



Module: Organisational Culture: LCLM 5005

Individual Report: British Airways

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Introduction

Organisational culture plays an important role in shaping how businesses operate, particularly in industries where service quality and customer experience are key factors. It influences how employees behave, how decisions are made and how organisations respond to both internal and external challenges. In the aviation industry, where safety, efficiency and customer service must be carefully balanced, organisational culture becomes even more significant.

This report focuses on British Airways, one of the UK's leading airlines, and explores how its organisational culture affects different aspects of the business. The discussion considers how culture influences the company's structure and decision-making processes, as well as how it supports its response to a highly competitive and constantly changing external environment. Relevant theoretical models are applied to provide a deeper understanding of the organisation's cultural characteristics. The report also evaluates how culture contributes to effectiveness and performance, while identifying potential challenges and areas for improvement.

Organisational Culture of British Airways

British Airways' organisational culture is strongly influenced by its position within the aviation industry, where safety, reliability and customer service are essential. As a flag carrier airline, the company aims to present a professional and premium image, which is reflected in how employees are expected to behave and interact with customers. This creates a culture that places importance on both operational discipline and service quality.

One of the key features of British Airways' culture is its focus on customer experience. Employees, particularly those in frontline roles such as cabin crew and customer service staff, are expected to deliver a high standard of service. This includes professionalism, communication skills and attention to detail. The aim is to create a positive experience for passengers, especially in long-haul and business class services where expectations are higher. However, maintaining this level of service consistently can be challenging, particularly during busy travel periods or operational disruptions.

Another important aspect is the strong emphasis on safety and procedures. In the airline industry, strict regulations and protocols must be followed at all times (International Airlines Group, 2023). As a result, British Airways has a culture that values compliance, responsibility and attention to detail. Employees are trained to follow specific procedures, which helps ensure safety and operational reliability. While this supports consistency, it can also limit flexibility, as employees may have less freedom to adapt to unexpected situations.

Teamwork is also a central part of the organisational culture. Airline operations require coordination between different teams, including pilots, cabin crew, ground staff and management. Effective communication and cooperation are essential to ensure that flights operate smoothly. This creates a culture where collaboration is necessary, and employees rely on one another to carry out their roles successfully. (Mullins and Christy, 2016).

In addition, British Airways' culture reflects a degree of hierarchy. There are clear roles and levels of authority within the organisation, particularly in operational areas where decisions must be controlled and structured. However, communication between teams is still important to ensure that information flows effectively and that issues can be addressed quickly.

At the same time, the company operates in a highly competitive global market, which requires adaptability. Changes in customer expectations, technology and external

conditions, such as economic pressures or disruptions, mean that the organisation must be able to adjust its approach when needed. This has encouraged a culture that, while structured, is also capable of responding to change.

Overall, British Airways' organisational culture combines professionalism, safety, teamwork and customer service, creating an environment that supports both operational performance and the delivery of a consistent passenger experience.

How Organisational Culture Shapes Structure and Decision-Making at British Airways

The organisational culture of British Airways has a direct influence on how the company is structured and how decisions are made across the business. As an airline operating in a highly regulated and safety-critical industry, the structure must be clearly defined, and this is closely linked to the values and expectations within the organisation.

British Airways follows a hierarchical structure, where roles and responsibilities are clearly established. This is particularly important in aviation, where accountability and control are essential for maintaining safety and operational standards. For example, there are clear distinctions between pilots, cabin crew, ground staff and management, each with specific duties. This structured approach reflects a culture that prioritises order, reliability and compliance with procedures.

However, the culture also encourages coordination between different areas of the organisation. Airline operations depend on multiple teams working together, and effective communication is essential to ensure that flights run smoothly. This creates a balance between a formal structure and the need for collaboration, as employees must share information and respond quickly to operational demands.

In terms of decision-making, British Airways combines centralised control with operational responsiveness. Strategic decisions, such as route planning, pricing and long-term business direction, are typically made at a senior level. This ensures consistency and alignment with the company's overall objectives. At the same time, operational decisions often need to be made quickly, particularly in situations such as delays, cancellations or customer service issues. Employees in frontline roles may therefore be required to make immediate decisions within defined guidelines.

The company's strong focus on safety also shapes decision-making processes. Decisions are often guided by strict regulations and established procedures, which limits the level of risk that can be taken. This supports consistency and reduces the likelihood of errors, but it may also slow down decision-making in certain situations where flexibility could be beneficial.

Another important factor is the increasing use of data and technology. British Airways relies on operational data, customer feedback and performance metrics to support decisions. This allows the organisation to improve efficiency and identify areas for

improvement. However, a heavy reliance on data may sometimes reduce the role of individual judgement, particularly in complex or unpredictable situations.

When these elements are considered together, it becomes clear that British Airways' organisational culture supports a structured and controlled approach, while still allowing for a degree of responsiveness. This balance is essential in an industry where both safety and customer experience must be carefully managed

Relevant Frameworks, Models or Theories Applied to British Airways

To gain a deeper understanding of British Airways' organisational culture, it is useful to apply established theoretical models such as Schein's model of organisational culture and Hofstede's cultural dimensions. These frameworks help to explain both the visible aspects of the organisation and the underlying values that influence behaviour across the company. Schein's model offers a useful way to analyse culture at three different levels (Schein and Schein, 2017), artefacts include elements such as employee

uniforms, formal communication styles and the structured environment found within airline operations. In British Airways, these artefacts reflect a professional image and a strong focus on consistency and safety. Passengers experience this directly through the behaviour of staff and the overall service provided.

At the level of espoused values, British Airways promotes principles such as customer service, safety, professionalism and reliability. These values are communicated through training programmes and operational guidelines. Employees are expected to follow procedures carefully while also maintaining a high standard of service. This shows that the organisation aims to balance efficiency with customer experience.

At a deeper level, underlying assumptions include the belief that safety must always come first and that consistency is essential for maintaining trust with passengers. These assumptions influence how employees behave, even in situations where flexibility might be required. For example, staff are trained to prioritise safety procedures over customer convenience when necessary. Hofstede's cultural dimensions also help (Corporate Finance Institute, n.d.) explain aspects of British Airways' organisational culture. The company operates within a context that reflects moderate individualism, where employees are responsible for their specific roles, but still need to work as part of a team. This balance is particularly important in airline operations, where individual performance and teamwork are equally necessary.

In terms of power distance, British Airways demonstrates a relatively structured hierarchy. There are clear levels of authority, particularly between flight crew, management and operational staff. However, communication between these levels is still important, especially when dealing with operational issues.

The organisation also shows a results-oriented approach, with a focus on efficiency, performance and maintaining a competitive position within the airline industry. While this

can drive strong performance, it may also create pressure for employees, particularly during busy travel periods.

By applying these models, it becomes clear that British Airways' organisational culture is shaped by both visible practices and deeper values. These frameworks provide a clearer understanding of how culture influences behaviour, decision-making and overall performance within the organisation.

Organisational Culture and Adaptation to the External Environment of British Airways

British Airways operates in a highly dynamic and unpredictable external environment, where factors such as economic conditions, global events, technological developments and changing customer expectations can have a significant impact on performance. In this context, organisational culture plays an important role (Mullins and Christy, 2016) in shaping how the company responds to these external pressures.

One of the main challenges faced by British Airways is the level of competition within the airline industry. The company competes not only with other full-service airlines but also with low-cost carriers that often operate with different business models. In response, British Airways has developed a culture that emphasises service quality and brand reputation, aiming to differentiate itself through customer experience rather than price alone. This reflects an approach that focuses on maintaining a premium image while still adapting to market conditions.

Economic factors also influence how the organisation operates. Changes in fuel costs, inflation and consumer spending can affect demand for air travel. British Airways responds to these challenges by adjusting its pricing strategies and operational efficiency. The culture within the organisation supports this by encouraging cost awareness and careful resource management, while still maintaining service standards.

Technological change is another important aspect of the external environment. The airline industry has seen significant developments in areas such as digital booking systems, mobile applications and automated services. British Airways has adapted by investing in technology to improve both efficiency and customer experience. This demonstrates a culture that is open to innovation, while still maintaining its structured approach to operations.

In addition, global events such as health crises, security concerns and political changes can have a direct impact on the airline industry. British Airways must be able to respond quickly to these situations, often making rapid operational decisions. The organisation's culture, which combines structured procedures with the ability to act under pressure, supports this need for responsiveness.

Customer expectations have also changed over time, with passengers increasingly expecting convenience, flexibility and high levels of service. British Airways has adapted by offering a range of services and improving customer interaction through digital

platforms. This shows that the organisation's culture is not fixed but continues to evolve in response to external demands.

When these factors are considered together, it becomes clear that British Airways' organisational culture supports its ability to adapt to a complex and changing environment. While the company maintains a strong focus on safety and structure, it also demonstrates the flexibility needed to respond to external challenges and remain competitive.

Organisational Culture and Effective Functioning of British Airways

The effectiveness of British Airways as an organisation is closely linked to how well its people, processes and systems work together. Organisational culture plays a key role in supporting this, particularly in an industry where safety, coordination and efficiency are essential for daily operations.

One of the main ways culture supports effective functioning is through its strong emphasis on procedures and consistency. Employees are trained to follow strict operational guidelines, especially in areas such as safety checks, boarding processes and in-flight service. This helps reduce errors and ensures that operations run smoothly across different flights and locations. In an environment where small mistakes can have serious consequences, this structured approach is essential.

Communication is another important factor. British Airways relies (British Airways, 2025) on clear and timely communication between different teams, including pilots, cabin crew, ground staff and control centres. The organisational culture encourages the sharing of information to ensure that any issues, such as delays or technical problems, can be managed effectively. This improves coordination and helps maintain overall efficiency.

Teamwork also plays a central role in supporting effective functioning. Airline operations require employees to work closely together, often in high-pressure situations. A strong team-based culture helps ensure that responsibilities are shared and that staff can support each other when needed. This is particularly important during unexpected events, where cooperation is necessary to resolve problems quickly.

In addition, accountability contributes to organisational effectiveness. Employees are expected to take responsibility for their roles and follow established standards. This helps maintain consistency and ensures that tasks are carried out correctly. However, a strong focus on rules and procedures may sometimes limit flexibility, particularly in situations where a more adaptable response could be beneficial.

There are also some challenges to consider. The structured nature of the organisation can make it more difficult to introduce changes quickly, especially when approval is required from multiple levels. In addition, the pressure to maintain high standards, particularly in customer service and safety, can affect employee wellbeing if not managed carefully.

When considering these factors together, British Airways' organisational culture supports effective functioning through structure, communication and teamwork. At the same time, maintaining a balance between control and flexibility is important to ensure that the organisation remains both efficient and responsive in a demanding environment.

Evaluation of the Impact of Organisational Culture on the Performance of British Airways

The organisational culture of British Airways has a significant influence on its overall performance, particularly in areas such as service quality, operational efficiency and competitiveness within the airline industry. The values and behaviours promoted within the organisation shape how employees carry out their roles, which directly affects both customer experience and business outcomes.

One of the main strengths of British Airways' culture is its focus on professionalism and customer service. By encouraging employees to maintain high standards when interacting with passengers, the company is able to deliver a consistent level of service. This is especially important in the airline industry, where customer experience can influence brand reputation and customer loyalty. A strong reputation can support long-term performance by attracting repeat customers and maintaining a competitive position in the market.

Efficiency is another area where culture has a clear impact. The emphasis on structured processes and clear procedures helps ensure that operations run smoothly. This is particularly important in aviation, where delays, errors or miscommunication can have significant consequences. By maintaining a culture of discipline and attention to detail, British Airways is able to support reliable operations and reduce risks.

However, there are also some limitations. A strong focus on procedures and hierarchy may reduce flexibility, particularly in situations that require quick and creative responses. Employees may feel restricted by rules, which can limit their ability to adapt to unexpected challenges or provide more personalised customer service. In addition, the pressure to maintain high standards in both safety and service can impact employee motivation if not managed effectively.

Another challenge is the balance between cost control and service quality. As competition increases, particularly from low-cost airlines, British Airways must manage its resources carefully. While its culture supports efficiency, maintaining a premium level of service can increase operational costs, which may affect profitability if not balanced properly.

To address these challenges, British Airways could focus on increasing flexibility within its organisational culture. This could involve giving employees more autonomy in certain situations, particularly when dealing with customer service issues. In addition, greater support for employee wellbeing could help reduce pressure and improve motivation, which would have a positive impact on performance.

In conclusion, British Airways' organisational culture plays a key role in supporting performance through professionalism, efficiency and consistency. However, maintaining a balance between control, flexibility and employee wellbeing will be essential to ensure continued success in a competitive and evolving industry.

Conclusion

This report has examined how organisational culture influences key aspects of British Airways, including its structure, decision-making and overall performance. The analysis has shown that the company's culture is strongly shaped by the need to maintain high standards of safety, professionalism and customer service. These elements support consistent operations and help the organisation remain competitive within the airline industry.

The use of models such as Schein's and Hofstede's has provided a clearer understanding of how both visible practices and deeper values influence behaviour within the organisation. At the same time, the discussion has highlighted that while British Airways' culture supports efficiency and reliability, it may also create challenges, particularly in terms of flexibility and employee pressure.

In the long term, maintaining a balance between structured processes, adaptability and employee wellbeing will be essential to ensure that British Airways continues to perform effectively in a constantly changing environment.

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