding to these changing factors, their culture must be found out first. Culture is a well-known factor that researchers are still discussing but is certainly a tool companies use in the running of their businesses and M&S does too. An overview of what culture is and how it impacts an organisation in the next part.

2.2 Analysis of the industry and macro-environmental factors

M&S Porter's 5 Forces (industry analysis)

Porter's Five Forces is a strategic technique that analyses a company's attractiveness and profitability by examining its competitors. In 1979, Michael Porter proposed that keeping a careful eye on competitors is critical in determining other elements that can influence the business environment (MindTools, 2021).

During the pandemic lockdown, the retail industry has been affected more for others and less for some. For-example food companies had similar profits compared to clothing companies that had profits cut because they had to stay closed, and the online shopping merged for others more. M&S stayed afloat compared to H&M that sells clothes and home products.

Competitive Rivalry – Marks & Spencer Group Plc competes in a highly competitive retail environment along retailers like John Lewis, Waitrose, H&M, Zara, Tesco, Sainsburys and others. This competition has a negative impact on the company's overall long-term profitability. M&S is differentiating itself from competition by positioning itself as a higher quality value for money brand. M&S matched and improved on the approximately 4,000 Waitrose items with an increased selection of M&S products, providing Ocado consumers with a broader, better range at even better value. Is already differentiating itself by building a sustainable approach with the aim to restore M&S to sustainable growth and provide long-term value to all of their stakeholders and customers.

Threat of new entrants - new competitors in the retail industry bring innovation and newer ways of doing things, putting pressure on Marks and Spencer to lower prices, cut expenses, and offer new value propositions to customers. However, the retail market in the United Kingdom is very strong, making it difficult for new entrants to open a chain of stores if they do not have enough capital, and they must also offer something absolutely unique. Also, new entrants face a barrier if they lack the necessary experience and skills to function in this sector.

Marks and Spencer is coming up with innovative products and services to bring new customers and keep the old ones. For Christmas and Easter M&S has introduced more innovation into their products, extending their "Plant Kitchen" and creating a "Food Innovation Hub". Food's goal is to "protect the magic" by investing a distinctive focus on own-brand innovation and fresh, easy-to-cook food, as well as expanding into larger, more inspiring locations while modernising the cost base and supply chain.

Bargaining power of suppliers - there are loads of them that have high positions that gives them the negotiating power to increase prices for retailers and this affects the profitability of any retailer. Luckily for M&S is selling own branded products and does

not depend so much on suppliers. It has a long-term, successful connection with its suppliers, which allows them to manufacture excellent high quality, sustainably sourced product for customers' expectations. Also works with them to prevent modern slavery and monitor supplier satisfaction and investing in a Supplier Engagement Manager as a result (Marks and Spencer, 2021).

Bargaining power of buyers – buyers want to buy at lower prices and get the best offers from products making it easier for them to find alternatives. Which is why M&S should continue to come up with new products and build their customers base in order to limit the bargaining power of buyers.

Threat of substitution – Customers can easily find ways to substitute a product or service and M&S products can be substituted with those of the competitors like Asda or Waitrose. Also M&S knows the needs of their customers and the service they expect.

By analysing these 5 forces M&S can get an insight of the factors that can affect the profitability of the organisation and what it can do to change and improve the position they have in the industry especially now as the pandemic affected the retail industry.

M&S PESTEL analysis of the macro environment

Is a tool used by many organisations to analyse the external factors surrounding the organisation and how these can influence that organisation. It helps managers to identify the triggers that affect the functionality of the external environment of the organisation and help them to take appropriate decision making (CIPD, 2020). Using a PESTEL can help to identify opportunities for change and development for the company (MindTools, 2021).

Political – Politically M&S is facing with a lot of procedures and government policies, Taxes, trade, and industry regulations. M&S benefited from the free trade importing cheaper products for sale in their stores. This also permitted the company to expand internationally but BREXIT is an issue now with M&S facing higher costs, a tight labour market, costs from suppliers, import and export duties, industrial safety regulations in the consumer service sector, pricing regulations. If M&S is failing to lessen the costs resulting from the difficulties at the border and the development in the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, it will have consequences on the trading performance. Consumer protection rights might be affected with the availability of the products this is due to the pandemic with the crazy shopping where M&S had to limit the number of

products per customer. And due to Brexit because some of the products might not be available or be on hold at the border in which case the products will be damaged as it happened with the truck of strawberries.

Economic – Factors considered to be affected - Exchange rates for international shops, economic growth or decline, inflation and interest rates, labour costs and productivity, cost of living, consumer spending habits. The market performance was very poor due to the COVID-19 and the fact that people had to stay home depending more on online shopping. M&S convenience categories and hospitality, as well as a strong presence in city centres, and shopping malls have been impacted by restrictions. Consumer spending habit changes put pressure on goods like household cleaners, hand sanitizer, toilet paper, paracetamol, and food stocking. Products like clothing and home have declined M&S declares as being the area that people did not bother to shop more instead people bought meat, fish, and poultry.

Social – factors that influence M& S are demographics, consumer tastes and buying habits, education levels, culture (gender roles), attitudes about changes in health. Demographics has been a continuous issue for M&S with people saying that are selling boring clothes and it doesn't know its key demographic associating it the retailer with the past. Also their reputation it is less trendy brand for the young people but hopefully with the online shopping they will be able to reach a wider demographic.

Technological – to keep up with the technological changes, M&S is focusing on investing in IT infrastructure, has made changes to its website, partnered with Microsoft and Ocado for online food shopping which had enormous success. Technology is used throughout the stores from signposting to smart mirrors in dressing rooms to virtually trying on clothes.

Environmental – Weather, climate change, environment pollution (air and water pollution in the retail industry), recycling by using easy-to-recycle packaging, waste management (reduced by 24% in 2019 and donated to charities), and attitudes toward green products and renewable energy are all factors that M&S considers. PLAN A is a sustainable transformation plan that M&S is committed to tackling by helping communities develop via various activities (M&S is raising money for causes that matter: MC Millan Cancer Support, UNICEF with the money from recycled hangers, Prince's Trust, WWF – World Wildlife Fund, and Oxfam. Launching the plant kitchen range, creating a zero-waste business, and helping the world with the reuse, redesign, reduce, return, and recycle principle on plastic helps people live happier, healthier

lives. In the last seven years, it has used sustainable cotton clothes and has sent zero waste to landfill (Marks and Spencer, 2021).

Legal – There are different laws and policies that M&S and any company considers like discrimination law, consumer protection, employment law, health and safety law, and data protection. M&S is proud of the importance it places on health and safety issues, as it is critical to maintain a safe workplace that promotes high productivity and quality while also reducing the risk of health issues, accidents, and injuries, which not only have a human cost but also a financial cost to the company in lost work hours and potential legal action.

2.3 M&S Culture and its efficiency on financial/non-financial performance

Organisational culture

Organisational culture is a term that does not have an exact definition, but some have tried to give a meaning from different contexts. For example Mullins (2019) mentions the phrase "how things are done around here" as being a popular way of defining culture. That organisational culture reflects the basic ideas about how work is done, what is considered "acceptable" and "unacceptable," and what behaviours and activities are recognized and avoided in the workplace also what practices and policies the company follows. Another concept would be a set of rules, principles, views, ideas, and attitudes that impact how people behave in a company (Kassem, 2019).

History, principal function and technology, strategy, size, location, management and leadership, and the environment all have an impact on the development of culture in an organisation (Alvesson, 2013).

To analyse organisational culture the cultural web model can be used. The cultural web reflects various aspects of an organization's culture, including behavioural, physical, and symbolic representations. The web can be applied to gain a better knowledge of an organization's current culture and to make suggestions about specific areas of that culture. Data obtained from a variety of sources, such as interviews, observation, and documentation, can also be represented on the web (Business Balls, 2020).

Stories - M&S culture comes from its founders being a family driven culture which later was adapted to more customer-based culture. Is hierarchically and slow with old fashioned stores said some customers.

Symbols - enforcing a sense of belonging and loyalty within the family, as well as traditions. Their logo is a sign of loyalty.

Organisational structure – M&S operates as a family of businesses each with their management team. Is increasing gender and ethnic diversity in their leadership ranks which is essential to the company's success.

Power structure – main decisions made at their head offices in London, autocratic style.

Control systems - a top-down management systems. There is a reward system put in place for employees and development within the company. Employees are motivated to deliver for customers and business success through appropriate rewards, making them feel valued.

Changes in the organisation are essential for employee's happiness, to boost sales and maintain the company's reputation. If basic assumptions are understood then values, beliefs and behaviours are easily managed.

Organisational culture and external factors

The crises of global warming, climate change, and sustainability is having an impact on organisational culture, as leaders must incorporate these issues into their mission and work out how to help and make culture a part of the environmental changes.

Some of the external factors that affect the organisational culture of M&S are as follows: Due to Brexit, new regulations are imposed at the border with consumer rights being affected because of the products that M&S depends on bringing from Europe and due to the pandemic as it had to limit the number of products a person was allowed to buy; Economically the market performance was poor as a consequence of COVID 19 and consumer spending habits have put pressure on certain goods at the start of the pandemic.; M&S is integrating sustainability in the culture of the organisation both inside and outside the organisation through their Plan A (sustainability action plan) to address risks and opportunities that social and environmental issues present to the business making better choices to ensure that M&S, the resources they rely on, as well as the planet we live on are in better shape for the future; It benefits from its trustworthy partnerships, fair treatment of people, and innovative and investing initiatives; Has established standards to provide customers with trusted value by having the most sustainable denim selection, exploring alternatives to soy-based animal feed to avoid deforestation, sourcing ethically and supporting human rights in their business, and moving towards net zero carbon emissions by 2035; M&S portrays

itself as a high-quality, value-for-money brand when it comes to delivering products and services to customers, with the goal of standing out from the competition.

Organisational culture and performance

Alvesson (2013) adds that culture is essential in the development of an organisation and however, despite managers' awareness of the importance of culture, there is still a lack of understanding of how people and organisation's function when it comes to culture in some organisations. While Kassem (2019) mentions that organisational culture has a great impact on productivity and that a strong culture leads together with the ability to adapt contributes to higher performance.

Since the beginning of the first lockdown, March 2020 to the end of the third lockdown, April 2021 M&S's performance was impacted by social distancing, as well as the partial or complete closure of huge portions of the store estate, which seriously affected operations for the most of this time. M&S was able to take advantage of changing customer purchasing habits, resulting in a steady gain in online sales and market share throughout the year (Marks and Spencer, 2021). Financially Marks & Spencer's grocery market share was 3.1 percent in April 2020, down 0.2 percentage points from 2017. Their number of employees has fluctuated around the world from 85,209 workers in 2017, reduced to 69,577 in April 2021 (Statista, 2021).

Group results before adjusting items (£m) ¹	2020/21	2019/20	%
C&H operating (loss)/profit	(129.4)	223.9	-157.8
Food operating profit	213.6	236.7	-9.8
International operating profit	45.1	110.7	-59.3
Share of Ocado Retail net income	78.4	2.6	2,915.4
Profit before tax & adjusting items	41.6	403.1	-89.7
Adjusting items	(242.8)	(335.9)	27.7
Free cashflow ²	296.4	205.7	44.1
Net debt excluding lease liabilities ²	£1.11bn	£1.39bn	-20.1
	£3.52bn	£3.95bn	-10.9

Extra costs of £49.4 million were incurred by the Food sector to support customer and colleague safety, as well as £22.0 million in incentives for non-furloughed colleagues working through the pandemic. Furthermore, £9.9 million in costs were incurred as a result of Brexit.

Non financially M&S is grateful to its colleagues that have put great efforts and the company has been able to produce a stable performance. M&S is creating a diverse workplace with a respectful corporate culture where their colleagues' voices are heard believing that they must be motivated to deliver for customers and business success through appropriate rewards, making them feel valued.

With the strong online growth, M&S plans to focus on creating an online culture enabling a digitally company through – Bringing together the data, digital and trading teams under MS2, creating 85 new technology roles and 15 new trading roles in e-commerce; More than 90% of the front-line colleagues are now communicating through Microsoft Teams, Teams has been key for connecting leaders to the front line helping to build a more digital workplace. The way the company evaluates, and rewards performance has changed with the goal of encouraging a more direct communication style and creating a more performance-driven culture. The compensation and benefits package has been re-evaluated to make it more current and matched with the proper behaviours and performance. Financial support is given to colleagues, Salary has been rolled out, and an easy-to-access wellbeing app Unmind.

The response that M&S has over the changes caused by the pandemic are positive with chief executive Steve Rowe exclaiming that “they are doing the correct steps, and M&S is emerging from the crisis stronger and more focused” (Marks and Spencer, 2021). While this is positive, it remains to be seen how the recovery of M&S will progress and whether consumer activity will be sustained

Effects of org culture on performance

In his book Alvesson (2013) suggests 4 ideas that might connect the relationship between organizational culture on performance:

- 1. Strong culture thesis - Employee and management dedication to the same set of values, beliefs, and norms will provide favourable outcomes - the strength of corporate culture is closely related to a company's profit level.
- 2. Reverse relationship between culture and performance - A strong company culture comes as a result of high performance.
- 3. A certain form of culture is acceptable, even essential, depending on circumstances and aids to efficiency.
- 4. Adaptive cultures, such as cultures that can respond to changes in the environment, are essential for high performance

Leadership and org culture - The concepts, ideas, views, and sentiments of others are influenced by the actions of leaders. In order for a leader to change the culture of an organisation, a leader must first relate with it (Alvesson, 2013). On the other hand, Perumal (2021) argues that in order to achieve truly lasting change, a leader who is striving to transform the culture of the company must focus on the values he/she is trying to instil and why the change is important.

Marks and Spencer has a founder of organisation form of leadership in which he is the creator of organisational cultures as well as the source of a set of values that the members of the organisation adapt and imitate. This style of leader starts from the bottom - up, has influence over the employees, and decides on the company's future.

In the end more important is how people relate and respond to the actions of the leaders instead of what he does. Most leadership is culture-driven, in the sense that shared values and norms guide the manager's actions; leadership is considered as a function of culture, where a skilled manager can have a significant impact on culture.

2.4 Ethical dilemmas at M&S

An ethical dilemma occurs when a person is faced with a choice between two possibilities, neither of which is completely ethical. Analysing the situation thoroughly, choosing options that give the best outcome and finding alternative solutions are all ways to solving an ethical problem (CFI, 2021). In an organisation, an ethical dilemma can arise from almost any area of the business. Inside Marks and Spencer there have been considered 2 possible ethical dilemmas that can influence the performance of

the organisation, one is related to their colleagues and the other is regarding their approach to sustainability.

1. One of the challenges that the pandemic has brought on the company was the closure of some of their shops that came with ***the decision to make 7000 of their employees redundant and 27000 placed in furlough***. They considered the option of taking the business online to save costs, which resulted in job losses due to shop closures, as the only viable choice for right-sizing and the future of the firm, as well as in the best interests of the shareholders.

This was a decision that changed the way the company was doing things in order to survive as this change happened due to “Cultural drifting” - This is the result of people being replaced or growing older; “downsizing or growth” of the company (Alvesson, 2013). Making people redundant and cutting costs takes place in a cultural context, this allows for a shared view of the company situation and what is reasonable in difficult circumstances, that needs to be considered as people dismissed, as well as the one staying, will have different views on the company’s culture in regard to the relationship it has with employees. Due to their ethical standards put in place and government guidance, people furloughed were offered full pay and also offered flexibility to colleagues that had to shield. To avoid issues with employees in the future, M&S should train and update colleagues on ethical standards and make them aware of the risks of losing their jobs due to different circumstances.

2. ***M&S risks losing the loyalty of their customers*** which expressed their concerns over how M&S handles the climate change, sustainability, and ethical trading in the organisation. This not only affects M&S’s customers but colleagues and stakeholders as well and the long-term success of the business. In order to change things and prove to their customers that they address these concerns, M&S has decided to create the ESG (environmental, social and government) committee to update plan A sustainability programme and do the right thing. In the future M&S can find ways to give a closer insight of their Plan A sustainability programme to their customers and colleagues and make a bigger impact on customers and colleagues views as to why there is no planet B if they do not fulfil plan A.

3. CONCLUSION

As seen on the discussion in this report, organisational culture has a direct impact on performance and the way a company progresses in the market. If an organisation considers the external factors that impact on their performance, then they can implement strategies of change to help overcome any potential issues that may arise. When faced with change, managers must pay close attention to how changes influence the organisation, as continuous changes are considered damaging for the organisation.

Culturally M&S is on the right track, measured their outcomes and responded accordingly following all the necessary regulations that they instilled in their workplace through a very thorough code of conduct and policies that allows them to lead the business to great outcomes. Covid 19 and Brexit have brought challenges but added further pace and acceleration to their transformation plans creating opportunities for changes in the organisation that Marks and Spencer embraced and worked on in order to deliver to customers and stay alive on the market. Although, M&S has been impacted by Brexit and the pandemic, they have been able to make up the loses by adapting and partnered with Ocado to sell online. There might not be free trading, but M&S is positive that the deal with suppliers will bring a positive outcome for their trading. Also the rise of ethically and environmentally conscious shoppers have made M&S to produce plant-based items, use sustainable cotton in their clothing and dyes to make people happier and healthier.

Maintaining their reputation as a responsible firm requires setting and adhering to suitable environmental, human rights, animal welfare, and ethical standards and obligations, MR Rowe exclaimed positively in an interview to BBC (2020) adding that "My goal remains unchanged - that is to deliver the long-term transformation for M&S, building a brand that is more digital in a world that will never be the same again."

Looks like M&S is aware of their future issues and the factors that impact their organisations inside and out and the way they perform and for this reason reasonable decisions are taken with less impact on their employees, customers, and the overall productivity of the company. The company has learnt from the pandemic and the effects it had on the business in the last year and strengthened the way it controls the environment and uses flexibility that allows important actions to be adapted in reaction to this kind of events.

4. REFLECTION ON THE MODULE

I have used a few reflection models in the last year and found that for me Gibbs' reflective cycle works best when analysing my experiences. The questions at each of the 6 stages helped me to think of the things experienced in the past and now reflecting on my learning about culture in the workplace.

What was interesting to find out in this module was that culture influences an individual's workplace through your behaviour towards work and colleagues which impacts on your ability to perform and the company's success. I learnt in dept that culture is defined by the way an organisation is doing things regarding their productivity, the environment, people that work there, the customers they serve, the structure and the ethical behaviours that they apply when doing things. I would not have learnt all this if it was not for the module workplace culture and its impact on organisational efficiency.

My view about culture before the module was that it defines the country that a person comes from and the way they do things and the religion they believe in. At the start of the module I was introduced to how culture works in a business environment and explained the fact that a business is impacted positively or negatively by external factors like economy, politics, laws, changes in technology and the environment and learnt how I can use this to analyse my own workplace.

During the lessons I had to engage and contribute to add my opinion to discussions around different topics and find solutions or explain facts which was little stressful at the beginning as I had to talk a lot. I was involved in some of the discussions more than others because of my understanding and knowledge or experience of the topics. Also with the lessons being online I was disrupted at times by the things around the house and my children, which impacted on my interaction. But overall I enjoyed being able to express my opinions and ideas because this was an opportunity to use my thinking and interact with my colleagues and listen to their different culture views.

The lessons in the module were very interactive with activities based on discussions and debates on case studies. What was good about the discussions was to hear other people bringing in their life or work experiences as examples to help with the work which made the conversation more relaxed.

The tools presented in the module helped to analyse in our discussions how a company is doing things to perform well, and it was of great use for me as it has given me an understanding of how my workplace functions. I was able to think about my workplace during the lessons presented and apply the topics and compare.

I see now, how much I improved my knowledge of organisational culture, and this has opened my eyes and vision on how I see things in my workplace, and in the future, I am determined to be more understanding of the difficulties faced and contribute in a mannered way by exercising my personal responsibilities towards the culture of my workplace.

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