Course 12:
Leading organisations: cases studies

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Lectures for first-year Master's students in Business Management.

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1. Introduction

Corporate culture is not a slogan or a set of posters on the wall; it is a *system of shared values, beliefs, norms, and practices* that shapes how people behave inside organizations. Studying leading organizations allows us to understand how culture becomes a **strategic asset** that influences performance, innovation, employee engagement, and long-term sustainability.

This lesson uses **case studies** to:

- Translate theory into practice
- Compare different cultural models
- Analyze the link between culture, strategy, and results

2. Analytical Framework for Case Studies

When analyzing any organization, we will use the following framework:

3.1 Core Elements of Corporate Culture
- **Values** (what the organization claims to believe)
- **Norms & Behaviors** (what people actually do)
- **Symbols & Rituals** (logos, stories, ceremonies, language)
- **Leadership Style** (role modeling by top management)
- **HR Practices** (recruitment, promotion, rewards, training)

3.2 Culture–Strategy Fit
- A strong culture is not enough. It must be **aligned with strategy**.
- Innovation strategy → learning & risk-taking culture
- Cost leadership → discipline & efficiency culture
- Customer intimacy → service & empathy culture

3. Case Study 1: Google (Alphabet Inc.) – Innovation Culture

3.1 Cultural Characteristics
- Emphasis on **creativity, autonomy, and experimentation**
- Psychological safety: employees encouraged to speak up
- Flat structures and informal communication

3.2 Managerial Practices
- 20% time for personal projects
- Data-driven decision-making
- Continuous feedback and learning

3.3 Cultural Impact
Strengths:
- High innovation capacity
- Attraction of top global talent

Limitations:
- Complexity and coordination challenges as the firm grows

3.4 Discussion Question
- Can Google maintain its innovation culture as it becomes larger and more regulated?

4. Case Study 2: Toyota – Continuous Improvement Culture

4.1 Cultural Foundations
- **Kaizen** (continuous improvement)
- **Respect for people**
- Long-term orientation

4.2 Key Cultural Practices
- Employees empowered to stop production lines
- Learning from errors rather than blaming
- Strong socialization of new employees

4.3 Cultural Impact
- **Strengths:**
- High quality and operational excellence
- Strong employee loyalty
- **Risks:**
- Cultural rigidity in highly turbulent environments

4.4 Discussion Question
- Is Toyota's culture suitable for digital transformation and electric vehicles?

5. Case Study 3: Netflix – Performance-Oriented Culture

5.1 Core Cultural Philosophy
- "Freedom and Responsibility"
- High performance standards
- Radical transparency

5.2 HR and Cultural Practices
- No fixed vacation policy
- High tolerance for talent turnover
- Continuous performance evaluation

5.3 Cultural Impact
Strengths:
- Agility and fast decision-making
- Strong results orientation

Weaknesses:
- High pressure and stress
- Not suitable for all employee profiles

5.4 Discussion Question
- Is Netflix's culture sustainable in the long term?

6. Case Study 4: Patagonia – Ethical and Sustainability Culture

6.1 Cultural Values
- Environmental responsibility
- Ethical sourcing and production
- Work–life balance

6.2 Symbolic Actions
- Repair instead of replace philosophy
- Activism aligned with brand identity
- Transparent communication

6.3 Cultural Impact
Strengths:
- Strong employer brand
- High employee commitment

Challenges:
- Balancing profitability with activism

6.4 Discussion Question
- Can ethical culture be a competitive advantage?

7. Managerial Lessons

From these cases, managers should learn that:

- There is **no one best culture**

- Culture must evolve with strategy and environment

- Leaders are the main carriers of culture

- Misaligned culture leads to resistance and failure

8. Comparative Analysis

Organization	Dominant Culture Type	Strategic Alignment
Google	Innovation & Learning	High
Toyota	Process & Quality	High
Netflix	Performance & Results	Medium–High
Patagonia	Ethical & Purpose-driven	High

Conclusion

Corporate culture is a **living system**, not a static concept. Through these case studies, we see how leading organizations consciously design, manage, and adapt their cultures to remain competitive. For future managers, understanding culture is not optional—it is a **core leadership competence**