



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Student Name: Anita Chavez Cobos

Student ID number: 2327141

Programme: BA (Hons) Leadership and Management Skills for the Workplace

Module: Organisational Culture

Module code: LCLM 5005

Lecturer: Toyin Adisa

Assignment Title: Component 1 Organisational Culture

Individual Report:

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Role of Organisational Culture	
Importance of Culture in Global Aviation	
Emirates Airlines Context	
Purpose of the Report	
How Organisational Culture Shapes Structure and Decision-Making.....	2
Influence of National Culture (Hofstede)	
Centralised Structure and Hierarchy	
Cultural Impact on Safety, Service and Operational Discipline	
Strengths and Limitations of the Cultural Approach	
Identifying Emirates' Organisational Culture Using Models and Frameworks ...	3
Schein's Three Levels of Culture	
Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions	
Handy's Cultural Types	
Summary of Cultural Characteristics	
Cultural Influence on External Environment Adaptation.....	4
Response to Global Disruptions (e.g., COVID-19)	
Innovation and Technological Adaptation	
Impact of Multinational Workforce on Adaptability	
Culture as a Strategic Asset in Competitive Markets	
Is Organisational Culture a Barrier to Effective Functioning?.....	5
Cultural Strengths Supporting Performance	
Challenges: Hierarchy, Autonomy, and Emotional Labour	
Evaluation of Culture as an Enabler or Barrier	
Impact of Organisational Culture on Performance and Recommendations.....	6
Positive Impacts: Brand, Safety, Service and Talent Attraction	
Negative Impacts: Limited Autonomy, Communication Issues, Pressure	
Recommendations	
Increase Employee Involvement and Voice	
Improve Intercultural Communication	
Promote Distributed Leadership	
Strengthen Employee Wellbeing Initiatives	
Recommendations.....	7
Positive Impacts	
Negative Impacts	
Recommendations	
Conclusion.....	8
Summary of Cultural Analysis	
Strengths and Weaknesses	
Future Cultural Improvements	
References.....	9

Introduction

Organisational culture plays a fundamental role in shaping how companies' function, make decisions, and respond to challenges in an increasingly globalised environment. Mullins and Christy (2016) argue that culture is deeply embedded in the ways "things are done around here," influencing shared values, beliefs, attitudes, and everyday behaviours within organisations. These cultural elements do not simply exist in the background; they actively guide major organisational processes such as decision-making, leadership approaches, structure, work organisation, motivation, staff satisfaction, and managerial control. As businesses expand across borders and employ individuals from diverse national backgrounds, the ability to understand, integrate and manage cultural differences becomes even more essential. A strong, well-aligned culture can provide strategic clarity and consistency, while a poorly managed or rigid culture can become a significant barrier to effective performance. Within this context, Emirates Airlines presents a compelling case for examining the impact of organisational culture. As one of the world's largest and most recognisable long-haul carriers, Emirates operates within a complex international environment that demands strong cultural coherence. The airline employs staff from over 160 nationalities, manages a centralised hub in Dubai, and functions within a highly regulated aviation industry where safety, service quality, and operational reliability are non-negotiable priorities. This unique combination makes organisational culture not only a managerial concern but a critical strategic asset.

The introduction of cultural frameworks such as Schein's model, Hofstede's cultural dimensions and Handy's cultural types allows for a structured analysis of how Emirates' culture manifests in visible behaviours, deeply held values and long-standing underlying assumptions. These frameworks help explain why the organisation favours centralised decision-making, why service excellence remains at the core of its brand identity, and how cultural norms influence everything from crew behaviour to leadership style.

Furthermore, Emirates' culture has played a notable role in shaping how the organisation adapts to external pressures. Global disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic, fluctuating fuel prices, geopolitical tensions, and evolving customer expectations have all required calculated strategic responses. Throughout these challenges, Emirates has relied on its strong cultural principles — including

discipline, unity, innovation and operational excellence — to maintain resilience and competitiveness.

This report assesses whether Emirates' organisational culture functions as a supportive force or a potential barrier and evaluates its impact on performance. By analysing these dynamics, the study aims to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of Emirates' cultural framework and propose recommendations for future improvement.

How Organisational Culture Shapes Structure and Decision-Making

Emirates operates within a distinctly hierarchical and centralised organisational structure, shaped not only by the strict requirements of the global aviation industry but also by the wider cultural context of the United Arab Emirates. Hofstede's (2011) findings on national culture indicate that the UAE scores high on the power-distance dimension, meaning that authority, leadership and top-down decision-making are widely accepted and respected. This societal expectation is mirrored in Emirates' internal practices, where strategic decisions are largely concentrated among senior executives. Employees often look to top leadership for direction, reinforcing a chain of command that promotes clarity, control and stability.

Culture also plays a powerful role in maintaining the airline's reputation for safety, discipline and world-class service. Using Schein's (2017) framework, many of Emirates' visible artefacts—such as precisely structured customer service routines—reflect deeper organisational values of professionalism, reliability and hospitality. These cultural expressions are not superficial; they help ensure that employees understand what the organisation stands for and what behaviours are expected, particularly in high-pressure environments.

This cultural foundation enables rapid, coordinated decision-making during emergencies or operational disruptions, which is vital in aviation. When quick action is required, a centralised system reduces ambiguity and ensures that staff follow established procedures without hesitation. However, this strength can also become a limitation. A strong hierarchy may discourage employees from sharing innovative ideas or challenging existing processes. Creativity, experimentation and grassroots problem-solving may be overshadowed by the emphasis on consistency and compliance.

Nevertheless, Emirates continues to evolve. By integrating more opportunities for employee voice, encouraging cross-cultural dialogue and supporting collaborative problem-solving, the airline could maintain its disciplined structure while unlocking greater innovation. A more balanced approach—one that blends structure with flexibility—would not only align with its global mission but also support long-term resilience in a rapidly changing aviation market.

Identifying Emirates' Culture Using Organisational Culture Models

Schein's Model

Artefacts: Multicultural crews, formal uniforms, safety routines rituals.

Espoused Values: Customer service excellence, punctuality, teamwork, hospitality.

Basic Assumptions: Aviation requires discipline; customer comfort is essential; diversity is an asset.

These levels suggest a service-driven, safety-focused culture.

Hofstede's Dimensions

Relevant culture dimensions include:

High Power Distance: Strong hierarchy, respect for senior roles.

Collectivism: Emphasis on teamwork among crew members.

High Uncertainty Avoidance: Strict rules and procedures for safety.

Long-term Orientation: Investment in innovation, such as digital check-in and new aircraft.

Handy's Culture Types

Handy (1993) identifies four cultural types. Emirates demonstrates a blend of:

Role Culture: Clear rules, structured roles, and procedures.

Power Culture: Strong leadership influence at the top.

Task Culture: Seen innovation projects and customer experience initiatives.

This combination allows the airline to balance operational stability with innovation.

Cultural Influence on External Environment Adaptation

A strong organisational culture plays a crucial role in shaping how Emirates anticipates, interprets and responds to changes in its external environment. The airline operates in a highly volatile sector where competitive pressures, regulatory shifts and rapid technological advancements constantly demand organisational agility. Emirates' culture—rooted in safety, service excellence and innovation—provides a stable foundation that enables effective adaptation while preserving the brand's global identity.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, the airline drew heavily on its safety-orientated culture to implement new hygiene procedures swiftly and consistently across all operations. The organisations deeply held values around passenger wellbeing and operational discipline meant that frontline staff were already accustomed to strict protocols, allowing for seamless adjustments to new requirements. Additionally, Emirates' strong customer-service ethos shaped its response to customer concerns and uncertainty. The introduction of flexible booking policies extended travel waivers and clear communication demonstrated the company's commitment to maintaining trust even during unprecedented disruption. Beyond crisis management, Emirates' culture has long supported a proactive approach to technological and competitive change. Its emphasis on innovation—visible in both daily operations and long-term strategic planning—has led to significant investments in biometric boarding, advanced aircraft such as the Airbus A380, and digital service enhancements. These innovations enable the airline to differentiate itself from key competitors like Qatar Airways and Singapore Airlines, reinforcing its reputation for forward-thinking leadership in global aviation.

The multicultural nature of Emirates' workforce, representing more than 160 nationalities, further strengthens its adaptability. This diversity fosters cultural intelligence, enabling employees to understand and meet the expectations of a varied global customer base. It also supports creativity by bringing together different perspectives, problem-solving approaches and communication styles.

Overall, Emirates' organisational culture is not just internally beneficial but serves as a strategic asset in navigating external challenges. By continually leveraging its cultural strengths while remaining open to new ideas, the airline maintains resilience, competitiveness and global relevance.

Is Culture a Barrier to Effective Functioning?

While Emirates' organisational culture strongly contributes to efficiency, reliability and exceptional service quality, it is important to acknowledge that certain cultural elements can also create challenges for employees and the organisation. One of the most significant limitations is the highly centralised hierarchical structure. Although this top-down approach ensures clarity and control especially in a safety-critical industry it can unintentionally restrict employee empowerment. Staff at lower levels may feel hesitant to voice new ideas, challenge existing routines or take initiative, knowing that most decisions are ultimately made by senior leadership. As a result, creativity and innovation at the frontline may be limited, even though these perspectives could offer valuable insights into customer needs and operational improvement.

Another challenge relates to the pressure placed on employees to consistently meet the airline's exceptionally high service standards. Emirates is known for delivering a "premium experience," and maintaining this reputation requires cabin crew and ground staff to display constant professionalism, emotional warmth and composure even in difficult situations. Over time, this emotional labour can lead to stress, burnout and reduced wellbeing if not carefully managed. For some employees, the expectation to always remain polished and positive may feel overwhelming or unsustainable during busy travel seasons or challenging flights.

Despite these limitations, Emirates' culture remains a powerful organisational asset. Its strong operational performance, world-leading safety record and consistently high customer satisfaction levels demonstrate that the benefits of its cultural approach outweigh the drawbacks. The organisation's shared values create unity, purpose and clarity, helping staff deliver the world-class service that the airline is known for. However, there is still room for improvement. By encouraging greater openness, promoting employee voice and investing in wellbeing initiatives, Emirates could create a more balanced culture—one that preserves discipline and excellence while giving staff more space to innovate, express themselves and thrive.

Impact of Organisational Culture on Performance

Emirates' organisational culture has clear and powerful positive impacts that have helped position the airline as one of the most respected aviation brands in the world. Its strong global reputation is built on consistent service delivery, luxurious customer experiences and a clear commitment to safety. These cultural strengths translate into high rankings in customer satisfaction surveys, with passengers often praising the airline's professionalism and reliability. The consistency of its operations—whether in on-board service, safety procedures or airport processes—reinforces customer trust and supports smooth, predictable performance across its global network. Additionally, Emirates' reputation and multicultural ethos attract a diverse pool of international talent. People from around the world are drawn to the airline not only for career opportunities but also for the chance to work in a dynamic, globally connected environment.

However, the culture also has its challenges. A key limitation is restricted employee autonomy, which can make some staff feel disconnected from decision-making or unable to share ideas freely. The diversity of the workforce, while a major strength, can also lead to communication challenges, especially when crew members come from vastly different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This sometimes affects teamwork and coordination. Furthermore, the high-performance expectations associated with premium service can place considerable pressure on staff, contributing to fatigue and emotional strain.

To ensure that culture remains an enabling force, several improvements could be made. Increasing employee involvement through regular feedback systems, innovation workshops and open forums would help staff feel more empowered and valued. Enhanced intercultural communication training could reduce misunderstandings and strengthen teamwork within multinational crews. Promoting distributed leadership—where experienced staff at operational levels are trusted to make decisions—would support faster problem-solving and boost confidence. Finally, introducing stronger wellbeing initiatives, such as mental health support, rest-time protections and emotional resilience programs, would help reduce burnout and sustain long-term employee satisfaction.

Recommendations

Positive Impacts

Strong global brand reputation.
High rankings in customer satisfaction surveys.
Operational consistency and safety reliability.
Attraction of diverse international talent.

Negative Impacts

Limited employee autonomy.
Communication challenges across diverse teams.
High performance pressure.

Recommendations

Increasing employee involvement is essential for strengthening organisational culture and improving performance at Emirates Airlines. One effective approach is to introduce more structured feedback systems and regular innovation workshops, where employees from different departments can openly share ideas, highlight operational challenges, and contribute to service improvements. This not only increases engagement but also fosters a sense of ownership across the workforce. Given Emirates' highly diverse and multinational employee base, enhanced intercultural communication training is also crucial. Such training helps reduce misunderstandings, supports smoother teamwork, and ensures that employees feel respected and confident working within a multicultural environment. Strengthening these skills also contributes to a more consistent and harmonious service experience for passengers.

Promoting distributed leadership represents another valuable opportunity. By giving supervisors and team leaders more autonomy in making operational decisions, the airline can improve responsiveness, reduce delays, and empower staff to act confidently during dynamic or unexpected situations.

Finally, wellbeing initiatives should be prioritised to address emotional labour and fatigue—issues that are particularly common among cabin crew. Programmes such as mental health support, flexible scheduling, rest-recovery planning, and resilience training can significantly enhance employee morale, reduce burnout, and ultimately improve service quality and organisational performance.

Conclusion

Emirates Airlines demonstrates a strong, distinctive and culturally embedded approach to service delivery, organisational performance, and safety management. Through the lenses of Schein's, Hofstede's and Handy's cultural models, it becomes evident that culture is not merely a background element within the organisation but a central force shaping its structure, behaviours, and decision-making processes. Schein's model highlights how Emirates' deeply rooted assumptions around excellence, hospitality and global professionalism influence employee conduct and expectations. Hofstede's dimensions further illustrate how the airline's high-power distance and collectivist tendencies support a clear hierarchy and coordinated teamwork, both of which are essential in a safety-critical industry. Handy's classification reinforces this by identifying a role-oriented culture that ensures consistency, compliance, and operational reliability across a diverse, international workforce.

While cultural strengths contribute significantly to Emirates' global reputation and operational success, they also present certain limitations. A hierarchical structure, for example, may restrict the flow of bottom-up ideas and reduce opportunities for creativity and innovation. Similarly, strong role cultures can sometimes overshadow employee individuality and wellbeing if not balanced with supportive and inclusive practices.

Overall, Emirates' organisational culture is a major asset, underpinning its high standards of customer service, safety, and efficiency. However, the airline could benefit from targeted contributions positively to operational success. Implementing targeted enhancements-such as encouraging more open communication, promoting creativity, and investing further in employee wellbeing initiatives. By preserving its cultural strengths while fostering greater adaptability and engagement, Emirates can continue to thrive in an increasingly competitive and changing aviation industry.

References

1. **Mullins, L.J. and Christy, G., 2016.** *Management and Organisational Behaviour*. 11th ed. Harlow: Pearson Education.
2. **Schein, E.H., 2017.** *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. 5th ed. Hoboken: Wiley.
3. **Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J. and Minkov, M., 2010.** *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. 3rd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.
4. **Handy, C., 1993.** *Understanding Organizations*. 4th ed. London: Penguin Books.
5. **Al Suwaidi, M., 2019.** 'Organisational culture and leadership practices in the airline industry: A study of UAE carriers.' *Journal of Aviation Management*, 12(2), pp. 45–59.
6. **O'Connell, J.F. and Williams, G., 2016.** *Air Transport in the 21st Century: Key Strategic Developments*. Abingdon: Routledge.
7. **Graham, A., 2020.** *Managing Airports: An International Perspective*. 5th ed. Abingdon: Routledge.
8. **Emirates Group, 2023.** *Annual Report 2022–2023*. Dubai: Emirates Group.
9. **Al-Abed, I. and Vine, P., 2018.** *United Arab Emirates Yearbook*. London: Trident Press.
10. **Kumar, V. and Chandra, P., 2021.** 'Cultural diversity and service quality in global airlines.' *International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management*, 21(1), pp. 33–52.
11. **Hitt, M.A., Miller, C. and Colella, A., 2018.** *Organizational Behaviour: A Strategic Approach*. 5th ed. Hoboken: Wiley.
12. **Schneider, B., Ehrhart, M.G. and Macey, W.H., 2013.** 'Organizational climate and culture.' *Annual Review of Psychology*, 64, pp. 361–388.