

Corporate Culture: Evidence from the Field *

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ABSTRACT

We use interviews and a novel survey tool to study corporate culture at more than 1,300 North American firms. More than 90% of executives believe that culture is important or very important and 92% believe improving culture would increase firm value. Only 16% believe their firm's culture is exactly where it should be. Executives link culture to ethical choices (including compliance and short-termism), innovation (creativity, taking on appropriate business risk), and value creation (productivity, acquisition premia) at their firms. We study these issues within a framework that implies that the effectiveness of corporate culture is determined not just by stated cultural values but also by whether employees act according to social norms that are consistent with the values, and whether formal institutions such as governance reinforce the values. Key cultural values include integrity, collaboration, and adaptability.

JEL classification: G3, Z1, D23, G23, G30, K22, M14, O16.

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Why do some firms generate great wealth for investors and offer innovative solutions to problems, while seemingly similar firms are much less successful? Economists have traditionally explained persistent differences in outcomes across firms using inputs and selective attrition, but recently some argue that the majority of performance variation across firms is due to unobserved forces within the firm (Syverson (2011); Backus (2015)). Corporate culture is a difficult-to-observe force within companies that may explain these residual differences in performance. In this paper, we seek to empirically address questions related to what is corporate culture, does culture affect firm value and decision-making, and if so, how?

Economists who study corporate culture often embed it within the broader political economy literature on corporate institutions (e.g., Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales (2015); Hermalin (2013)). We follow this precedent and, as shown in Figure 1, dichotomize corporate institutions into formal and informal branches. Formal institutions are tangible and consist of policies such as governance and compensation. Informal institutions, which we refer to as corporate culture, are less tangible and consist of cultural values and social norms. Cultural values are unwavering standards employees strive to fulfill, while social norms are the day-to-day practices that attempt to live out these values. Figure 1 illustrates that the effectiveness of corporate culture on the alignment of and the interaction between values and norms, as well as possible interactions with formal institutions. These interactions determine the effectiveness of corporate culture which, in turn, enables (or not) successful outcomes.

Despite decades of research conceptually arguing for culture’s prominent role in fixing contractual inefficiencies (Kreps (1990)) and the many anecdotes that policymakers, executives and the press provide to suggest corporate culture is very important, empirical researchers have less to say about culture with a few notable exceptions (e.g., Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales (2015)). One reason for limited empirical research is the absence of large-sample, high-quality data about corporate culture. While an early view suggests that “culture is a complex phenomenon, and we should not rush to measure things until we understand better what we are measuring” Schein (1990), the theory is now relatively mature. For research to progress and to guide policy, it is critical to know which elements of culture are most important, when, and why.

One of the purposes of this paper is to gather a large, comprehensive database of corporate culture, beyond just anecdotes, that allows us to explore culture in the context of the values, norms, and formal institutions framework described above. We gather data using a comprehensive survey of nearly 1,900 chief executive and financial officers (CEOs and CFOs, referred to interchangeably as executives or managers) across a wide range of public and private firms; we supplement the survey data with 18 in-depth interviews. The richness of our data allows us to explore the roles played by cultural values, norms, and formal institutions in determining the effectiveness of corporate culture, and in turn the effect of culture on three different types of business outcomes: ethics, innovation, and productivity/firm value.

Business executives indicate that having an effective corporate culture impacts value. 91% of executives consider corporate culture to be “very important” or “important” at their firm. 79% rank culture as at least a “top 5” factor among all of the things that make their firm valuable. Cultural fit in merger and acquisition (M&A) deals is so important that 54% of executives would walk away from a target that is culturally misaligned, while another 33% would require discounts between 10%–30% of the purchase price of the target. 92% of corporate executives believe that improving corporate culture would increase firm value.

Executives also believe that culture influences a wide range of decisions and actions. 84% believe a poorly implemented, ineffective culture increases the chance that an employee might act unethically or even illegally. For example, we find that nearly half of corporate officers indicate that they would choose a “short-term” project over one that maximizes NPV and 80% of these same officers indicate that their firm’s culture influences their selection of the NPV-inferior investment. 55% believe (effective) culture is an important reason their firm takes on the appropriate amount of investment risk, while a surprising 29% indicate that (ineffective) culture leads them to take on too little investment risk to achieve their firm’s goals. Finally, 53% believe that an effective culture reduces the tendency of companies to engage in end-of-quarter earnings management practices (such as delaying valuable projects) to deliver the market’s expected earnings numbers.

Figure 2 illustrates an interesting feature of the raw data. 89% of respondents indicate their firm’s culture is not exactly where it should be, yet 52% indicate they perfectly track their stated

cultural values. If choosing cultural values optimally is all that matters for effectiveness, then adhering to values should also lead to effectiveness. To the contrary, survey responses do not suggest a strong relation between tracking stated culture and business outcomes. A central thesis of this paper is that simply declaring cultural values does not by itself guarantee a successful outcome. Rather, consistent with our empirical results, for culture to be effective in driving outcomes, these values must be complemented by norms that dictate actual behavior. Our results further indicate that norms are at least as important as the values themselves in driving outcomes, and that formal institutions reinforce or work against these informal corporate institutions.

More specifically, our econometric investigation into the effects of culture on business outcomes suggest three important findings. First, for culture to have a big effect on firm performance, values alone are insufficient. A firm needs a combination of both values and their associated norms. Second, formal institutions and social norms explain the effectiveness of corporate culture. These factors alone can explain almost 50% of the variation in the effectiveness of culture. Third, when we use a quantile regression approach to examine the impact of culture on firms in the upper and lower end of the outcome distribution, we see the impact of culture is economically and statistically much more meaningful for firms in the low end. This suggests the frequency with which the popular press blames culture for corporate shortcomings may be justified.¹

We also investigate how specific avenues by which culture might affect specific business outcomes. We find that creativity (one measure of innovation) is positively associated with the cultural value of adaptability and the social norms of “new ideas develop organically” and “comfort in suggesting critiques”; creativity is negatively associated with the value of being focused on bottom-line results. We also find that compliance (one measure of ethics) is associated with a value of integrity and social norms of long-run decision-making and willingness to report unethical behavior. Thus, multiple mechanisms appear to be at work connecting corporate culture to different business outcomes.

To understand the robustness and generalizeability of our findings, we conduct a thorough evaluation of the quality of the data. Given that measurement error could generate internally

¹As recent examples, corporate culture has been blamed for negative performance at VW and Toshiba.

inconsistent data, we consulted 11 experts to vet the survey design and administered 20 beta tests prior to sending the survey. Given that presentation of the questions may bias respondent's answers, we scramble the order of choices within a question. When we examine the correlations among repeat observations within the same firm and compare survey responses for those who we also interviewed, we find support for internal validity. We cross-validate our cultural measures by examining the cultural values at an industry level, which produces patterns that appear to conform to intuition. Finally, we conduct several tests to explore the extent of selection in our data. We test for response differences by job title, delay in survey response (a test for non-response bias), and participants in regular surveys vs. one-time responder. There is little statistical difference across these categories, thus we do not find evidence of selection problems. Finally, as described below, we attempt to statistically address a possible "halo effect" (a carry-over in judgment from one question to the next) using the approach used by [Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales \(2015\)](#).

Overall, our work relates to a number of strands in the literature. First, our findings are consistent with recent research pointing to the first-order importance of internal firm practices for determining productivity and performance ([Bloom and Van Reenen \(2007\)](#); [Bloom, Sadun, and Van Reenen \(2012\)](#)). Second, our research highlights the vital, but underappreciated, role that corporate culture plays in the value creation of a firm ([Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales \(2006\)](#); [Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales \(2015\)](#); [Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales \(2015\)](#)). Third, our results suggest that formal institutions such as leadership style ([Bertrand and Schoar \(2003\)](#)), incentive compensation ([Lazear \(2000\)](#)), and corporate governance ([Popadak \(2016\)](#)) meaningfully interact with the underlying corporate culture. Finally, we provide some of the first evidence linking culture to ethics ([Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales \(2006\)](#)), myopia ([Graham, Harvey, and Rajgopal \(2005\)](#)), whistle-blowing ([Bowen, Call, and Rajgopal \(2010\)](#); [Dyck, Morse, Zingales \(2010\)](#)), and performance in an economic downturn ([Fahlenbrach, Prilmeier, and Stulz \(2012\)](#)).

The rest of the paper proceeds as follows. [Section I](#) introduces the theoretical background and develops our hypotheses. [Section II](#) describes how we gather the data and measure corporate culture. [Section III](#) presents our findings. Some concluding remarks are offered in the final section. The online appendices contain a copy of the survey, variable definitions, and additional tables.

I. Hypothesis Development

A. *Corporate Culture as an Informal Institution That Affects Firm Performance*

Our definition of corporate culture builds on previous research and facilitates our tests connecting culture to business outcomes. Early research defined corporate culture as an intangible asset designed to meet unforeseen contingencies as they arise (Kreps (1990)). This culture asset includes the shared assumptions, values, and beliefs that help employees understand which behaviors are and are not appropriate (Schein (1990)). Recent research embeds this earlier definition of culture into a broader context of corporate institutions and societal culture (Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales (2015)). As shown in Figure 1, corporate institutions consist of formal and informal institutions (the latter is what we refer to as corporate culture). Formal institutions are tangible and consist of corporate policies like governance and compensation. Corporate culture is less tangible and consists of cultural values and social norms. Cultural values are unwavering standards that employees strive to fulfill, while norms are the day-to-day practices that attempt to live out these values.²

The central thesis of our paper is that simply declaring cultural values does not by itself lead to successful business outcomes. Rather, these values must be complemented by norms that dictate actual behavior. We also posit that formal institutions such as compensation policy can either reinforce or work against the effectiveness of cultural values and norms. We attempt to separately measure these different elements and their effects on business outcomes. The rest of this section puts these basic ideas into the broader literature and develops our testable hypotheses.

We begin by connecting the elements in Figure 1 to business outcomes. Both formal institutions and informal institutions (i.e., corporate culture) relate to economic outcomes through the incentive structures that they provide (North (1991)). Formal and informal influences can motivate employees in different ways. Formal institutions such as compensation contracts provide pecuniary rewards or extrinsic motivation while, in contrast, culture creates a desire to perform for its own sake, that is culture provides an intrinsic motivation (Benabou and Tirole (2003)). The distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation is important in distinguishing when the effects of corporate culture

² Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales (2015) give the example of impeccable customer service being a value, while the associated norm would be lived out by employees exhibiting a day-to-day positive attitude towards customers.

on firm outcomes may be most evident. Given that employees face choices that cannot properly be regulated ex ante (i.e., incomplete contracts), the intrinsic motivation provided by culture is likely to have its strongest effects when such choices arise. One way to think of this is that if you applied the exact same formal inputs (technology, contracts, etc.) to two similar firms and two different outputs result, the difference in output is likely attributable to culture.

The values and social norms that comprise culture characterize the incentive structure in place that guides employees' actions when they face unforeseen contingencies. A firm will try to promote understanding of their selected values and norms, and employees will be judged by their diligence in applying the values and norms. A cultural value represents an ideal state of behavior such as integrity or teamwork (Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales (2015)). Social norms are expressions of cultural values via the typical patterns of "right" and "wrong" conduct (Posner (2000)). For example, the importance of "honoring one's word" is a social norm that expresses an integrity value. A firm's cultural values and social norms connect to firm performance through the intrinsic motivation they create (Akerlof (2015)). Put another way, the reason that values and norms influence performance is that they reduce the agency problems and moral hazard that arise.

We expand upon the economic links from a culture comprised of values and norms to firm performance in the following example.

Technology firm example: Consider a technology firm with a reputation delivering innovative products and a strategy of frequent new product releases. To fulfill this reputation, the firm needs employees to execute on this strategy. But employees may be tempted to save on the effort necessary to think creatively and embark on risky design projects. For the employees, it may be easier to simply produce products that *appear* innovative because they are sleeker and more powerful but that actually are only minimally innovative. To avoid the outcome of less-than-innovative products and the effect they would eventually have on firm value, corporate leadership will attempt to instill a cultural value that leads to true innovativeness. In this example, the technology firm may elevate the ideal of adaptability to the level of a cultural value. The associated pattern of action (social norm) would be for employees to develop new ideas organically, internal to the firm. Employees that generate fresh, new ideas would be rewarded, while those that generate ideas that incrementally

modify competitor ideas would receive negative judgment. Hence, a social norm of organic idea creation takes root.

B. Determinants of an Effective Culture: Values and Norms

The previous subsection describes how an effective culture can lead to superior business outcomes relative to what the same production inputs, technology, and formal institutions would deliver at another firm. We refer to an “effective culture” as one that promotes the behaviors needed to successfully execute the firm’s strategies and achieve its goals. In this subsection, we explore the theoretical reasons that not all firms have effective cultures, given that an effective culture is beneficial for firm performance. To begin, we focus on the role played by cultural values and social norms. In the next subsection we focus on formal institutions and more traditional frictions such as implementation costs and agency considerations.

The following example contrasts effective and ineffective cultures, highlighting the roles played by cultural values and social norms in affecting corporate performance.

Banking example: Compliance is a desired business outcome for two hypothetical large financial institutions. Both banks state integrity as one of their cultural values. Leadership at the first bank promotes the integrity value by communicating a legalistic, check-the-box approach to integrity. The second bank promotes integrity by communicating an intent of “never compromise,” a spirit of “honor your word,” and a willingness to speak up when others violate their word. Either norm could lead to a desired compliance outcome but the probability of achieving the desired compliance outcome is greater in the second bank. In the second bank the value of integrity is expressed through the norms of employees’ actions, while in the first bank an opportunistic norm of “getting through the day without being indicted” may be established. Because compliance outcomes often result from choices employees make when they face unforeseen contingencies, developing norms that best achieve the integrity value in those instances are where culture has its greatest impact. The social norms established at the first bank frame the integrity value in terms of extrinsic legal factors rather than intrinsic motivation. This distinction in how the norm frames or encourages employees to live out the integrity value will more likely lead to an effective culture in the second

bank (Tversky and Kahneman (1981)).

What role do cultural values and norms have, if any, in achieving an effective culture? The theoretical literature is divided on this topic. Theorists that model culture as an equilibrium selection (Hermalin (2001); Rob and Zemsky (2002)) predict specific values and norms do not matter for effectiveness. A second strand of theory models culture as a characteristic of people that facilitates different equilibrium actions (Cr  mer (1993); Lazear (1995); Akerlof and Kranton (2005); Van den Steen (2010)). Because people are different and the payoffs that they assign to outcomes differ, culture serves as a mechanism to simplify communication and facilitate the actions preferred by the firm. These models suggest specific cultural values and norms will produce more effective cultures.

Broadly speaking, when culture exhibits specific values (adaptability, collaboration, and integrity) or norms (decision-making that reflects the long-term, and consistency/predictability of actions) the cultural mechanism that makes firms more efficient is working. We note the literature rarely speaks to specific outcomes (e.g., creativity). Although a natural conjecture is that even more tailored values and norms will produce greater efficiency if the objective is to maximize a single outcome rather than overall firm value.

First, Erhard and Jensen (2014) focuses on the cultural value of integrity. Having an integrity value is viewed as a necessary condition but not a sufficient condition for maximum performance. Without integrity the opportunity-set for firm performance shrinks, but implementation reasons can limit a firm’s outcomes as well. Social norms are part of the implementation process because they embody employees’ actions in living out the ideal. In the bank example, both banks had the sufficient condition for maximum performance by stating integrity as a value but the second bank had a norm that brought its implementation closer to the maximum.

Second, O’Reilly and Tushman (2013) focus on adaptability, which encompasses quick reactions and rapid experimentation, not only with products and services but also with business models, processes, and strategies. Adaptability, however, it is more than the ability to change to meet changing future circumstances. It also includes attending to the products and processes of the past, while simultaneously preparing for the innovations that will define the future. In a sense,

it is the mental balancing act of exploring new opportunities while diligently exploiting existing capabilities.

Third, collaboration is considered a critical cultural value for firm performance (Van den Steen (2010)). The social norm that expresses collaboration can be described as “we don’t show up at work to hit home runs, we show up at work to help advance the runner. There’s that sense of working together to help the company rather than of individual stars.” The norm facilitating a collaboration value can also be expressed more simply through the coordination among employees.

On the norms side, decision making that reflects the long-term is an important norm for expressing cultural values (Kreps (1990)). In a repeated game, the firm attempts to implement its selected cultural values and norms even when their application might not be optimal in the short-run because the permission of small deviations from the ideal values are unacceptable. Selected cultural values are elevated to such a high level that they are nonnegotiable, like the 10 Commandments, and therefore a norm of decision-making that reflects the long-term must be established to support this ideal. Consistency and predictability of actions is a second norm that the literature highlights as critical (e.g., Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales (2006)). Because employees may be heterogeneous, aligning expectations requires a norm of consistent and predictable behavior, so that employees starting from a diverse set of prior beliefs will update their beliefs in a way that leads to the same expected action.

In conclusion, the discussion above leads us to several hypotheses. First, we hypothesize that it is a combination of cultural values and their associated norms that produce an effective culture and have a positive association with firm performance. A natural corollary of the first hypothesis is that selecting values in isolation, even when the values are advertised and promoted, will not be as effective as a combination of values in norms in generating firm outcomes. Put another way, stated culture alone is not what affects outcomes, rather the culture needs to be effective to optimally affect outcomes. This hypotheses can be thought of and tested in two steps: The first step connects culture effectiveness to underlying norms and values, while the second step connects cultural effectiveness to outcomes. The three cultural values highlighted in the literature are adaptability, collaboration, and integrity. It is natural to link certain values to certain outcomes

(e.g., an adaptability value may lead to an innovative outcome). However, the equilibrium selection models suggest there is more than one combination of values and norms that can lead to desired outcomes. Therefore, below we also explore the extent to which values and norms broadly affect outcomes.

C. Other Determinants of an Effective Culture

Formal institutions such as incentive compensation may complement (i.e., reinforce) and/or substitute for (i.e., work against) corporate culture when it comes to firm outcomes. As illustrated in , an effective culture depends on the alignment of and the interaction between the values, norms, and formal institutions. Formal institutions may have their own independent effect on outcomes or they may indirectly affect outcomes through their impact on culture.

We explore five formal institutions that can interact with corporate culture: compensation contracts, corporate governance, corporate leadership, the finance function and human resources practices. We hypothesize that formal institutions play a significant role in the development of values and norms and ultimately in the effectiveness of the culture. Specifically, formal institutions may alter the cultural values selected, the alignment with the selected values, the strength of the cultural norms, and the overall effectiveness of the culture. Given the various possible effects and interactions of formal institutions, we explore their broad effect rather than make specific predictions for specific institutions.

Theoretically, the relationships between culture and formal institutions are quite ambiguous. For example, consider the interaction between incentive compensation and culture as discussed in [Lazear \(1995\)](#) and [Akerlof and Kranton \(2005\)](#). On one hand, if firms through culture are able to inculcate employees with intrinsic motivation, then, the culture would flatten the optimal wage schedule. This suggests culture and incentive compensation are substitutes. On the other hand, if culture via increased intrinsic motivation reduces employees' effort costs, compensation could be used to motivate employees even more and thus complement the effects of culture.

Finally, we note that other frictions such as implementation and learning costs, as well as agency and industry considerations, will play a role in determining whether a firm has an effective culture.

For example, learning how best to communicate cultural values and promote the development of social norms that embody the values may take time. At the extreme, implementing a cultural change may be so costly that only new incumbents can change their culture. Ineffective cultures may be attractive to some leaders because the status quo involves less effort than changing to and managing an effective culture. Finally, firms may not have an effective culture because they are in an industry where the supply of talent limits the set of values and norms one can communicate with their employees, forcing some firms to adopt suboptimal cultural values or not enforce appropriate norms. We consider these ideas in our econometric specifications through the use of control variables.

II. Measuring and Identifying the Effects Corporate Culture

In this section, we discuss how we define corporate culture, and in particular, how we quantify the cultural values and social norms that underlie culture in a way that is applicable to different firms in different industries. Because we measure corporate culture and its effects based on a survey, we also discuss data reliability and other econometric issues associated with data gathered from surveys.

A. Introduction to Interview and Survey Methodology

To measure corporate culture, we begin by interviewing 18 corporate executives, mostly CFOs and CEOs. Given the potentially sensitive nature of these interviews, and to encourage frank discussion, we promise the executives anonymity. With the interviewee's permission, we record and transcribe each interview to ensure accuracy in quotations. We begin the interviews on October 22, 2014 and conclude them on April 3, 2015. To learn about culture in a variety of settings, we interview executives that lead public and private firms, pre-IPO and post-IPO firms, early and late lifecycle stage firms, conglomerates, singularly-focused firms, and holding companies. Some executives compare and contrast their experience at multiple firms. Overall, the executives represent firms that contribute meaningfully to the U.S. economy and make up about 20% of the market capitalization of the NYSE plus NASDAQ. The average executive works at a firm that is much larger than the typical Compustat firm with mean sales of \$47 billion, more leverage, greater

profitability, lower sales growth, and higher credit ratings.

We begin each interview with open-ended questions such as, “What, in your view, is corporate culture?” and “How would you describe the corporate culture at your firm?” This allows us to initially capture broad themes and narrow the focus as the interview proceeds, without leading the interviewee by our presenting predetermined definitions of corporate culture. We also use interviews to identify under-researched topics and as input in developing our survey instrument. All of the executives that we contact agree to the interview. The interviews occur over the phone or in-person and vary in length, lasting from 40 to 90 minutes. The executives appear to be forthcoming in their responses.

We incorporate the knowledge we gain about corporate culture from the interviews into the design of our survey instrument. After beta-testing and modifying the instrument, we send invitations to take the survey via email to a diverse sample of corporate executives. We use two key databases of email addresses of CFOs supplied by (i) a list of CFO email addresses the Fuqua School of Business at Duke University maintains for their quarterly survey; and (ii) a list of CEO and CFO email addresses from among the alumni of the Columbia Business School. In total, we send requests to approximately 5,668 email addresses from these two sources and received 762 response (representing a 13.4% response rate). We supplement the primary email lists with emails from external sources such as CFO magazine, from which we collect an addition 1,136 responses. We include these details about the survey logistics and precise questions in [Appendix A](#).

B. Corporate Culture Measures

In total, we collect 1,898 total responses. We eliminate responses from participants located outside the United States and Canada to avoid possibly confounding influences from national cultures. Similarly, we remove respondents working for the government and non-profits because we are primarily interested in the relation between culture and firm outcomes and the objectives at those organizations may not be consistent with firm value maximization. Finally, we remove responses that do not respond to the first question of the survey. Applying these filters produces 1,348 observations from North American executives at public and private firms.

We use the survey questions to define our key variables, which include cultural values, social norms, and formal institutions. In addition, we use the survey to define our key dependent variables, which include firm outcomes related to ethics, innovation, and productivity and firm value. Finally, we use the survey to define intermediate outcomes such as how well the firm tracks its stated cultural values and how effective the firm’s current culture is.

We use an open-ended survey question to define cultural values. We ask “briefly, what words or phrases best describe the current corporate culture at your firm?” An open-ended question does not impose the values that academics deem important onto our respondents.³ We classify the responses to the open-ended question into seven cultural values. The first six values are the principal components of cultural values as determined by O’Reilly, Chatman, and Caldwell (1991) and confirmed in their follow-up research O’Reilly et al. (2014)). The seventh cultural value we label as “community,” which reflects the notion of caring for the community through social responsibility, good citizenship, respect and diversity. Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales (2015) study advertised corporate values and find that “community” is a popularly cited corporate value in recent years.

Panel A of Table I provides descriptive statistics (the mean, standard deviation, and median) for cultural values as well as for an aggregate measure (i.e., the mean) of the cultural values. We create an aggregate values variable to later test our hypotheses that cultural values matter, broadly speaking, for firm performance. The most commonly listed values are community, results-orientation, and collaboration. Our cultural values variables are coded from -1 to 1 to reflect that an executive might describe a given value in positive or negative terms. For example, a firm with a strong team-orientated or cooperative culture receives a score of one for the “collaboration” value, while a firm with a competitive or every-employee-for-himself culture receives a score of negative one for the “collaboration” value. Firms that do not mention collaboration receive a score of zero. Similarly, a firm that is innovative or where employees are resourceful in finding solutions when problems arise receives a score of one for the “adaptability” value, while a firm with a lot of red tape and bureaucracy that works against adaptability receives a score of negative one for

³Nevertheless, 90% of respondents describe a values-based culture with 85% of respondents listing specific cultural values. 30% of respondents describe their culture with adjectives that reflect positive and negative emotions (e.g., good and healthy vs. toxic and stressful). 9% describe their culture as currently changing and 7% indicate that their culture is a mix of different subcultures.

this cultural value. For additional details on construction and a tabulation of frequently recurring words associated with each value, please see our variable definitions in [Appendix B](#).

Panel B of [Table I](#) provides descriptive statistics for the cultural norms as well as for an aggregate measure of cultural norms that represents the mean of the norms. The most commonly listed norms are trust, decision-making that reflects long-term corporate interests, and coordination among employees. The norms are extracted from survey question 6 which asks “in the context of your firm’s current culture, please indicate which factors determine the effectiveness of your culture.” A score of one indicates a key factor that enhances cultural effectiveness, a score of zero indicate no effect, and a score of negative one indicates a norm that works against culture being effective. Other norms include urgency with which employees work, employees’ comfort in suggesting critiques, consistency and predictability of employees’ actions, employees’ willingness to report compliance risks or unethical behavior, broad agreement about goals and values, and new ideas develop organically.

We note that our measures of the cultural values and social norms are similar to the sample statistics for cultural values reported in [Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales \(2015\)](#). They analyze cultural values advertised on the websites of firms that participate in Fortune’s “100 Best Companies to Work For” survey. Advertised values, however, are more likely to include aspirational rather than authentic values. For this reason, we specifically ask about the current culture and later ask about how well the current culture tracks the aspirational culture. A company website would not describe their culture as “non-inclusive, political and backstabbing,” yet these are descriptors some of our respondents use. Nevertheless, we carefully explore the reliability of our measures in the next subsection.

Panel C of [Table I](#) provides descriptive statistics for formal institutions, as well as for an aggregate measure of formal institutions. Our set of formal institutions include corporate leadership, corporate governance, the finance function, the human resources function, and incentive compensation. The formal institutions are extracted from question 13 which asks “do the following items reinforce or work against the effectiveness of your corporate culture?” (Human resources is part of question 6.) A score of one indicates a formal institution that reinforces an effective corporate

culture, a score of zero indicates no effect, and a score of negative one indicates works against effective culture. We note that leadership plays a prominent role in determining the effectiveness of corporate culture: Nearly two-thirds of respondents indicate that leadership reinforces and effective culture, while nearly one-fifth indicate that leadership works against the firm’s corporate culture being effective.

Panel D of [Table I](#) provides descriptive statistics about corporate outcomes grouped by ethics, innovation, and productivity/value, as well as aggregate outcome measures. The responses stem from question 14 which asks, “To what extent does the corporate culture at your firm affect the following items:” where a score of 4 = big effect, 3 = moderate effect, 2 = little effect, and 1 = no effect. In addition, we include one outcome from the demographic question, “How important is meeting or beating earnings at your firm?” The ethics outcomes includes compliance, tax aggressiveness, quality of financial reporting, and importance of meeting or beating earnings. The innovation outcomes include creativity and project risk. The productivity and firm value outcomes include firm value, profitability, and productivity. The aggregate for all outcomes is the simple average of the ethics, innovation, and productivity/firm value outcomes.

C. Econometric Issues and Validation of Measures

Before analyzing the data, we evaluate the quality of the survey responses and consider related econometric issues. In particular, we examine the extent to which measurement error, selection, multicollinearity, and the “halo” effect may alter our inferences about the relationship between culture and performance.

Measurement error. Survey data potentially suffer from multiple sources of measurement error that could bias the association of firm outcomes with corporate culture toward zero. First, measurement error in the construction of our data could occur if respondents do not understand the question. To avoid such errors, 12 individuals including academic experts, regulators, culture consultants, and one professional expert on survey design vetted the instrument. In addition, we analyze 20 beta tests of the survey and modify the wording of a few questions accordingly. To test for this type of measurement error more explicitly, we compare responses that both completed the

survey and spoke to us at-length in an interview. We find a strong correlation between the survey responses and interview responses. Finally, our sample includes repeat observations from 18 firms where more than one corporate executive responds. While it is hard to make inferences from such a small sample size, to the extent that our survey is truly measuring the corporate culture, these measure should correlate. We find a strong pairwise correlation between the multiple responses among the repeat firms.

A second type of measurement error could occur if the cultural values and social norms we include in the survey are a subset of all the relevant cultural values and social norms. While we attempt to include the cultural values and social norms that theory predicts are most relevant, we may exclude other relevant choices. A potential test of this type of error involves studying both aggregated and disaggregated results. When such tests produce similar inferences, it suggests the values and norms included on the survey are a meaningful proxy. Moreover, if the firm’s cultural characteristics are correlated, which they are in the 16 cultural values and norms that we examine, then our aggregate measures will serve as a representative proxy of the firm’s true cultural values and norms. Appendix [Table CI](#) shows the correlation matrix for our measures. In addition, for respondents are allowed to write in norms beyond those we list (and the cultural value question is entirely open-ended), and we do not detect any frequently mentioned choices we might have missed.

In addition, we cross-validate our cultural measures by examining the industry break-down. [Table II](#) shows that the measures of culture we construct appear to vary intuitively across industries. For example, technology firms exhibit high levels of adaptability and the community ideals that millennials embrace, whereas healthcare firm cultural values are tied more closely to collaboration and integrity. When we look at the breakdown by the firm’s competitive position within industry, we see firms that are industry leaders and near-leaders, on average, exhibit significantly higher scores for cultural values and norms than those firms in the middle of the pack.

A third type of possible measurement error concerns whether the presentation of the questions could bias respondents’ answers (e.g., [Bertrand and Mullainathan \(2001\)](#)). One advantage of on-line administration is the ability to randomly scramble the order of choices within a question, so as to mitigate potential order-of-presentation effects. Specifically, the survey scrambles the order

of answers in the questions used to construct our measures of social norms (Q6), formal institutions (Q13), and business outcomes (Q14). In addition, we include several questions about cultural values, social norms, and formal institutions that rephrase and reframe issues of interest. These additional questions help us to remove noise in the data attributable to potential respondent behavioral biases. Finally, we include a range of “noise” controls in all of our regression specifications that attempt to capture the potential for systematic bias in the survey data. They include the date of survey response, response delay, job title, and source of email (i.e., Duke, Columbia, *CFO* magazine).

Selection. Selection may alter statistical inferences when data are not gathered via randomization or quasi-random assignment. In our context, selection will be present if those who respond to the survey are those that “drank the kool-aid” on culture versus those that engage in “cheap talk” about culture. If the extent of selection is pervasive, then inferences from our sample of executives are unlikely to generalize to a representative sample of firms. From a survey design standpoint, we mitigate this concern with a mix of hypothetical and real questions. Prior research suggests the two type of questions complement each other, allowing the researcher to uncover an unbiased response with the appropriate statistical techniques ([Harrison \(2014\)](#)).

We also conduct several tests to explore the extent of selection in our data. First, because one of our email lists includes respondents that regularly participate in the Duke quarterly survey of CFOs, we compare the responses of executives that routinely responds to that survey to those that occasionally respond and also to respondents from another email list. We find no statistical difference across these sampling frames, which suggests minimal selection. Second, we test the time to response to see if it suggests differences. On one hand, those that respond early to the survey may be very enthusiastic about the topic of culture. On the other hand, those that respond closer to the end of the open window may be more negative and want to get their final word in on culture. [Figure 3](#) shows a bar graph of the mean response to Question 1 (“how important is corporate culture”) broken down by the number of days from the initial survey invitation to when the survey is completed. The dashed blue line shows the mean response across all observations. Unreported joint F-tests show that the responses are statistically indistinguishable across days.

Third, we test for response differences by job title. Because the modal respondent in our survey is a CFO, we compare the responses of CFOs to non-CFOs in [Figure 3](#). The responses are statistically indistinguishable across job title for the four survey questions related to the value of corporate culture. In conclusion, while selection has the potential to be a problem in our data, we find no evidence that it is a significant issue.

Multicollinearity. Multicollinearity can limit the validity of statistical inferences when two or more independent variables are highly correlated. Multicollinearity can inflate the variance, leading analysis to fail to reject the null hypotheses of no effect too often because the standard errors are so large. Common approaches to deal with multicollinearity include aggregating variables to reduce the number of highly correlated variables and data dimension reduction techniques such as principal components analysis or factor analysis. While data dimension techniques are useful for reducing the number of independent variables to a smaller set of orthogonal variables, the reduction exercise is purely statistical. Using such an approach, it is possible that a cultural value such as integrity could be combined with a cultural norm such as organic idea creation because the linear combination of the two explains the most variance. Such a combination does not jive with intuition or theory regarding how specific norms and values connect. To avoid such problems, we rely on aggregating across variables. This allows us to use theory to guide which variables to combine when reducing the dimension in the data. We note the approach of using the mean to aggregate across many variables has been used successfully in prior field studies (e.g., [Bloom and Van Reenen \(2007\)](#); [Bloom, Sadun, and Van Reenen \(2012\)](#)).

Halo effect. The “halo effect” can arise when there is carry-over in judgment from one survey question to the next. For example, a respondent’s sentiment from answering question one may lead him to answer question two in a different way than if he answered question two in isolation. This halo effect could manifest itself econometrically as classical measurement error and lead to attenuation bias in the coefficient estimate. For example, if an executive’s response to question two is always δ more positive when her answer to question one is positive. In this sense, measurement error produces an errors-in-variables problem. It is possible, however, to uncover the true response when the true response has a functional relationship with the observed response, such as in the

observed response equals true response plus δ example.

To address this potential problem, we include as a control the response to a question that, though containing the halo effect, in theory is orthogonal to the questions about the firm’s current corporate culture. We note [Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales \(2015\)](#) adopt a similar procedure in their study of cultural values. Specifically, we use Q11, which is a hypothetical question about a potential M&A deal. The question asks, “You work at a firm with an effective, strong culture. You are evaluating two acquisition targets, A and B. A and B would bring the same strategic and operational benefits if acquired, and the targets are identical in all dimensions except corporate culture. Company A’s culture is very aligned with your firm’s culture, whereas company B’s culture is not at all aligned. Relative to how much you would offer for A, how much less would you offer for company B due to the culture misalignment?”

III. Corporate Culture and Firm Performance

A. *Summary of survey responses.*

Having established reasonable variation in our measures of corporate culture, we now proceed to examine the survey responses directly. [Table III](#) summarizes the four survey questions linking culture to firm value. The first question, “how important is corporate culture at your firm?” reveals that 91% of survey respondents consider corporate culture to be “very important” or “important” at their firms. This result is corroborated by responses to the next question, “in terms of all of the things that make your firm valuable, where would you place corporate culture?” A majority of respondents consider culture to be among the “top 3” factors affecting firm value and 79% of respondents rank culture as at least a “top 5” contributor. In another question, 92% of executives believe that improving corporate culture would increase their firm’s value.

Our interviews help to explain why so many of our 1,348 North American executives believe culture is important for firm value. As one interviewee said, “culture can be described as foundational. It is the most important thing because in some ways it can influence your ability to come to solutions to all the unknown problems and challenges that you will face from inception to growth.”

Another executive echoed that, “culture is the foundation of all companies, and can make or break the success of a company.”

While the responses to the first three survey questions in [Table III](#) indicate a strong positive association between culture and firm value, our final question explores value effects in a hypothetical setting: “You work at a firm with an effective, strong culture. You are evaluating two acquisition targets, A and B. A and B would bring the same strategic and operational benefits if acquired, and the targets are identical in all dimensions except corporate culture. Company A’s culture is very aligned with your firm’s culture, whereas company B’s culture is not at all aligned. Relative to how much you would offer for A, how much less would you offer for company B due to the culture misalignment?”

We find cultural fit in M&A deals is so important that 54% of executives would walk away from culturally misaligned target, while another 22% of respondents would discount the offer price for the culturally misaligned target by 20% or more. At least in the M&A context, this indicates that the valuation effect of culture is large.

The interviews offer insight into why executives would walk away from acquisitions lacking cultural fit: “we would test for cultural fit. If the gap is wide enough it does not matter if it is a great price. We won’t move forward.” Another manager put it this way: “I would definitely pay more for the company whose culture is closer. Less friction and assimilation cost, we can get it all done easier, faster and at lower cost.” When we asked how cultural fit is tested, one executive responded, “we had a checklist set of questions that we would ask about the elements of the culture and we would compare them with the key elements of our culture. For example, we would look for strong focus on customer, high levels of integrity, open door communication and so on ... among a list of 10-12 items.”

While transactions involving the boundary of the firm highlight the value of culture, theory indicates that corporate culture also affects firm value via routine corporate actions. To understand the variety of actions potentially impacted by culture, [Table IV](#) summarizes six survey questions that link culture to employees’ actions. They explore risk-taking, short-termism, ethics, and earnings management.

The first question in Table IV, “Do you think your company takes the right amount of risk in its investments to achieve its goals?” reveals that that 60% believe that their firms take on the “right amount or risk, 29% believe their firms take too little risk, and 11% believe that their firms take too much risk. In a follow-up question, we asked respondents whether their culture was a “very important,” “important,” “somewhat,” or “not a reason” that their firm takes on that amount of risk. 55% of respondents thought culture played an important or very important role in their risk decisions. While a strong positive association between risk decisions and culture could be attributable to a third common factor, the follow-up question suggests a direct link between culture and actions. (Later, we link the willingness to take on risky investments to corporate innovation.)

The next question in Table IV examines the role of culture in long-term vs. short-term decision-making. This hypothetical question asks respondents to choose between two otherwise identical projects with a five year duration. Project A has a greater NPV but reports negative cash flows for the first two years whereas B reports positive cash flows throughout the duration. A surprising 41% of respondents said they would choose the NPV inferior project. In a follow-up question, four-out-of-five of the 59% who choose the project with the greater NPV say culture plays a role in their preference for the greater NPV project. This result further supports the directional link from culture to action suggested by the risk question.

Theory predicts that culture is likely to have its strongest effect over actions that cannot properly be regulated ex ante. To explore this possibility, we ask whether an ineffective culture can lead to unethical behavior: “do you think having a poorly implemented/ineffective culture at a company increases the chances that an employee would do something unethical (or even illegal)?” Table IV shows that a surprising 85% of respondents indicate that “yes”, ineffective corporate culture can lead to unethical behavior.

The final question in Table IV explores end-of-quarter earnings management: “sometimes companies engage in end-of-quarter practices such as delaying valuable projects in order to hit market expected earnings. How likely is it that an effective corporate culture would reduce the chance that such actions are taken?” 56% of executives believe that it is very likely or extremely likely that an effective corporate culture would reduce real earnings management. Only 19% of respondents

believe that an effective culture would not reduce real earnings management.

The interviews highlight specific channels that link corporate culture to firm performance. First, culture enhances firm performance because it enables superior execution. “Culture is very important because it allows you to execute. Culture is like the tendons and ligaments that hold the body together and allow it to be healthy as a body and execute daily.” Second, culture enhances firm performance through reduced agency costs. “When corporate culture is working at its best, it reduces dramatically the agency costs within an organization because you have an invisible hand at work inside of each of the employees that helps to guide their decisions and judgments in a way that the overall corporation would desire it to be.”

Third, executives highlight that culture can circumvent mistakes in a way that other executive actions, formal institutions, or corporate assets cannot. They provide comparisons to other factors typically thought of as critical for superior performance. Many executives believe culture contributes more to firm value than strategy does. For example, a company perform better with a strong culture and weak strategy but not the other way around: “culture helps even if you don’t have a great strategy and you’re not communicating well because culture helps tremendously to make sure that you are continuing to do the right things for the company in the long run.” Another CFO says that culture adds more to market value than the finance function. He believes a good finance function can contribute 20% added market value if it’s done right and that a strong culture can add 20-30% to market value.

B. Regression evidence that links culture to business outcomes.

The responses in the previous two tables indicate executives believe that corporate culture affects firm value and corporate decisions. We now use regression analysis to explore whether firm value and performance are tied to effective corporate culture and if so, whether the channel by which this occurs is via cultural values, social norms, and/or formal institutions (as discussed in [Section I](#)).

We start in [Table V](#) using OLS regressions to explore the channels by which specific values and norms affect specific outcomes. Following the banking and technology examples introduced

in [Section I](#), we focus on *Compliance* as a specific ethics outcome and *Creativity* as specific innovation outcome. Panel A of [Table V](#) presents results from regressing the *Compliance* outcome on explanatory variables that include all of the cultural values, social norms, and formal institutions, plus various control variables. The presented results in Columns (1) and (2) are for the cultural values and norms that intuition and theory suggests most closely link to ethical outcomes. We find significant evidence that firms with an integrity value accompanied by social norms that express integrity (willingness to report unethical behavior, trust among employees, decision-making that reflects the long-term, the actions of employees are consistent and predictable) are likely to have a cultural effect that is significantly greater for compliance.

The specifications in Columns (1) and (2) of [Table V](#) include a host of control variables. In particular, Column (2) attempts to correct for the potential error-in-variables problem that could be introduced via the halo effect. Including the controls weaken the results slightly, but integrity, decision-making that reflects the long-term, and willingness to report unethical behavior all remain significant at the 5% level. Overall, Panel A indicates that, while firms with cultures that are more effective may have better overall performance, they are particularly good at achieving compliance when they have an integrity value and norms that express that value.

Panel B in [Table V](#) shows results from regressing the *Creativity* outcome on the full set of cultural values, social norms, and formal institutions as well as various control variables. We present the coefficient estimates for the values and norms intuition and theory most closely tie to innovation outcomes. We find a significantly positive association between creativity and the adaptability value (as expected) and a negative association with a results-oriented value. Said differently, this is consistent with firms that value the ability to change to fit new circumstances fostering creativity, while valuing bottom-line results may reduce creativity. The norms that are associated with creativity are employee comfort in suggesting critiques, new ideas develop organically, and the urgency with which employees work. Organic idea creation has the most pronounced effect on creativity and strengthens in magnitude and statistical significance as additional controls are added.

By finding that creativity (one measure of innovation) is positively associated with the cultural value of adaptability and the social norm of new ideas develop organically, and then, finding com-

pliance (one measure of ethics) is associated with the value of integrity and the social norm of willingness to report unethical behavior, we have confidence that the data we collect is capturing what we are trying to measure with regards to culture. Given the data produce patterns that conform to intuition, we turn to the broader question – do cultural values and social norms affect business outcomes.

In [Table VI](#) we use OLS regressions with dependent variables that measure business outcomes broadly, which we describe in [Section II](#) and use to improve statistical inference by reducing data dimensionality. The dependent variable in Column (1) measures an aggregation of all outcomes (see [Appendix B](#) for variable definitions), while in columns (2) through (4) the dependent variable aggregates, respectively, ethical, innovation, and productivity/value outcomes separately. The key explanatory variables are also aggregate measures of cultural values and social norms. As additional explanatory variables, we include formal institutions, noise controls, demographic controls, and additional question controls.

As we report in Panel A of [Table VI](#), social norms are an important channel by which corporate culture affects business outcomes. The coefficient estimates for aggregate social norms are positive and significant at the 1% level in all columns. The economic magnitude of the point estimate is similar across ethical, innovation, and productivity/value outcomes. In contrast to the social norms results, there is little evidence that simply having cultural values enhance business outcomes. The statistical evidence is consistent with the theoretical prediction that having cultural values is a necessary but not sufficient condition for maximum corporate performance. Moreover, the results support our argument that selecting cultural values in isolation, even when the values are advertised and the firm is tracking the values that are stated, are not as effective as when the day-to-day living of those values (that is, social norms) is functioning properly.

In Panel B of [Table VI](#), we test for this complementarity between selected cultural values and the norms that express them on a day-to-day basis more explicitly by allowing for values to interact with norms. The evidence strongly supports the conclusion that the norms that express and reinforce the selected cultural values to enhance performance. The coefficient estimate on the interaction term is positive and significant at the 1% level in all columns. The coefficient on the

social norms term also remain positive and significant at the 1% level in all columns. Overall, these findings support the conclusion that broadly speaking cultural values and norms have an important impact on business outcomes.

C. Regression evidence on cultural effectiveness.

One can think of a two-step process for corporate culture to affect business outcomes. First, cultural values, social norms, and formal institutions combine to create an effective culture. Second, effective culture affects business outcomes. Our next set of results present evidence on these two steps. In Panel A of [Table VII](#), we use OLS regressions with dependent variables that measure business outcomes broadly, which we describe in [Section II](#) and use to improve statistical inference by reducing data dimensionality. This time we regress survey responses that explore whether having an effective corporate culture affects corporate outcomes. The results suggest that the implementation of the selected cultural values into an effective corporate culture is what affects outcomes.

In Panel B [Table VII](#), we regress survey responses to whether a respondent’s firm has an effective culture on aggregate values, norms, and formal institutions. Column (1) shows that as a stand-alone variable, aggregate values are positively associated with the effectiveness of corporate culture. Columns (2) and (3) show similar results for social norms and formal institutions, respectively. Column (4) of [Table VII](#) includes values, norms, and formal institutions in the same specification. In this specification, cultural values lose their economic and statistical significance but norms and formal institutions remain significant and positively associated with effectiveness. Finally, in column (5), we include values, norms, and formal institutions as stand-alone variables, and we also include formal institutions separately interacted with values and norms. The idea is that formal institutions such as governance may reinforce or work against the values and norms. The negative coefficient for values interacted with formal institutions is consistent with formal institutions working more as substitutes than complements with informal institutions (and in particular, with cultural values).

Having used aggregate variables to establish broadly that norms and formal institutions are associated with the effectiveness of corporate culture, we now use disaggregated measures to explore

more specific channels. The specification in [Table VIII](#) regresses whether a firm’s current culture is effective on the various values, norms, and formal institution variables. Column (1) through (3) show the explanatory power of these values, norms, and formal institutions in isolation. Columns (4) and (5) combine the values, norms, and formal institutions into the same regression. [Table VIII](#) shows that the norms and values suggested by theory (and described in [Section I](#)) have a strong positive association with cultural effectiveness. Integrity is the more pronounced cultural value while consistency and predictability of action is the more pronounced social norm. On the formal institutions side, leadership has the most pronounced role.

The evidence in [Table VII](#) and [Table VIII](#) supports our hypothesis that formal institutions play a significant role in the development of values and norms and ultimately in the effectiveness of the culture. Because our evidence suggests formal institutions alter the cultural values selected and the alignment with the selected values in aggregate, a natural next question is what values are most affected and how. In the next set of regressions, we return to our two specific examples of compliance and creativity to understand in more detail what formal institutions are doing. Overall, our findings that formal institutions such as corporate governance, the finance function, human resources, incentive compensation, and leadership play an important role in determining cultural effectiveness and ultimately firm outcomes is supported by prior research. Our work is consistent with recent econometric work looking at the important influence corporate governance has on corporate culture and that compensation has on corporate culture.

D. Economic implications.

A common argument is that variations in corporate culture lead to both huge successes and major failures. Since there are reasons to believe the effects of culture may differ between firms with more effective and less effective cultures, we use quantile regression techniques to investigate this hypotheses. In particular, we are interested in knowing if the strong positive association we report between culture and firm outcomes, on average, is being driven by tail events or if cultural values and norms matter across the full distribution. Quantile regression provides a way to test this hypothesis. Unlike OLS regression, where the coefficients represent the conditional mean of the

outcome variable given the independent variables selected, quantile regression provides coefficients estimates for the independent variables at specific quantiles of the outcome variable. That is, we estimate a model in which quantiles of the conditional distribution of the outcome variable are expressed as functions of the observed independent variables (e.g., see [Koenker and Hallock \(2001\)](#)).

Table IX investigates the relationship between firm outcomes and culture away from the mean using the quantile regression approach. For this exercise, we focus on our composite measure that aggregates all firm outcomes including ethics, innovation, productivity and firm value related outcomes. Comparing firms at the median of the distribution of firm performance with firms at the 25th and 5th percentile of the distribution of firm performance, we see that social norms play a much more pronounced role for firms in the bottom of the distribution. In contrast, comparing firms at the median of the distribution of firm performance to firms at the 75th and 95th percentiles of the distribution of the dependent variable, we see that social norms plays a much smaller role for firms at the top of the distribution. The coefficient estimate is much more meaningful economically and statistically as one moves toward the lowest percentiles of aggregate firm outcomes. F -tests of the equality of the coefficient estimate on cultural norms across the different quantile regressions are rejected at the 5% level of significance.

IV. Conclusion

Corporate culture is perhaps the most under-researched value driver among the important contributors to firm performance. The first contribution of our field study is to quantify the value of culture and its influence on employee decisions. 91% of executives believe culture is important to their firms and 79% place culture among the top 3 or the top 5 value drivers of their company. 54% of executives would just walk away from an acquisition target that is a cultural misfit or while another 33% would require discounts between 10%-30% of the purchase price of the target. Culture influences a wide range of financial decisions such as investment and risk-taking. For example, 59% of executives do not choose to maximize NPV when NPV superior investment requires short-term challenges (negative cash flows) and 80% indicate this short-termism is driven by culture. Similarly, 55% believe culture is an important force behind their firm's chosen level of investment risk. Culture

influences actions that are hard to contract on, such as ethical decisions. An overwhelming 84% of executives believe an ineffective culture increases the chances that an employee might act unethically or illegally.

A second contribution of our field study is to start to provide data infrastructure for the analysis of culture across firms. Despite many theoretical advances, the empirical literature on corporate culture is still developing. We gather a large, comprehensive database of survey responses and use the questions to construct measures of corporate culture (values and social norms), firm outcomes for three general categories (ethics, innovation, and productivity/firm value), and formal institutions (e.g., governance, compensation). A key finding of our paper is that stated cultural values, even among firms that track those values, do not by themselves guarantee a successful outcome. Rather, cultural values must be complemented by social norms that dictate actual behavior. We also find strong evidence that formal institutions can either reinforce or work against cultural values and norms. Finally, our evidence shows the impact of culture is most pervasive for firms at the low end of the performance distribution.

While economists are increasingly aware of the importance of corporate culture (e.g., [Edmans \(2011\)](#); [Bloom, Sadun, and Van Reenen \(2012\)](#); [Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales \(2015\)](#)), limited empirical work exists on the topic, in part because it is difficult to measure. Before we started this project, we thought culture might be too amorphous to quantify. Then in the interviews we heard loudly and repeatedly, how important culture is, especially from CFOs who are typically the numbers people and are one might think suspicious of hard-to-quantify aspects of the business environment. We believe that our paper conveys a powerful message that corporate culture does matter, a lot. We are aware that our study is just a first cut at this very difficult but important problem. But we believe the magnitude of the topic means it deserves substantial research going forward and we hope our paper helps build a bridge to enable such future work.

There are many future directions for work on corporate culture. One may be pinning down when formal institutions substitute for and when they complement the existent cultural values and norms. This could involve running field experiments that vary compensation or governance. Another may be to explain why 92% of executive believe improving firm culture would increase

firm value yet they also indicate that they significantly underinvest in culture. Recent work suggest a firm's investors play a role in this decision, but more theoretical and empirical work needs to be done to identify factors that contribute to successful cultural change as well as what tools that investors and executives could use to gauge the effectiveness of a firm's culture.

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Figures and Tables

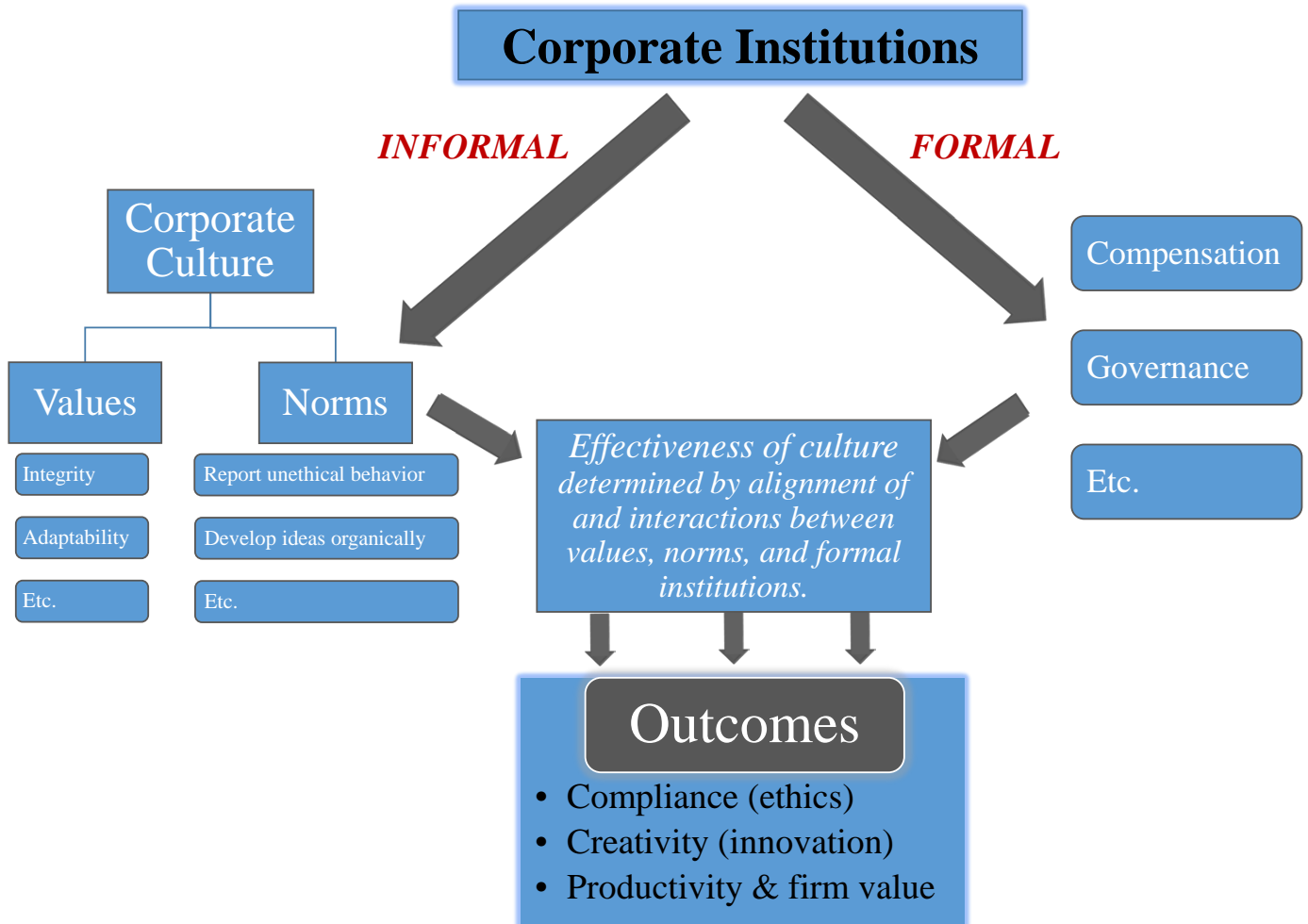
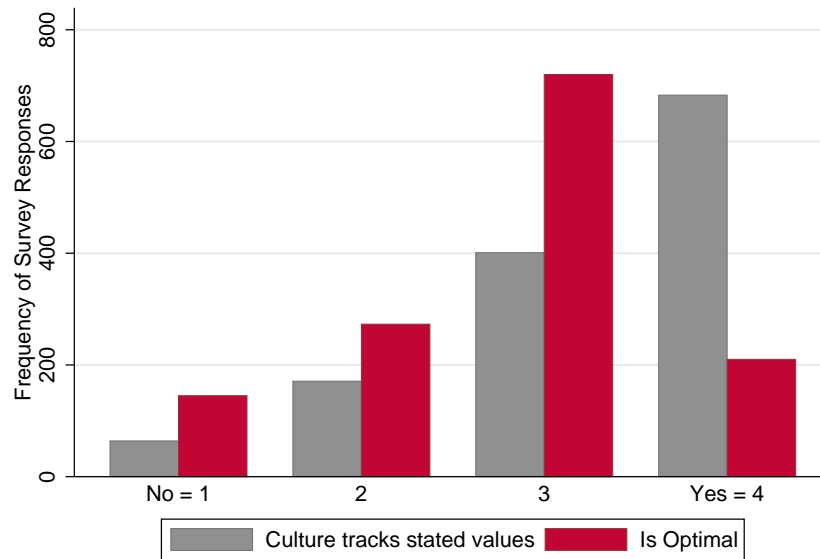
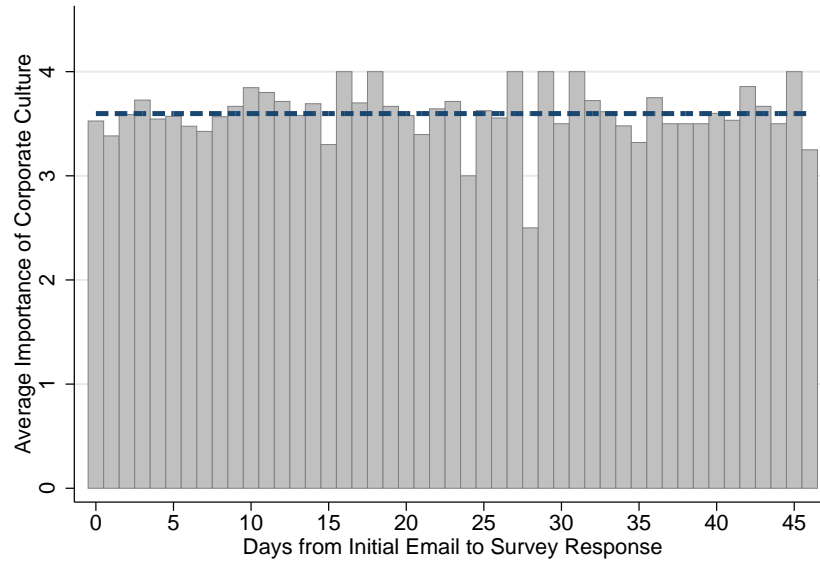


Figure 1. Diagram linking corporate culture to outcomes: According to North (1991), institutions can be classified as informal and formal. We define corporate culture as an informal institution comprised of values and social norms. The values and social norms characterize the incentive structure in place that guides employees' actions when they face unforeseen contingencies. A cultural value represents an ideal state of behavior such as adaptability or integrity. Social norms are the day-to-day living out of the cultural values via the typical patterns of conduct. An effective culture is one that promotes the behaviors needed to successfully execute the firm's strategies and achieve its goals and it is determined by alignment of and interactions between values, norms, and formal institutions.

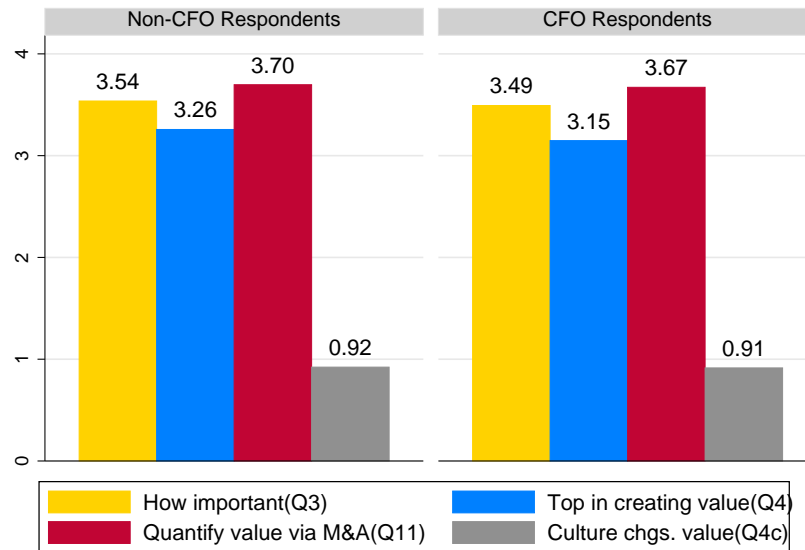


Source: 1348 survey responses from executives at public and private North American firms.

Figure 2. Stated values and current corporate culture: The histogram shows the frequency of responses to Q4 (see [Appendix A](#)), “How closely does your current corporate culture track with your stated firm values?” where 1 = Not at all, 2 = Not very closely, 3 = Somewhat, and 4 = Very closely and Q4b, “Our firm’s corporate culture:” where 1 = Needs a substantial overhaul, 2 = Needs considerable work to get to where it should be, 3 = Needs some work but is close to where it should be, and 4 = Is exactly where it should be.” The sample is limited to survey responses from executives at public and private North American firms.



Source: 1348 survey responses from executives at public and private North American firms.



Graphs by Job Title

Figure 3. Reliability of culture measures: The top plot shows a histogram of the mean response to Q2, “How important do you believe corporate culture is at your firm?” where 1 = not important, 2 = somewhat important, 3 = important, 4 = very important. The x-axis represents the delay in days from when the initial survey email is sent to when the survey is filled out. The dashed blue line shows the mean response across all observations. The responses are statistically indistinguishable across days. The sample is limited to survey responses from executives at public and private North American firms. The bottom plot is a bar graph of the four survey questions related to the value of corporate culture. Each bar represents the mean response by job title where respondents are separated into CFO respondents and non-CFO respondents. The responses are statistically indistinguishable across job title.

Table I Corporate Culture Summary Statistics

This table shows summary statistics of the values (Panel A) and norms (Panel B) that comprise corporate culture as well as formal institutions (Panel C). Later tables explore the the effect of culture on three different types of business outcomes (Panel D). The sample is limited to survey responses from executives at public and private North American firms. For a detailed description of each variable, see [Appendix B](#).

| | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---|------------------------|------|------|------|-----------|-----------|--------|------|
| Cultural values from Q1 "Briefly, what words or phrases best describe the current corporate culture at your firm?" -1 = Opposite value, 0 = No mention of value, 1 = Stated value | | | | | | | | | |
| Panel A. Cultural values | | Percent of respondents | | | | | | | |
| | Obs. | -1 | 0 | 1 | Mean | Std. dev. | Median | | |
| | Adaptability | 1348 | 7% | 72% | 21% | 0.13 | 0.51 | 0 | |
| | Collaboration | 1348 | 8% | 68% | 24% | 0.16 | 0.55 | 0 | |
| | Community | 1348 | 6% | 62% | 32% | 0.26 | 0.55 | 0 | |
| | Customer-oriented | 1348 | 0% | 84% | 16% | 0.16 | 0.37 | 0 | |
| | Detail-oriented | 1348 | 1% | 91% | 7% | 0.06 | 0.29 | 0 | |
| | Integrity | 1348 | 1% | 81% | 18% | 0.17 | 0.40 | 0 | |
| | Results-oriented | 1348 | 2% | 72% | 26% | 0.24 | 0.47 | 0 | |
| | Agg. cultural values | 1348 | | N.A. | | 0.17 | 0.21 | 0.14 | |
| Social normsfrom Q6, "In the context of your firm's current culture, please indicate which factors determine the effectiveness of your culture." -1 = Works against, 0 = No effect, 1 = Key factor | | | | | | | | | |
| Panel B. Social norms | | Percent of respondents | | | | | | | |
| | Obs. | -1 | 0 | 1 | Mean | Std. dev. | Median | | |
| | Agreement about goals and values | 1348 | 8% | 30% | 62% | 0.54 | 0.64 | 1 | |
| | Consistency and predictability of actions | 1348 | 8% | 45% | 47% | 0.39 | 0.63 | 0 | |
| | Coordination among employees | 1348 | 10% | 23% | 67% | 0.57 | 0.66 | 1 | |
| | Decision-making reflects long-term | 1348 | 10% | 27% | 63% | 0.53 | 0.67 | 1 | |
| | Employees comfort in suggesting critiques | 1348 | 13% | 33% | 54% | 0.42 | 0.71 | 1 | |
| | New ideas develop organically | 1348 | 8% | 41% | 52% | 0.44 | 0.63 | 1 | |
| | Trust among employees | 1348 | 9% | 15% | 76% | 0.68 | 0.63 | 1 | |
| | Urgency with which employees work | 1348 | 12% | 39% | 49% | 0.37 | 0.69 | 0 | |
| Willingness to report unethical behavior | 1348 | 7% | 44% | 49% | 0.42 | 0.62 | 0 | | |
| Agg. social norms | 1348 | | N.A. | | 0.48 | 0.43 | 0.56 | | |
| Formal institutions from Q6/Q13, "Do the following items reinforce or work against the effectiveness of your corporate culture." -1 = Works against, 0 = No impact, 1 = Reinforces | | | | | | | | | |
| Panel C. Formal insitutions | | Percent of respondents | | | | | | | |
| | Obs. | -1 | 0 | 1 | Mean | Std. dev. | Median | | |
| | Corporate governance | 1348 | 9% | 42% | 48% | 0.39 | 0.65 | 0 | |
| | Corporate leadership | 1348 | 17% | 18% | 65% | 0.48 | 0.77 | 1 | |
| | Finance function | 1348 | 7% | 50% | 43% | 0.36 | 0.61 | 0 | |
| | Hiring, firing, and promotion | 1348 | 13% | 35% | 52% | 0.38 | 0.71 | 1 | |
| | Incentive compensation | 1348 | 17% | 33% | 50% | 0.32 | 0.75 | 0 | |
| Agg. formal institutions | 1348 | | N.A. | | 0.08 | 0.65 | 0.10 | | |
| Firm outcomes extracted from Q14, "To what extent does the corporate culture at your firm affect the following items:" 1 = No Effect, 2 = Little effect, 3 = Moderate effect 4 = Big effect | | | | | | | | | |
| Panel D. Firm outcomes | | Percent of respondents | | | | | | | |
| | Obs. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Mean | Std. dev. | Median | |
| | Compliance | 1119 | 9% | 14% | 30% | 47% | 3.15 | 0.97 | 3 |
| | Tax aggressiveness | 1020 | 32% | 32% | 25% | 10% | 2.14 | 0.99 | 2 |
| | Quality of our financial reporting | 1118 | 10% | 21% | 33% | 36% | 2.94 | 0.99 | 3 |
| | Rescale beat EPS | 302 | 11% | 29% | 60% | 57% | 3.24 | 1.03 | 4 |
| | Aggregate ethics | 1152 | | N.A. | | | 2.80 | 0.77 | 3.00 |
| | Creativity | 1136 | 2% | 9% | 32% | 57% | 3.43 | 0.76 | 4 |
| | Project risk | 1129 | 5% | 11% | 43% | 41% | 3.21 | 0.82 | 3 |
| | Aggregate innovation | 1150 | | N.A. | | | 3.32 | 0.61 | 3.50 |
| | Firm value | 1124 | 3% | 8% | 31% | 57% | 3.43 | 0.78 | 4 |
| | Profitability | 1137 | 1% | 8% | 36% | 54% | 3.44 | 0.69 | 4 |
| | Productivity | 1126 | 1% | 8% | 29% | 62% | 3.51 | 0.70 | 4 |
| | Agg. productivity & value outcomes | 1153 | | N.A. | | | 3.46 | 0.54 | 3.67 |
| | Agg. all outcomes | 1162 | | N.A. | | | 3.20 | 0.46 | 3.22 |

Table II Corporate Culture by Industry

This table provides descriptive statistics of the values and norms that comprise corporate culture by industry. Columns (1) through (6) display the mean response from executives in the specific industries for which we had at least 50 responses. Columns (7) through (10) display the mean response from executives conditional on their competitive position in the industry. The sample is limited to survey responses from executives at public and private North American firms. For a detailed description of each variable, see the definitions in [Appendix B](#).

| | Specific Industry | | | | | | Competitive Position in Industry | | | |
|---|-------------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|--------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| | Finance (1) | Health (2) | Manu. (3) | Retail (4) | Services (5) | Tech. (6) | Leader (7) | Among Leading (8) | Middle of Pack (9) | Challenger (10) |
| <i><u>Cultural values</u></i> | | | | | | | | | | |
| Adaptability | 0.16 | 0.19 | 0.07 | 0.02 | 0.19 | 0.30 | 0.21 | 0.12 | 0.07 | 0.22 |
| Collaboration | 0.21 | 0.00 | 0.14 | 0.08 | 0.32 | 0.21 | 0.21 | 0.23 | 0.04 | 0.13 |
| Community | 0.23 | 0.19 | 0.31 | 0.30 | 0.23 | 0.41 | 0.33 | 0.31 | 0.18 | 0.30 |
| Customer-oriented | 0.18 | 0.19 | 0.19 | 0.22 | 0.23 | 0.14 | 0.16 | 0.20 | 0.11 | 0.17 |
| Detail-oriented | 0.01 | 0.08 | 0.12 | -0.01 | 0.13 | 0.06 | 0.08 | 0.07 | 0.04 | 0.07 |
| Integrity | 0.21 | 0.10 | 0.19 | 0.13 | 0.21 | 0.13 | 0.17 | 0.19 | 0.11 | 0.15 |
| Results-oriented | 0.25 | 0.24 | 0.32 | 0.19 | 0.24 | 0.24 | 0.27 | 0.27 | 0.16 | 0.25 |
| <i><u>Social norms</u></i> | | | | | | | | | | |
| Agreement about goals and values | 0.58 | 0.66 | 0.52 | 0.62 | 0.59 | 0.52 | 0.67 | 0.61 | 0.40 | 0.53 |
| Consistency and predictability of actions | 0.45 | 0.53 | 0.41 | 0.28 | 0.43 | 0.32 | 0.46 | 0.45 | 0.33 | 0.38 |
| Coordination among employees | 0.53 | 0.55 | 0.64 | 0.58 | 0.72 | 0.68 | 0.65 | 0.67 | 0.46 | 0.65 |
| Decision-making reflects long-term | 0.52 | 0.52 | 0.55 | 0.53 | 0.61 | 0.52 | 0.66 | 0.60 | 0.39 | 0.56 |
| Employees comfort in suggesting critiques | 0.36 | 0.55 | 0.38 | 0.37 | 0.57 | 0.57 | 0.52 | 0.45 | 0.28 | 0.55 |
| New ideas develop organically | 0.36 | 0.47 | 0.40 | 0.41 | 0.67 | 0.53 | 0.52 | 0.47 | 0.28 | 0.61 |
| Trust among employees | 0.73 | 0.76 | 0.67 | 0.65 | 0.77 | 0.80 | 0.82 | 0.75 | 0.56 | 0.74 |
| Urgency with which employees work | 0.31 | 0.31 | 0.44 | 0.40 | 0.46 | 0.45 | 0.43 | 0.42 | 0.29 | 0.45 |
| Willingness to report unethical behavior | 0.58 | 0.56 | 0.49 | 0.33 | 0.43 | 0.39 | 0.52 | 0.48 | 0.34 | 0.41 |
| <i><u>Aggregate cultural measures</u></i> | | | | | | | | | | |
| Agg. cultural values | 0.43 | 0.37 | 0.41 | 0.30 | 0.44 | 0.42 | 0.45 | 0.45 | 0.23 | 0.35 |
| Agg. social norms | 0.21 | 0.18 | 0.21 | 0.14 | 0.30 | 0.28 | 0.28 | 0.26 | 0.06 | 0.25 |
| Track stated values | 3.39 | 3.21 | 3.28 | 3.16 | 3.51 | 3.38 | 3.50 | 3.40 | 2.90 | 3.32 |
| Effective culture | 2.82 | 2.69 | 2.70 | 2.58 | 3.02 | 2.90 | 2.91 | 2.87 | 2.37 | 2.83 |
| Observations | 174 | 62 | 191 | 111 | 150 | 105 | 258 | 484 | 227 | 128 |

Table III The Value of Corporate Culture

This table provides descriptive statistics on the value placed on corporate culture by surveyed executives. The sample is limited to survey responses from executives at public and private North American firms. The question is listed along with the percentage of responses in each category. For details on all survey questions, please see the example survey in [Appendix A](#).

| Q2, "How important do you believe corporate culture is at your firm?" | | | | | | | |
|---|------|-----------|--------|-------------------------|------------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| Obs. | Mean | Std. dev. | Median | 1 = Not important | 2 = Somewhat important | 3 = Important | 4 = Very important |
| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) |
| 1335 | 3.52 | 0.77 | 4 | 4.2% | 4.9% | 25.4% | 65.5% |

| Q3, "In terms of all of the things that make your firm valuable, where would you place corporate culture?" | | | | | | | |
|--|------|-----------|--------|-------------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|
| Obs. | Mean | Std. dev. | Median | 1 = Not in Top 10 | 2 = Top 10 | 3 = Top 5 | 4 = Top 3 |
| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) |
| 1345 | 3.22 | 1.00 | 4 | 10.0% | 11.5% | 25.0% | 53.5% |

| Q4c, "Do you believe that improving your corporate culture would increase your firm's value?" | | | | | |
|---|------|-----------|--------|-----------|------------|
| Obs. | Mean | Std. dev. | Median | 0 = No | 1 = Yes |
| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
| 1104 | 0.92 | 0.27 | 1 | 8.1% | 91.9% |

| Q11, "You work at a firm with an effective, strong culture. You are evaluating two acquisition targets, A and B. A and B would bring the same strategic and operational benefits if acquired, and the targets are identical in all dimensions except corporate culture. Company A's culture is very aligned with your firm's culture, whereas company B's culture is not at all aligned. Relative to how much you would offer for A, how much less would you offer for company B due to the culture misalignment?" | | | | | | | | | |
|--|------|-----------|--------|------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| Obs. | Mean | Std. dev. | Median | 0 = Same amt. | 1 = 5% discount | 2 = 10% discount | 3 = 20% discount | 4 = 30+% discount | 5 = No offer |
| 1000 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 1000 | 3.69 | 1.71 | 5 | 10.3% | 3.0% | 10.5% | 13.8% | 8.8% | 53.6% |

Table IV Actions Influenced by Corporate Culture

This table provides descriptive statistics on the value placed on corporate culture by surveyed executives. The sample is limited to survey responses from executives at public and private North American firms. The precise question is listed along with the percentage of responses in each category. For details on all survey questions, please see the example survey in [Appendix A](#).

| Q7, "Do you think your company takes the right amount of risk in its investments to achieve its goals?" | | | | | | |
|--|-------|-----------|--------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Obs. | Mean | Std. dev. | Median | -1 = No, too little risk | 0 = Yes, right amount | 1 = No, too much risk |
| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) |
| 1117 | -0.18 | 0.61 | 0 | 28.8% | 60.2% | 11.0% |

| Q7b, "Our corporate culture is a (fill in the blank) reason that our company takes on this amount of risk." | | | | | | | |
|--|------|-----------|--------|---------------------|------------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| Obs. | Mean | Std. dev. | Median | 1 = Not a reason | 2 = Somewhat important | 3 = Important | 4 = Very important |
| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) |
| 860 | 2.70 | 1.08 | 3 | 19.2% | 19.8% | 33.0% | 28.0% |

Q8, "Suppose your firm is considering two projects A and B:
•A and B are very similar in that they require the same capital up front, have the same expected life, and have the same probability of failure.
•A is more valuable than project B (A has greater NPV)
•A generates negative cash flows for the first two years, while B has positive cash flows in all years.
Assuming all cash flow forecasts are equally accurate, does your firm's culture make it more likely that project A or B will be chosen?"

| Obs. | Mean | Std. dev. | Median | 0 = Project B | 1 = Project A |
|------|------|-----------|--------|------------------|------------------|
| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
| 1025 | 0.59 | 0.49 | 1 | 40.6% | 59.4% |

Q8b, "Does the firm's culture pay a role in the preference for Project A?"

| Obs. | Mean | Std. dev. | Median | 0 = No | 1 = Yes |
|------|------|-----------|--------|-----------|------------|
| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
| 629 | 0.80 | 0.40 | 1 | 20.0% | 80.0% |

Q10, "Do you think having a poorly implemented/ineffective culture at a company increases the chances that an employee would do something unethical (or even illegal)?"

| Obs. | Mean | Std. dev. | Median | 0 = No | 1 = Yes |
|------|------|-----------|--------|-----------|------------|
| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
| 1126 | 0.85 | 0.36 | 1 | 15.5% | 84.5% |

Q12, "Sometimes companies engage in end-of-quarter practices such as delaying valuable projects in order to hit market expected earnings. How likely is it that an effective corporate culture would reduce the chance that such actions are taken?"

| Obs. | Mean | Std. dev. | Median | 1 = Not likely | 2 = Somewhat likely | 3 = Very likely | 4 = Extremely likely |
|------|------|-----------|--------|-------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) |
| 1103 | 2.55 | 1.00 | 3 | 18.9% | 25.6% | 36.7% | 18.8% |

Q12 limited to only public companies:

| | | | | | | | |
|-----|------|------|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 299 | 2.55 | 1.01 | 3 | 19.7% | 24.4% | 37.1% | 18.7% |
|-----|------|------|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|

Table V Do Values and Norms Affect Compliance and Creativity?

This table presents OLS estimates demonstrating an association between specific values and norms and firm outcomes. Panel A shows an example ethics outcomes (i.e., compliance) and Panel B shows an example innovation outcome (i.e., creativity). In Column (1) and (2), the key explanatory variables are the displayed values and norms. Additional explanatory variables include all other values, norms, and formal institutions, noise controls, and demographic controls. Column (2) includes our “halo effect” control (hypothetical Q11) and additional question controls (Q1, Q4, and Q4b). Standard errors are in parentheses under coefficient estimates; they are bootstrapped with 100 replications. For a detailed description of each variable, please see the definitions in [Appendix B](#). ***, ** and * indicate p -values of 1%, 5%, and 10%, respectively.

| | Dependent variable = | |
|---|----------------------|--------------------|
| | Compliance | |
| Panel A. Example Ethics Outcome | (1) | (2) |
| <u>Cultural values</u> | | |
| Integrity | 0.25*** (0.07) | 0.19** (0.10) |
| <u>Social norms</u> | | |
| Consistency and predictability of actions | 0.13*** (0.05) | 0.08 (0.06) |
| Decision-making reflects long-term | 0.11** (0.06) | 0.13** (0.07) |
| Trust among employees | 0.17*** (0.07) | 0.12 (0.08) |
| Willingness to report unethical behavior | 0.15*** (0.06) | 0.15** (0.06) |
| Other Cultural Values & Social Norms | Yes | Yes |
| Formal Insitutiton Controls | Yes | Yes |
| Noise & Demographic Controls | Yes | Yes |
| Additional Question Controls | No | Yes |
| "Halo Effect" Specification | No | Yes |
| Observations | 1115 | 937 |
| Adjusted R-squared | 20.5% | 22.3% |
| | Dependent variable = | |
| | Creativity (Q14) | |
| Panel B. Example Innovation Outcome | (1) | (2) |
| <u>Cultural values</u> | | |
| Adaptability | 0.08** (0.04) | 0.07 (0.05) |
| Results-oriented | -0.12** (0.05) | -0.15*** (0.06) |
| <u>Social norms</u> | | |
| Employees comfort in suggesting critiques | 0.11*** (0.04) | 0.10** (0.05) |
| New ideas develop organically | 0.15*** (0.04) | 0.18*** (0.05) |
| Urgency with which employees work | 0.08** (0.04) | 0.18*** (0.04) |
| Other Cultural Values & Social Norms | Yes | Yes |
| Formal Insitutiton Controls | Yes | Yes |
| Noise & Demographic Controls | Yes | Yes |
| Additional Question Controls | No | Yes |
| "Halo Effect" Specification | No | Yes |
| Observations | 1132 | 949 |
| Adjusted R-squared | 21.4% | 23.4% |

Table VI Do Aggregate Values and Norms Affect Business Outcomes?

This table presents OLS estimates connecting the values and norms that comprise corporate culture to firm outcomes. Column (1) is the aggregate mean for all firm outcomes. The dependent variable in Column (2), (3), and (4) are, respectively, the aggregate among all ethical outcomes, innovation outcomes, and productivity/firm value outcomes. The key explanatory variables are the aggregate cultural values and social norms. Additional explanatory variables include noise controls (date, response delay, job title, and source of email), demographic controls (profitability, employee turnover, CEO turnover, family firm, ownership (public vs. private), firm location, CEO age, CEO tenure, CEO incentive compensation, revenue, number of employees, industry, and credit rating), and additional question controls (Q1, Q4, Q4b). Standard errors are in parentheses under coefficient estimates; they are bootstrapped with 100 replications. Panel A examines cultural values and norms in isolation while Panel B allows for an interaction. For a detailed description of each variable, please see the definitions in [Appendix B](#). ***, ** and * indicate p -values of 1%, 5%, and 10%, respectively.

| Dependent variable = Aggregate outcome | | | | |
|--|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| | All | Ethics | Innovation | Productivity & Firm Value |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| Panel A. No interaction term | | | | |
| Aggregate cultural values | -0.08 (0.12) | -0.14 (0.18) | -0.14 (0.16) | 0.03 (0.14) |
| Aggregate social norms | 0.17*** (0.04) | 0.20*** (0.07) | 0.19*** (0.06) | 0.15*** (0.05) |
| Noise & Demographic Controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Formal Institution Controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Additional Question Controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Observations | 1138 | 1128 | 1126 | 1129 |
| Adjusted R-squared | 17.0% | 18.4% | 13.2% | 13.9% |
| Dependent variable = Aggregate outcome | | | | |
| | All | Ethics | Innovation | Productivity & Firm Value |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| Panel B. Adding an interaction term | | | | |
| Aggregate cultural values | -0.39*** (0.14) | -0.52** (0.21) | -0.46** (0.18) | -0.20 (0.16) |
| Aggregate social norms | 0.13*** (0.05) | 0.15** (0.07) | 0.15*** (0.06) | 0.11** (0.05) |
| Agg. cultural values x agg. social norms | 0.69*** (0.16) | 0.88*** (0.27) | 0.71*** (0.21) | 0.54*** (0.18) |
| Noise & Demographic Controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Formal Institution Controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Additional Question Controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Observations | 1138 | 1128 | 1126 | 1129 |
| Adjusted R-squared | 18.5% | 19.3% | 14.1% | 14.6% |

Table VII Cultural Effectiveness and Business Outcomes

This table presents OLS estimates connecting an effective culture to firm outcomes in Panel A. Column (1) is the aggregate mean for all firm outcomes. The dependent variable in Column (2), (3), and (4) are, respectively, the aggregate among all ethical outcomes, innovation outcomes, and productivity/firm value outcomes. The key explanatory variable is “current culture is effective?” Additional explanatory variables include noise controls and demographic controls. Panel B presents OLS estimates connecting cultural values, social norms, and formal institutions to an effective culture. In the survey, we define an effective culture as one that promotes the behaviors needed to successfully execute the firm’s strategies and achieve its goals. In Panel B, Column (1), (2), and (3), the key explanatory variable of interest is aggregate cultural values, social norms, and formal institutions, respectively. In Column (4), all explanatory variables are combined and Column (5) includes their interactions. Additional explanatory variables include noise controls (date, response delay, job title, and source of email), demographic controls (profitability, employee turnover, CEO turnover, family firm, ownership (public vs. private), firm location, CEO age, CEO tenure, CEO incentive compensation, revenue, number of employees, industry, and credit rating), and additional question controls (Q1, Q4). Standard errors are in parentheses under coefficient estimates; they are bootstrapped with 100 replications. For a detailed description of each variable, please see the definitions in [Appendix B](#).

| | Dependent variable = Aggregate outcome | | | | |
|---|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| | | | | Productivity & | |
| | All | Ethics | Innovation | Firm Value | |
| Panel A. Effectiveness and outcomes | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | |
| Current culture is effective? | 0.04** (0.02) | 0.08*** (0.03) | -0.00 (0.03) | 0.04** (0.02) | |
| Noise & Demographic Controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | |
| Observations | 1158 | 1148 | 1146 | 1149 | |
| Adjusted R-squared | 13.3% | 15.9% | 10.8% | 11.2% | |
| | | | | | |
| | Dependent variable = current culture is effective? | | | | |
| Panel B. Determinants of effectiveness | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
| Aggregate cultural values | 0.33** (0.13) | | | 0.18 (0.12) | 0.09 (0.15) |
| Aggregate social norms | | 0.26*** (0.04) | | 0.13*** (0.04) | 0.13** (0.05) |
| Aggregate formal institutions | | | 0.37*** (0.04) | 0.33*** (0.04) | 0.41*** (0.06) |
| Agg. cultural values x agg. formal institutions | | | | | -0.54*** (0.14) |
| Agg. social norms x agg. formal institutions | | | | | 0.04 (0.07) |
| Noise & Demographic Controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Additional Question Controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Observations | 1310 | 1310 | 1310 | 1310 | 1310 |
| Adjusted R-squared | 57.4% | 58.6% | 61.5% | 61.9% | 62.3% |
| R-squared (excl. noise & demo. controls) | 53.7% | 54.4% | 58.2% | 59.3% | 59.7% |
| R-squared (excl. all controls) | 21.7% | 18.1% | 43.2% | 48.0% | 50.1% |

Table VIII What Determines Cultural Effectiveness?

This table presents OLS estimates connecting a firm's current culture to an effective culture. In the survey, we define an effective culture as one that promotes the behaviors needed to successfully execute the firm's strategies and achieve its goals. Columns (1) through (5) examine the role of cultural values, social norms, and formal institutions in determining effectiveness. In Column (1), (2), and (3), the key explanatory variables are the cultural values, social norms, and formal institutions, respectively, that theory predicts are most relevant for firm performance. Column (4) combines all explanatory variables and Column (5) includes our "halo effect" control (hypothetical Q11). In each column, additional explanatory variables include noise controls (date, response delay, job title, and source of email), demographic controls (profitability, employee turnover, CEO turnover, family firm, ownership (public vs. private), firm location, CEO age, CEO tenure, CEO incentive compensation, revenue, number of employees, industry, and credit rating), and additional question controls (Q1, Q4). Standard errors are in parentheses under coefficient estimates; they are bootstrapped with 100 replications. We include all values, social norms, and formal institutions but only report those theory highlights. For a detailed description of each variable, please see the definitions in [Appendix B](#).

| | Dependent variable = current culture is effective? | | | | |
|---|--|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
| <u><i>Cultural Values</i></u> | | | | | |
| Adaptability | 0.06** (0.03) | | | 0.04 (0.03) | 0.03 (0.04) |
| Collaboration | 0.10*** (0.03) | | | 0.08*** (0.03) | 0.06* (0.04) |
| Integrity | 0.15*** (0.05) | | | 0.13*** (0.05) | 0.13** (0.05) |
| <u><i>Social Norms</i></u> | | | | | |
| Consistency and predictability of actions | | 0.06** (0.03) | | 0.04* (0.03) | 0.02 (0.03) |
| Decision-making reflects long-term | | 0.06** (0.03) | | 0.03 (0.03) | 0.02 (0.04) |
| <u><i>Formal Institutions</i></u> | | | | | |
| Corporate Governance | | | 0.01 (0.03) | 0.01 (0.03) | 0.01 (0.03) |
| Corporate Leadership | | | 0.11*** (0.03) | 0.10*** (0.03) | 0.08*** (0.03) |
| Finance Function | | | -0.01 (0.03) | -0.02 (0.03) | -0.03 (0.03) |
| Hiring, Firing, and Promotion | | | 0.05** (0.02) | -0.01 (0.03) | -0.01 (0.03) |
| Incentive Compensation | | | 0.05** (0.02) | 0.04* (0.02) | 0.05** (0.03) |
| Noise & Demographic Controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Additional Question Controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| "Halo Effect" Specification | No | No | No | No | Yes |
| Observations | 1310 | 1310 | 1310 | 1310 | 980 |
| Adjusted R-squared | 57.7% | 58.5% | 58.7% | 59.6% | 61.6% |

Table IX Quantile Regression Estimates of Business Outcomes

This table presents quantile regression estimates that examine the role of cultural values and social norms in determining firm outcomes. Standard errors are in parentheses under coefficient estimates; they are bootstrapped with 100 replications. Demographic controls include profitability, employee turnover, CEO turnover, family firm, ownership (public vs. private), firm location, CEO age, CEO tenure, CEO incentive compensation, revenue, number of employees, industry, and credit rating. Noise controls include date, response delay, job title, and source of email (i.e., Duke, Columbia, CFO magazine). Additional question controls are from Q1, Q4, and Q4b. For a detailed description of each variable, please see the definitions in [Appendix A](#). ***, ** and * indicate p -values of 1%, 5%, and 10%, respectively.

| | Dependent variable = Aggregate All Outcomes | | | | |
|------------------------------|---|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| | 5th | 25th | 50th | 75th | 95th |
| | Percentile | Percentile | Percentile | Percentile | Percentile |
| | (1) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (7) |
| Aggregate cultural values | -0.20 (0.69) | 0.13 (0.44) | 0.08 (0.53) | -0.08 (0.46) | -0.06 (0.82) |
| Aggregate social norms | 0.43*** (0.00) | 0.32*** (0.00) | 0.27*** (0.00) | 0.10*** (0.01) | 0.11 (0.20) |
| Noise & Demographic Controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Formal Institution Controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Additional Question Controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Observations | 1138 | 1138 | 1138 | 1138 | 1138 |
| Pseudo R-squared | 26.2% | 13.8% | 12.8% | 14.1% | 21.4% |

Appendix A. Survey Questions and Additional Logistics

The survey contains 14 main questions, some with sub-parts dependent on initial answer selected, and was administered over the Internet. The survey is anonymous and does not require subjects to disclose their names or their corporate affiliation and is IRB approved at the authors' home institutions. One advantage of online administration is the ability to randomly scramble the order of choices within a question, so as to mitigate potential order-of-presentation effects. Specifically, the survey scrambles the order of answers in questions 4d, 6, 13 and 14. For the remaining questions, order of sub questions is deemed not to be a first-order issue (demographic questions, qualitative questions) or there is a natural order to the presented alternatives (e.g., 3, 7 and 11). Participants were allowed to skip questions if they did not want to answer them. That is why the number of observations varies across questions. Most multiple-choice questions were followed by a free-text response option, so that survey takers could provide answers that were not explicitly specified in the question.

Invitations to take the survey were sent via email to a diverse sample of corporate executives and invitations were sent in a staggered manner. We emailed an invitation to sub-sections of these email addresses on several dates (September 15, 22 of 2015) to take the survey, a reminder was sent a week or more later to these sub-groups (September 29, October 6, October 20). The survey closed on October 31, 2015. We supplemented the main email list from Duke's quarterly survey and Columbia business school with additional email lists from CFO magazine, the Center for Leadership and Ethics (COLE) at Duke University, the Fuqua School of Business Board of Visitors, and a list of Fortune 1000 CEOs and CFOs. Our baseline summary results do not vary whether we include all of these groups or not.



Duke University/Columbia University/CFO Magazine Corporate Culture Survey 2015

Participation in this survey is voluntary. You do not have to answer every question and you can withdraw from participation at any time by closing your internet browser. The survey is anonymous and we will only report aggregated data. At the end of the survey, you can indicate whether you would like to receive a copy of our report.

1. Briefly, what words or phrases best describe the current corporate culture at your firm?

2. How important do you believe corporate culture is at your firm? (choose best option)

Very important

☐

Important

☐

Somewhat
important

☐

Not important

☐

Don't know

☐

3. In terms of all of the things that make your firm valuable, where would you place corporate culture? (choose best option)

- ☐ Top 3
- ☐ Top 5
- ☐ Top 10
- ☐ Not in Top 10

4. How closely does your current corporate culture track with your stated firm values?

Very closely

☐

Somewhat

☐

Not very closely

☐

Not at all

☐

4b. Our firm's corporate culture: (choose best option)

- ☐ Is exactly where it should be
- ☐ Needs some work but is close to where it should be
- ☐ Needs considerable work to get to where it should be
- ☐ Needs a substantial overhaul

Continue





4c. Do you believe that improving your corporate culture would increase your firm's value?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

4d. What is preventing your firm's culture from being exactly where it should be?

| | Strongly disagree | | | | Strongly agree |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 |
| Our cultural values are not fully aligned with our business needs | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Our firm has inefficient workplace interactions (e.g., too much time spent building consensus, etc.) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Our employees are not fully committed to the culture | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Firm policies work against the intended culture (e.g., compensation, governance, etc.) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Leadership needs to invest more time to develop the culture | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Our culture has not caught up with recent changes in the business environment | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Other reasons why your corporate culture is not where it should be:

Continue





5. Which of the following have been most influential in setting your firm's current culture? (Check up to 4):

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Peer firms | <input type="checkbox"/> Our reputation or image in the marketplace |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Board of Directors | <input type="checkbox"/> Hard times we experienced |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Owners | <input type="checkbox"/> Changing needs of the marketplace |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Non-management employees | <input type="checkbox"/> Incentive compensation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Founder | <input type="checkbox"/> Internal policies and procedures |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Past CEO | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Current CEO | |

For the remaining questions, define an effective corporate culture as one that promotes the behaviors needed to successfully execute the firm's strategies and achieve its goals.

6. In the context of your firm's current culture, please indicate which factors determine the effectiveness of your culture.

| | Key factor helping our culture to be more effective | Little or no effect on culture | Works against our culture being effective | Don't know |
|---|---|-----------------------------------|---|-----------------------|
| Urgency with which employees work | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Coordination among employees | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Trust among employees | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Employees' comfort in suggesting critiques | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Consistency and predictability of employees' actions | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Employees' willingness to report compliance risks or unethical behavior | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Hiring, firing, and promotion decisions | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Broad agreement about goals and values | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Decision-making reflects firm's long-term interests | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| New ideas develop organically | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Other: <input type="text"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Continue





7. Do you think your company takes the right amount of risk in its investments to achieve its goals?

- ☐ Yes, right amount of risk
- ☐ No, too little risk
- ☐ No, too much risk
- ☐ Don't know

8. Suppose your firm is considering two projects A and B.

- A and B are very similar in that they require the same capital up front, have the same expected life, and have the same probability of failure.
- A is more valuable than project B (A has greater NPV).
- A generates negative cash flows for the first two years, while B has positive cash flows in all years.

Assuming all cash flow forecasts are equally accurate, does your firm's culture make it more likely that project A or B will be chosen?

- ☒ A
- ☐ B
- ☐ Not Sure

Does your firm's culture play a role in your company's preference for project A?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

9. The potential for: (choose best option)

- ☐ value destruction from ineffective culture is greater than value creation from effective culture
- ☐ value destruction from ineffective culture and value creation from effective culture are about the same
- ☐ value creation from effective culture is greater than value destruction from ineffective culture

Continue





10. Do you think having a poorly implemented/ineffective culture at a company increases the chances that an employee would do something unethical (or even illegal)?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

11. You work at a firm with an effective, strong culture. You are evaluating two acquisition targets, A and B.

- A and B would bring the same strategic and operational benefits if acquired, and the targets are identical in all dimensions except corporate culture.
- Company A's culture is very aligned with your firm's culture, whereas company B's culture is not at all aligned.

Relative to how much you would offer for A, how much less would you offer for company B due to the culture misalignment? (choose one)

- ☐ We would offer the same amount for B as for A
☐ We would offer 5% less for B
☐ 10% less for B
☐ 20% less for B
☐ 30+% less for B
☐ We would not make an offer for B
☐ Don't know

12. Sometimes companies engage in end-of-quarter practices such as delaying valuable projects in order to hit market expected earnings. How likely is it that an effective corporate culture would reduce the chance that such actions are taken?

- Extremely likely Very likely Somewhat likely Not likely Don't know
- ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

13. Do the following items reinforce or work against the effectiveness of your corporate culture:

| | Works against | No impact | Reinforces |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Incentive compensation | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Finance function / department | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Governance/Board of Directors | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Senior management behavior | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Other: | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| <input type="text"/> | | | |

What are the most important ways incentive compensation works against your corporate culture? [check all that apply]

- ☐ Focuses employees too much on short-term objectives
☐ Leads to fear of failure and insufficient risk taking
☐ Attracts/retains the wrong type of people to the firm
☐ Other



You are almost done! Hang in there!

On this question, we'd like to learn about the effects of corporate culture

| 14. To what extent does the corporate culture at your firm affect the following items: | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| | No effect | Little | Moderate | Big effect | Don't know or NA |
| Firm Value | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Profitability | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Quality of our financial reporting | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Creativity | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Tax aggressiveness | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| How much debt we use | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Willingness to take on risky projects | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Management of downside risk | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Our rate of growth | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Compliance | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Productivity | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Other: <input type="text"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Please provide a specific example of how culture affects firm profitability.

Please provide a specific example of how culture affects management of downside risk.

Continue





Thank you for your help!

Demographics (Important to complete!)

1. In your particular industry, how would you characterize your firm's competitive position? (choose best option)

- ☐ Market leader
☐ One of the leading firms
☐ In the middle of the pack
☐ Challenger

2. My company's credit rating is approximately: (e.g., AA-, BBB+, no rating, etc.)

☐ Check here if you do not have a rating, and please estimate what your rating would be.

3. During the last year, we earned an after-tax profit.

- ☐ True
☐ False

4. Over the last 3 years, what is your company's approximate:

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| <input type="text"/> | % ROE (e.g., 11%) |
| <input type="text"/> | % Annual growth in revenue (e.g., 8%) |
| <input type="text"/> | % Total debt / total assets (e.g., 25%) |

5. Approximate proportion of your employees that have worked at your firm less than 3 years %

6. Managers own approximately % of my company.

7. Our employee turnover is the industry average.

8. Our rate of CEO turnover is the industry average.

9a. Ownership (choose one)

- ☒ Public
☐ Private
☐ Government or non-profit

9b. Family (choose one)

- ☐ Family ownership and operational influence
☐ Family ownership but no operational influence
☐ No family ownership nor operational influence

10. How important is meeting or beating quarterly earnings estimates to your company?

- Very important ☐ Somewhat important ☐ Not important ☐ Not applicable ☐

11a. Our company is approximately years old.

11b. Where is your firm located?

12. What is your job title?

- ☐ CEO
☐ CFO, Treasurer, or similar
☐ Other:

13a. CEO Age

- ☐ < 40
☐ 40-49
☐ 50-59
☐ 60 +

13b. CEO time in job

- ☐ < 4 years
☐ 4-9 years
☐ 10-19 years
☐ 20 + years

13c. Percentage of CEO pay that is incentive based (stock, options, bonus):

- ☐ None
☐ 1-24%
☐ 25-49%
☐ 50-74%
☐ 75% +

14. Sales Revenue

- ☐ Less than \$25 million
☐ \$25-\$99 million
☐ \$100-\$499 million
☐ \$500-\$999 million
☐ \$1-\$4.9 billion
☐ \$5-\$9.9 billion
☐ More than \$10 billion

15. Number of Employees

- ☐ Fewer than 50
☐ 50-99
☐ 100-499
☐ 500-999
☐ 1000-2499
☐ 2500-4999
☐ 5000-9999
☐ More than 10,000

16. Industry

- ☐ Retail/Wholesale
☐ Banking/Finance/Insurance/Real Estate
☐ Mining/Construction
☐ Transportation & Public Utilities
☐ Energy
☐ Services, Consulting
☐ Agriculture, Forestry, & Fishing
☐ Public Administration
☐ Communication/Media
☐ Technology [Software/Hardware/Biotech]
☐ Manufacturing
☐ Healthcare/Pharmaceutical
☐ Other Industry

17. How many distinct business segments does your firm have?

[Click here to finish](#)

■■■■■■■■■■

Appendix B. Variable Definitions

Aggregate ethics outcomes is the mean of the following four components:

1. **Compliance** which is part of Q14 “To what extent does the corporate culture at your firm affect the following items:” where 1 = no effect, 2 = little effect, 3 = moderate effect, and 4 = big effect.
2. **Tax Aggressiveness** which is part of Q14 “To what extent does the corporate culture at your firm affect the following items:” where 1 = no effect, 2 = little effect, 3 = moderate effect, and 4 = big effect.
3. **Reporting Quality** which is part of Q14 “To what extent does the corporate culture at your firm affect the following items:” where 1 = no effect, 2 = little effect, 3 = moderate effect, and 4 = big effect.
4. **Rescale Beat EPS** which is a demographic variable, “How important is meeting or beating quarterly earnings estimates to your company?” where 1 = Not important, 2.5 = Somewhat important, 4 = Very important. Please note we rescale this question to correspond to the [1, 4] scale of Q14 variables. Specifically, we transform [-1, 1] scale to -1 = 1, 0 = 2.5, and 1 = 4.

Aggregate innovation outcomes is the mean of the following two components:

1. **Creativity** which is part of Q14 “To what extent does the corporate culture at your firm affect the following items:” where 1 = no effect, 2 = little effect, 3 = moderate effect, and 4 = big effect.
2. **Project Risk** which is part of Q14 “To what extent does the corporate culture at your firm affect the following items:” where 1 = no effect, 2 = little effect, 3 = moderate effect, and 4 = big effect.

Aggregate productivity and firm value outcomes is the mean of the following three components:

1. **Firm Value** which is part of Q14 “To what extent does the corporate culture at your firm affect the following items:” where 1 = no effect, 2 = little effect, 3 = moderate effect, and 4 = big effect.

2. **Profitability** which is part of Q14 “To what extent does the corporate culture at your firm affect the following items:” where 1 = no effect, 2 = little effect, 3 = moderate effect, and 4 = big effect.
3. **Productivity** which is part of Q14 “To what extent does the corporate culture at your firm affect the following items:” where 1 = no effect, 2 = little effect, 3 = moderate effect, and 4 = big effect.

Aggregate all outcomes is the mean of the aggregate ethics, aggregate innovation, and aggregate productivity and firm value outcomes.

Aggregate cultural values is the mean of the seven cultural values extracted from the open-ended Q1, “Briefly, in words or phrases best describe the current corporate culture at your firm?” Cultural values can take on a score of 1, 0 or -1 where a negative value indicates the antonym. We hand-code the individual values. The individual cultural values are:

1. **Adaptability:** willing to experiment, fast-moving, quick to take advantage of opportunities, taking initiative
2. **Collaboration:** team-oriented, supportive, not aggressive, low levels of conflict
3. **Community:** respectful of diversity, community, and the environment, inclusive, caring, and open
4. **Customer-orientation:** listening to customers, being market driven, taking pride in service
5. **Detail-orientation:** paying attention to detail, being precise, emphasizing quality, being analytical
6. **Integrity:** high ethical standards, being honest, accountable
7. **Results-orientation:** high expectations for performance, focus on achievement, not easy going, not calm

Aggregated social norms is the mean of the nine social norms extracted from the open-ended Q6, “In the context of your firm’s current culture, please indicate which factors determine the effectiveness of your culture,” where -1 = Works against our culture being effective , 0 = Little or no effect on culture, 1 = Key factor helping our culture to be more effective. The individual social norms are:

1. **Agreement about goals and values**
2. **Consistency and predictability of actions**
3. **Coordination among employees**
4. **Decision-making reflects long-term**
5. **Employees comfort in suggesting critiques**
6. **New ideas develop organically**
7. **Trust among employees**
8. **Urgency with which employees work**
9. **Willingness to report unethical behavior**

Aggregate formal institutions is the mean of the following two components:

1. **Rescale negatively-phrased formal institutions** is the mean response about the two formal institutions that are options in Q4d “What prevents from being where you should be?” where respondents select from a likert scale with -2 = strongly disagree and 2 = strongly agree. Please note we rescale this question to correspond to the [-1, 1] scale of the positively-phrased formal institutions question. Specifically, we transform [-2, 2] scale to -2 = 1, -1 = .5, 0 = 0, 1 = -.5, 2 = 1.
 - (a) Leadership needs to invest more time to develop the culture
 - (b) Firm policies work against the intended culture (e.g., compensation, governance, etc. . .)
2. **Positively-phrased formal institutions** is the mean response about the five formal institutions that are options in Q13/Q6 “Do the following items reinforce or work against the effectiveness of your corporate culture” where the scale is -1 = Works against, 0 = No impact, and 1 = Reinforces.
 - (a) Corporate governance
 - (b) Corporate leadership
 - (c) Finance function
 - (d) Hire, fire, promote (Please note this option comes from Q6 “In the context of your firm’s current culture, please indicate which factors determine the effectiveness of your culture”

but has the same scale -1 = Works against, 0 = No impact, and 1 = Key factor)

(e) Incentive compensation

Demographic controls include profitability, employee turnover, CEO turnover, family firm, ownership (public vs. private), firm location, CEO age, CEO tenure, CEO incentive compensation, revenue, number of employees, industry, and credit rating. Non-response categorical variables included as its own category.

Noise controls include date of survey response, response delay from initial email, job title, and source of email (i.e., Duke, Columbia, *CFO* magazine)

Addition question controls include controls extracted from Q1, Q4, and Q4b.

1. Q1 controls are hand-coded from the open-ended response to “Briefly, in words or phrases best describe the current corporate culture at your firm?” The controls include an indicator for if the response is uninformative (e.g., wrote the definition of culture), for the emotion in q1 response (1 = positive emotion, 0 = neutral, -1 = negative emotion), an indicator for saying the firm has no culture, the number of values mentioned (this also serves as a proxy for length of response), an indicator if the culture is changing, and an indicator if the culture is mixed/siloed.
2. Q4 controls for the response to “How closely does your current corporate culture track with your stated firm values?” where 1 = Not at all, 2 = Not very closely, 3 = Somewhat, and 4 = Very closely”
3. Q4b controls for the response to “Our firm’s culture:” where 1 = Needs a substantial overhaul, 2 = Needs considerable work to get to where it should be, 3 = Needs some work but is close to where it should be, and 4 = Is exactly where it should be.

Formal institutions controls are either aggregate formal institutions if the regression involves aggregate independent variables or five different controls, one for each of the formal institutions (i.e., corporate governance, corporate leadership, finance function, hire, fire, promote, and incentive compensation) if the regression involves individual independent variables.

“Halo Effect” Specification includes response to Q11, “You work at a firm with an effective, strong culture. You are evaluating two acquisition targets, A and B. A and B would bring the same strategic and operational benefits if acquired, and the targets are identical in all dimensions except corporate culture. Company A’s culture is very aligned with your firm’s culture, whereas company B’s culture is not at all aligned. Relative to how much you would offer for A, how much less would you offer for company B due to the culture misalignment?”

Corporate accounting data came from the Compustat-CRSP fundamental annual database. Definitions are as follow.

$$\text{Acquisitions-to-Assets} = AC/AT$$

$$\text{Assets} = AT$$

$$\text{Book Leverage} = (DLC + DLTT)/(DLC + DLTT + MEQ)$$

$$\text{Cash flow-to-Capital} = (IB + DPQ)/PPENT_{t-1}$$

$$\text{Firm Age} = \text{Years since first observed in Compustat.}$$

$$\text{Firm Intangibles} = \log(INTAN), \text{ in which } INTAN \text{ is in real 2010 dollars.}$$

$$\text{Firm Size} = \log(AT), \text{ in which } AT \text{ is in real 2010 dollars.}$$

$$\text{Goodwill Impairment Indicator} = I[GDWLIP > 0]$$

$$\text{Investment-to-Capital} = ((CAPXY - SPPEY) - (CAPXY_{t-1} - SPPEY_{t-1}))/PPENT_{t-1}$$

$$\text{Lifecycle Stage} = RET/AT$$

$$\text{Market Capitalization} = MEQ$$

$$\text{Market Value of Assets (MVA)} = ME + DLC + DLTT + PSTK - TXDITC$$

$$\text{Profitability} = OIBDP/AT$$

$$\text{Return on Equity} = (OIBDP - DVC)/CEQ$$

$$\text{Sales Growth Rate} = REVT/REVT_{t-1}$$

$$\text{Tangibility} = PPENT/AT$$

$$\text{Tobin's Q} = MVA/AT$$

Fortune’s 100 Best Places to Work List has been published annually since 1998. Companies must be five years or older to participate and have at least 1000 employees. Both private and public firms participate. Companies pay a fee to participate. The selection criteria for the list

is based on employees' responses to a proprietary employee survey developed by the Great Place to Work Institute. For a complete list of all the companies and the respective ranks, please visit: <http://www.greatplacetowork.com/best-companies/100-best-companies-to-work-for>

Kinder, Lydenberg, Domini (KLD) Ratings are produced to guide institutional investors concerned with socially responsible investment. They consider community, employee, environmental, governance, product, and social issues. Within each broad category, KLD creates two sets of indicators measuring management best practices (these are referred to as strengths) and the most serious challenges management faces (these are referred to as concerns). The overall strengths and concerns rating is the sum of the indicators across the broad category.

Appendix C. Additional Tables

Appendix Table CI Correlation Matrix among Survey Variables

This table reports some cross-correlations among the variables in the survey. The sample is limited to survey responses from executives at public and private North American firms. For a detailed description of each variable, please see the definitions in [Appendix A](#).

| Values, Norms, and Formal Institutions | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) | (9) | (10) | (11) | (12) | (13) | (14) | (15) | (16) | (17) | (18) | (19) | (20) | |
|--|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| <i>Cultural values</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| (1) Adaptability | 1.00 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| (2) Collaboration | 0.10 | 1.00 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| (3) Community | 0.16 | 0.13 | 1.00 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| (4) Customer-oriented | -0.01 | 0.11 | 0.05 | 1.00 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| (5) Detail-oriented | 0.06 | 0.03 | 0.03 | 0.11 | 1.00 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| (6) Integrity | -0.01 | 0.07 | 0.05 | 0.05 | 0.00 | 1.00 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| (7) Results-oriented | 0.09 | 0.08 | 0.09 | 0.01 | 0.07 | 0.13 | 1.00 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Social norms</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| (8) Agreement about goals and values | 0.09 | 0.22 | 0.13 | 0.11 | 0.03 | 0.13 | 0.07 | 1.00 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| (9) Consistency and predictability of actions | 0.07 | 0.12 | 0.05 | 0.09 | 0.06 | 0.09 | 0.05 | 0.35 | 1.00 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| (10) Coordination among employees | 0.13 | 0.20 | 0.09 | 0.12 | 0.05 | 0.08 | 0.11 | 0.40 | 0.35 | 1.00 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| (11) Decision-making reflects long-term | 0.12 | 0.17 | 0.13 | 0.11 | 0.06 | 0.09 | 0.06 | 0.50 | 0.34 | 0.39 | 1.00 | | | | | | | | | | |
| (12) Employees comfort in suggesting critiques | 0.15 | 0.17 | 0.15 | 0.11 | 0.03 | 0.09 | 0.08 | 0.38 | 0.33 | 0.45 | 0.41 | 1.00 | | | | | | | | | |
| (13) New ideas develop organically | 0.15 | 0.16 | 0.15 | 0.08 | 0.01 | 0.07 | 0.06 | 0.41 | 0.29 | 0.38 | 0.43 | 0.46 | 1.00 | | | | | | | | |
| (14) Trust among employees | 0.14 | 0.22 | 0.16 | 0.10 | 0.03 | 0.12 | 0.09 | 0.46 | 0.35 | 0.62 | 0.44 | 0.47 | 0.38 | 1.00 | | | | | | | |
| (15) Urgency with which employees work | 0.11 | 0.10 | 0.04 | 0.08 | 0.05 | 0.05 | 0.09 | 0.23 | 0.30 | 0.40 | 0.27 | 0.33 | 0.27 | 0.41 | 1.00 | | | | | | |
| (16) Willingness to report unethical behavior | 0.08 | 0.11 | 0.08 | 0.09 | 0.03 | 0.11 | 0.06 | 0.34 | 0.33 | 0.29 | 0.32 | 0.39 | 0.29 | 0.31 | 0.17 | 1.00 | | | | | |
| <i>Formal Institutions</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| (17) Corporate governance | 0.11 | 0.16 | 0.11 | 0.13 | 0.06 | 0.12 | 0.05 | 0.29 | 0.17 | 0.21 | 0.27 | 0.18 | 0.15 | 0.23 | 0.10 | 0.24 | 1.00 | | | | |
| (18) Corporate leadership | 0.14 | 0.25 | 0.18 | 0.17 | 0.11 | 0.13 | 0.08 | 0.35 | 0.25 | 0.30 | 0.34 | 0.25 | 0.22 | 0.36 | 0.18 | 0.21 | 0.51 | 1.00 | | | |
| (19) Finance function | 0.04 | 0.09 | 0.07 | 0.09 | 0.01 | 0.07 | 0.10 | 0.14 | 0.17 | 0.16 | 0.15 | 0.13 | 0.09 | 0.16 | 0.12 | 0.15 | 0.35 | 0.30 | 1.00 | | |
| (20) Hire, fire, promote | 0.13 | 0.16 | 0.14 | 0.09 | 0.05 | 0.10 | 0.10 | 0.41 | 0.38 | 0.38 | 0.51 | 0.40 | 0.40 | 0.46 | 0.33 | 0.31 | 0.20 | 0.27 | 0.15 | 1.00 | |
| (21) Incentive compensation | 0.12 | 0.16 | 0.08 | 0.08 | 0.05 | 0.06 | 0.06 | 0.23 | 0.20 | 0.24 | 0.22 | 0.22 | 0.14 | 0.26 | 0.22 | 0.13 | 0.33 | 0.46 | 0.30 | 0.23 | 1.00 |