

A close-up photograph of a person's hands being washed with white soap foam. The person is wearing a white lab coat, and the background is blurred, suggesting a clinical or professional setting. The lighting is soft and natural.

Culture Washing Global Survey

Debrief Report

September 2021

What's In Your Hand?

An initial breakdown of the data submitted for the Culture Washing survey.

It includes a Culture Conscious and General Population cohort.

Culture Conscious are respondents who responded to my personal request to participate. Based on my connections and their professional networks, I've presumed a higher level of interest, knowledge, expertise and experience related to the topic of Culture across this set of respondents..

A separate Survey was deployed, via market research firm HotSpex, to a predominantly US audience. That group reflects a *General Population* perspective and, as such, their inputs were analyzed separately.

For the budding statisticians among you

- Hilton's Survey: n = 110 Respondents (Global)
- HotSpex Market Research panel: n = 1887 Respondents (US only)

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Culture Washing: Hypothesis or Hyperbole

Early in my career environmental concerns bubbled up for the first time. Many clients rushed to put some environmental spin on their existing products and services. Consumers saw straight through the “new and improved” labels, calling BS immediately. Greenwashing entered the common vernacular.

Since then, the Washing Brigade hasn’t stood still.

Pinkwashing for LGBTQ+ audiences. Purposewashing for the millennials. And Greenwashing is back with a vengeance amidst the real concerns around climate change impact?

What about Culturewashing? Great point. As we enter an unprecedented review of work, work-from-home and the shadow of The Great Resignation, have organizations already begun to Culturewash in order to appeal to recruits and retain existing talent?

The results of this survey may surprise you, or confirm your suspicions. My hope is that it serves as a reminder that the public BS meter is incredibly sensitive and cynical. This is, bizarrely, a time that you wash at your own peril.

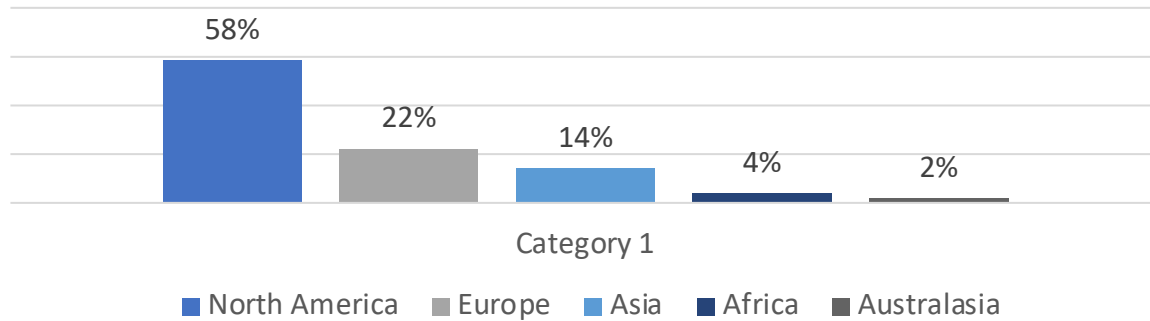


Who are the Culture Conscious?

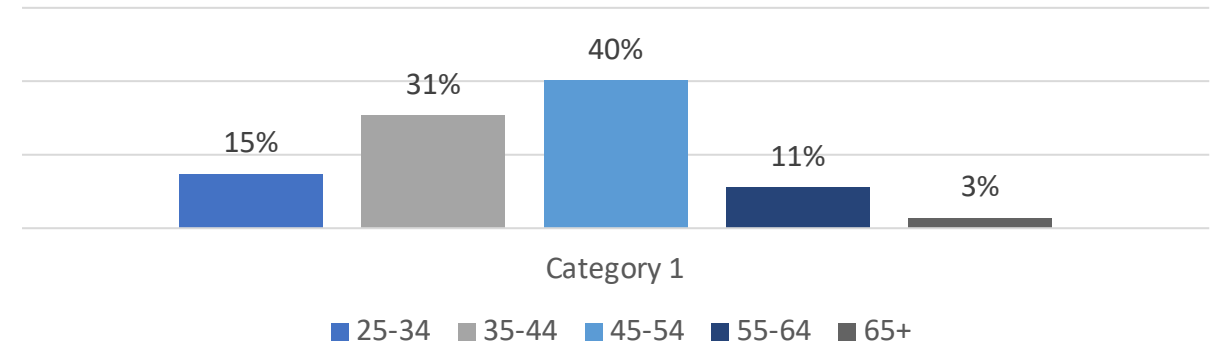
n = 110

- Significant participation from North America geography will create a unique bias based on the attitudes, employment regulations and market dynamics including topics like "Work from Home" and "The Great Resignation" in this geography.
- Demographics of the Culture Conscious group appear to, broadly speaking, reflect a standard distribution across the working population with sufficient input to derive directional insight for each demographic cohort.

Geography



Age





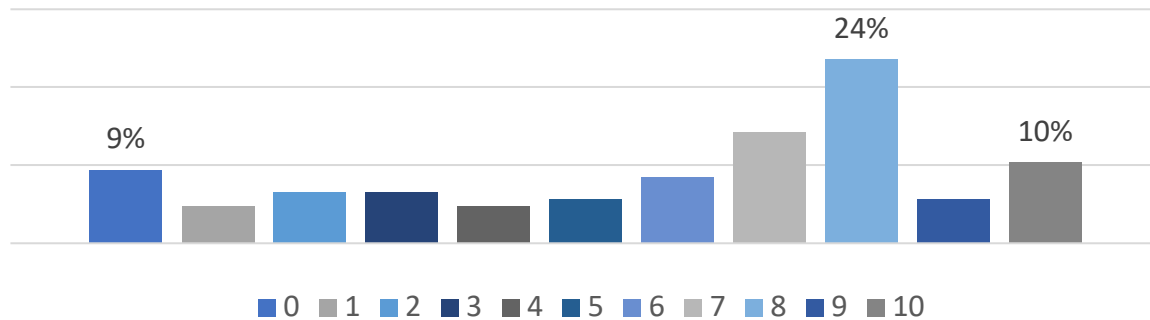
Analysis & Findings

The Million Dollar Question: How Different is the "Lived" versus "Advertised" Culture?

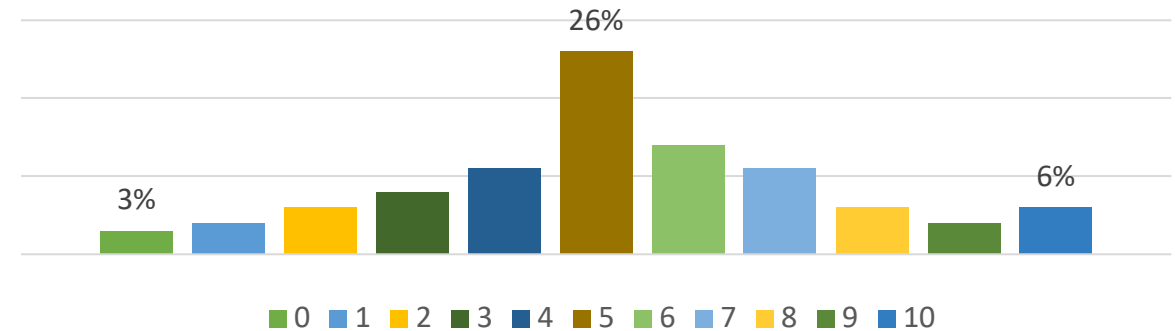
n = 110
n = 1887

- The General Population cohort shows a more standard deviation than the Culture Conscious which skew significantly toward experiencing a large disparity between "lived" and "advertised" cultures.
- These results likely reflect a higher "expectation" or "benchmark" for culture alignment among the Culture Conscious cohort than the General Population.
- The 9% of the Culture Conscious who report **no** disparity between "lived" and "advertised" cultures may also reflect the higher expectation for culture before joining/staying at an organization. The Culture Conscious group are possibly more rigorous in evaluating a culture before joining.

Culture Conscious



General Population



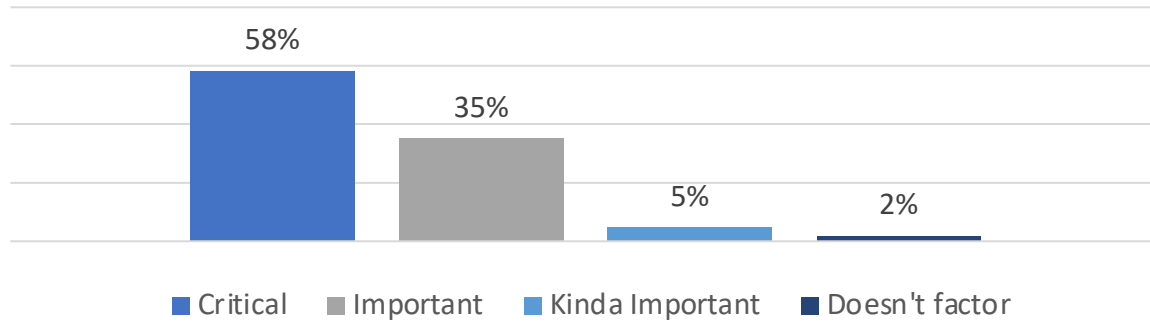
Q - In your most recent experience, how different is the culture inside an organization to how it is portrayed externally?

Impact of Culture on **Joining** an Organization

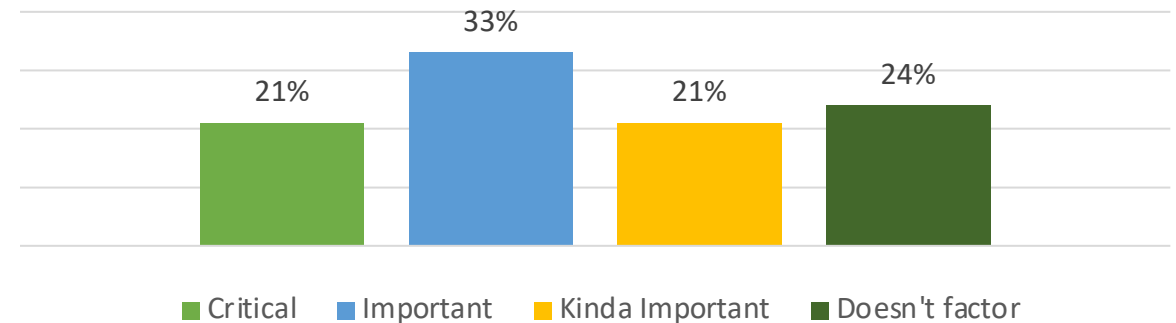
n = 110
n = 1887

- The General Population cohort shows a more standard deviation than the Culture Conscious which skew significantly toward requiring (knowing?) that the organization has a great culture before joining.
- Both groups agree strongly that "My Boss/Leader" is a critical component of any decision to join an organization. 1 in 3 in both the General Population and the Culture Conscious group believe this is crucial.
- Perhaps not surprisingly, 25% of the General Population say that culture has **no impact** on their decision to join an organization. When merged with respondents who answered "Kinda important", that number climbs to 46% - almost 1 in 2 – that aren't motivated by an organization's culture.

Culture Conscious



General Population



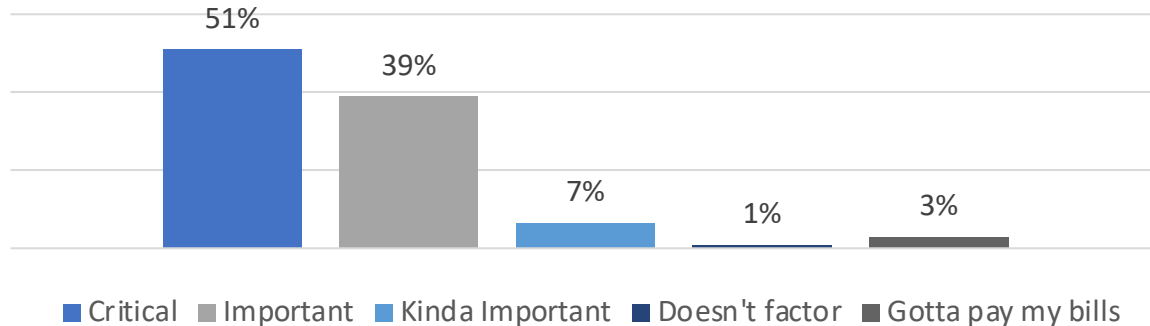
Q -How critical is culture when you are thinking about JOINING a company?

Impact of Culture on **Staying** with an Organization

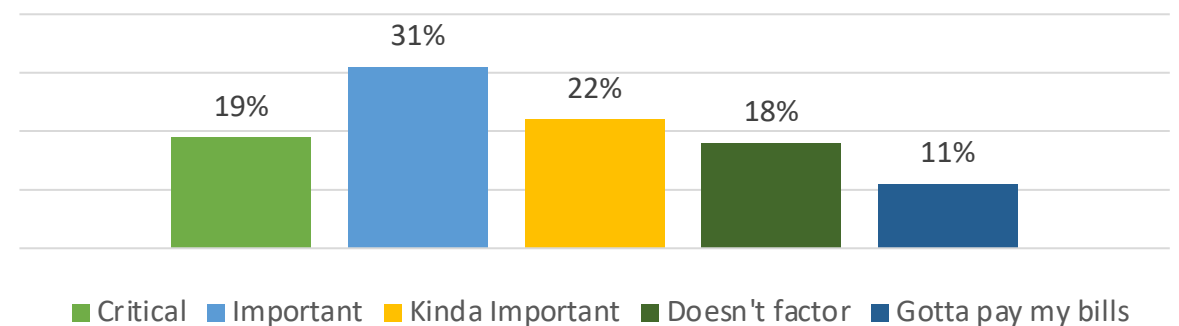
n = 110
n = 1887

- Culture is a much lower priority for General Population to stay at an organization with over 51% falling into "Kinda important", "Not important" and "Bills to pay". The 11% who cite "Bills to Pay" highlights a pragmatic reality for this group. Even the Culture Conscious have that pragmatic reality with 3% citing "Bills" as their reason
- Again, both groups agree strongly that "My Boss/Leader" is a critical component of staying at an organization. This is the most important consideration for the General Population and 2nd for the Culture Conscious.
- The significant weighting of "Critical" within the Culture Conscious group is not a surprise. Coupled with the "My boss/leader" score, this means for 9 out of 10 people in this group culture + leadership are critical

Culture Conscious



General Population



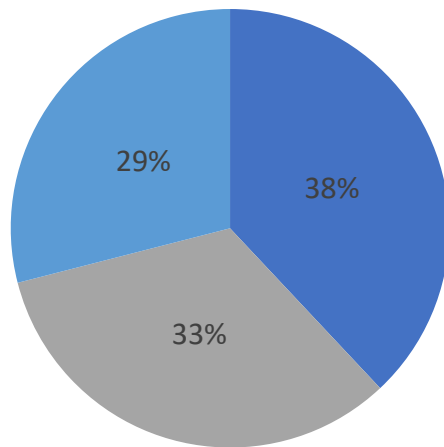
Q - How critical is culture as the reason you STAY at a company?

Are organizations more, or less, authentic about their culture today?

n = 110
n = 1887

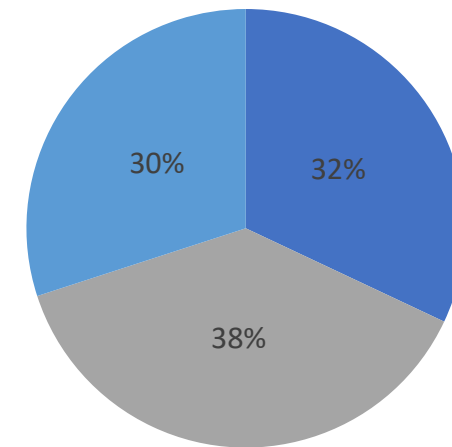
- The General Population cohort seems more cynical about organization authenticity with a larger % saying organizations are **less** authentic than their Culture Conscious peers 38% vs 33%.
- Interestingly a larger % of Culture Conscious respondents, who you might expect to have a more jaded or cynical opinion, believe that organizations are more authentic than their General Population peers.

Culture Conscious



■ More ■ Less ■ The Same

General Population



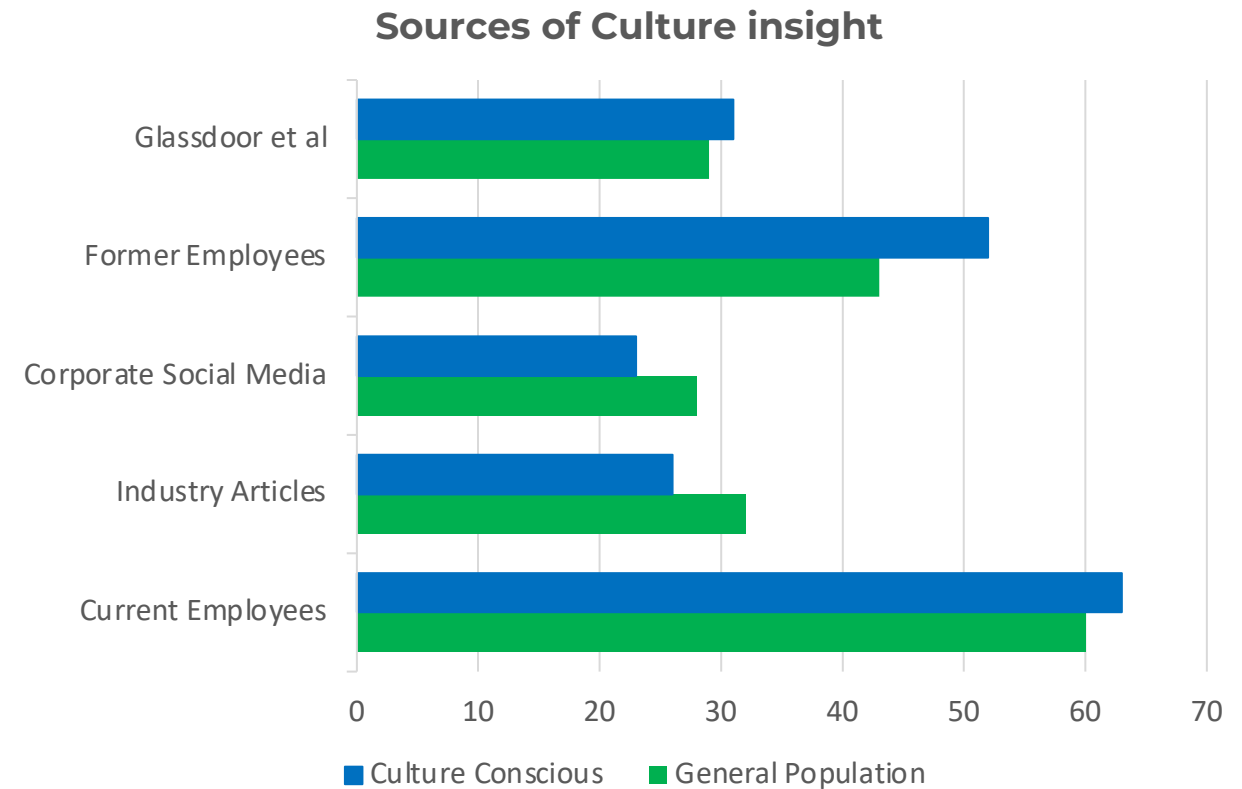
■ More ■ Less ■ The Same

Q - Do you believe organizations today are more, or less, authentic about their cultures?

Culture Conscious consider employee perspective to be more valuable than public communications

n = 110
n = 1887

- Both Culture Conscious and General Population rank sources of information on culture authenticity the same. However, the weighting given to employees (current and former) is statistically higher for the Culture Conscious group.
- Public communication elements, like industry articles and corporate social media, are given more weight among the General Population but they are still ranked below employees as a source of credible information.
- Glassdoor ranks 3rd for both cohorts and is the one source where both give it an equal weighting.

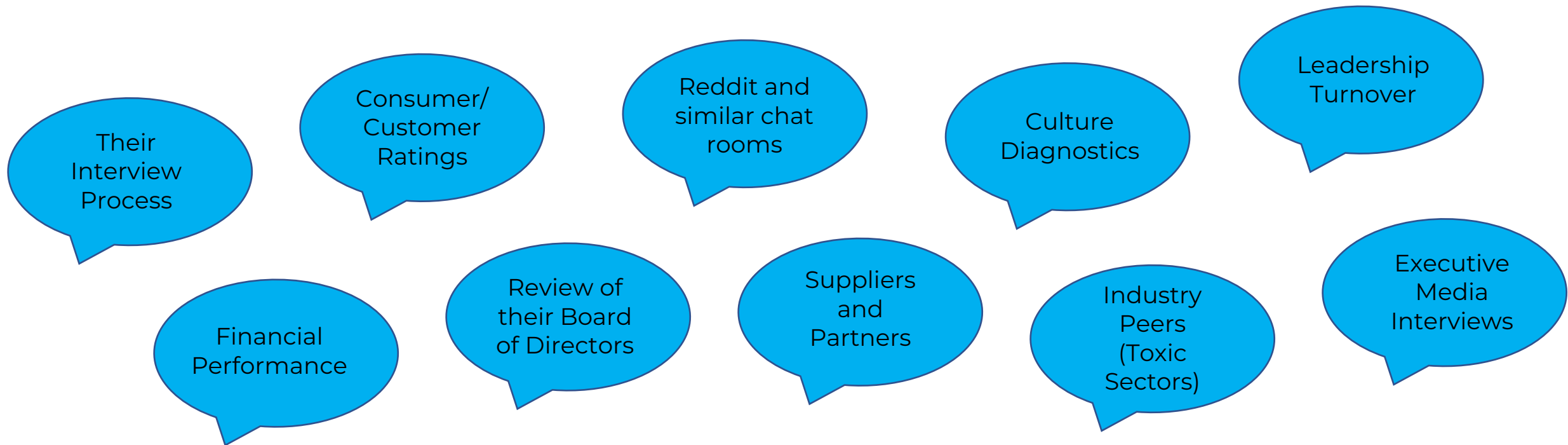


Q - What is the most credible source of information on an organization's real culture?

Supplementary sources are key to both cohorts to ascertain the authenticity of a culture

n = 110
n = 1887

- Both groups were given an open-ended question to detail which additional sources they looked at to ascertain the authenticity of a culture. This is a cross-section of responses.



Q - What is the most credible source of information on an organization's real culture?



Authentic &
Inauthentic
Cultures

Culture Conscious - Authentic

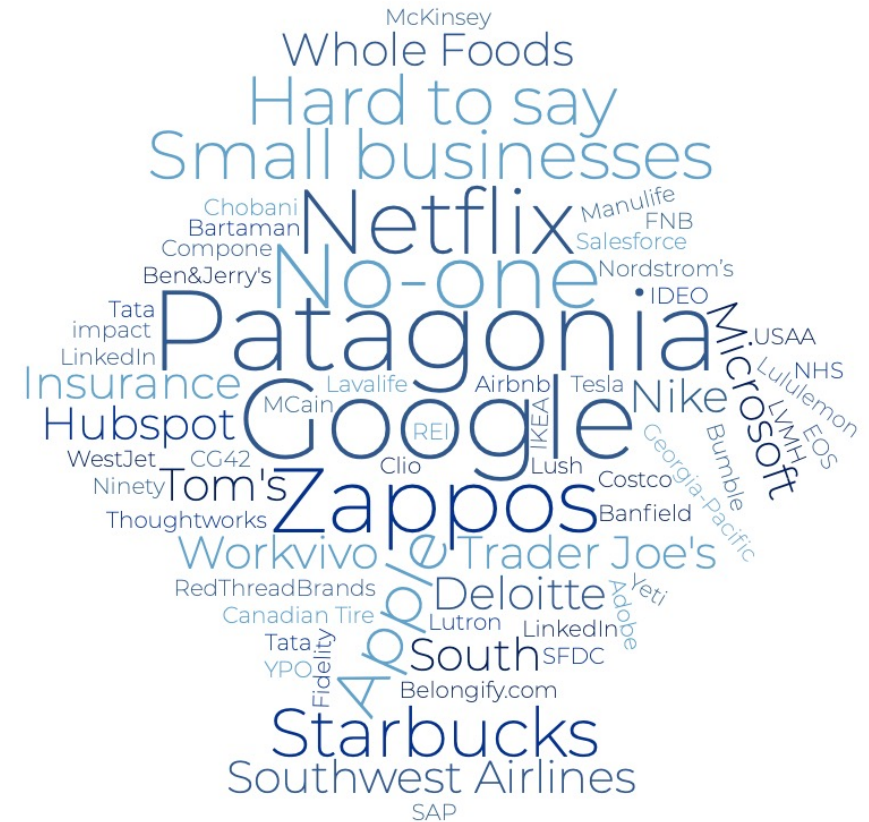
n = 110

Respondents were given an open-ended question to fill in with an organization they felt was authentic. This is a global cohort.

Culture Conscious gravitated to many of "the usual suspects" of Patagonia, Netflix, Zappos and Southwest. Interestingly, Microsoft who has had a highly-publicized culture (r)evolution did not rank very highly.

Considering the (somewhat) polarizing stories about Google that have reached the media, seeing that organization rank 5th across this group was intriguing. That ranking was driven by input from all regions so doesn't reflect any geographic bias. This may reflect a perception that, while Google has tripped in some areas, the motivations and broad actions of the organization are authentic.

Consistent feedback like "Hard to say", "No-one" and even "Small businesses" suggests that large Enterprises have the most work to do to convince their stakeholders that their cultures – and their business practises – are above reproach.



General Population - Authentic

n= 1887

Respondents were given an open-ended question to fill in with an organization they felt was authentic. This is a USA cohort.

General Population feedback highlights a much smaller cross-section of organizations that are seen as authentic. Entrants like The Red Cross, Salvation Army and institutions like the Church and Hospitals highlight those have more efficacy – and consistency – among this cohort.

Perhaps reflecting a broader ignorance, or apathy, toward the impact of culture, feedback like "Not sure", "Don't know" and "None" suggest an opportunity for organizations to build more visibility with the general public.

The inclusion of Amazon (#8), Facebook, Walmart and others whose cultures have been much debated, does suggest that broad awareness of an organization – and its success – might be enough for respondents to assume a healthy robust culture.



General Population - Inauthentic

n= 1887


Respondents were given an open-ended question to fill in with an organization they felt was authentic. This is a USA cohort.

General Population feedback reflects some of the current societal discourse in the United States so seeing both political parties, news companies and the government feature in this inauthentic list is not a surprise.

While market awareness might have driven inclusion in the authentic list for several organizations, it is likely that Amazon, Walmart, Facebook and Google feature on **this** list for the very same reasons. Media coverage related to union action, questionable working conditions etc likely contributed to those organizations featuring here.

Again, to have "Don't know" rise as the most oft-repeated commentary highlights an ignorance or an indifference among this group. Organizations seeking to attract talent cannot lose sight of needing to tackle this ignorance and indifference.



A blurred crowd of people walking in a city street, likely during the day. The image is out of focus, showing a diverse group of individuals in various attire. A large white circular overlay is positioned on the right side of the image, containing the text 'Distinct General Population Analysis' in a black, sans-serif font. The text is centered within the circle and has a thin horizontal line underneath the word 'Analysis'.

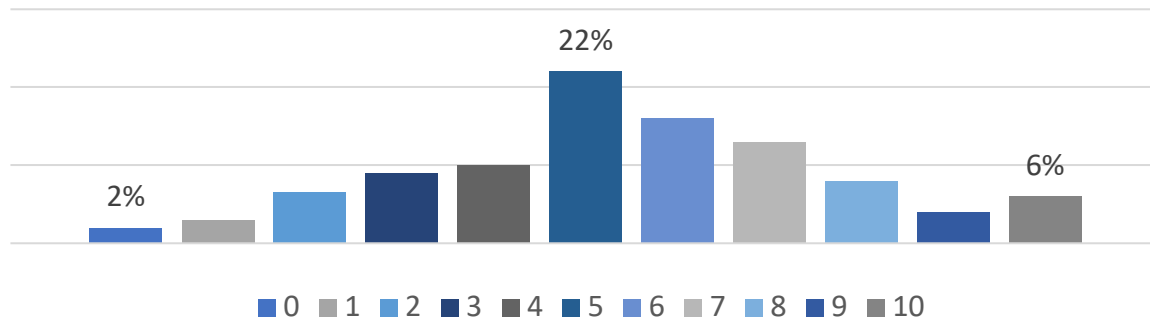
Distinct
General Population
Analysis

Employed respondents feel a larger dissonance between the "lived" and "advertised" culture

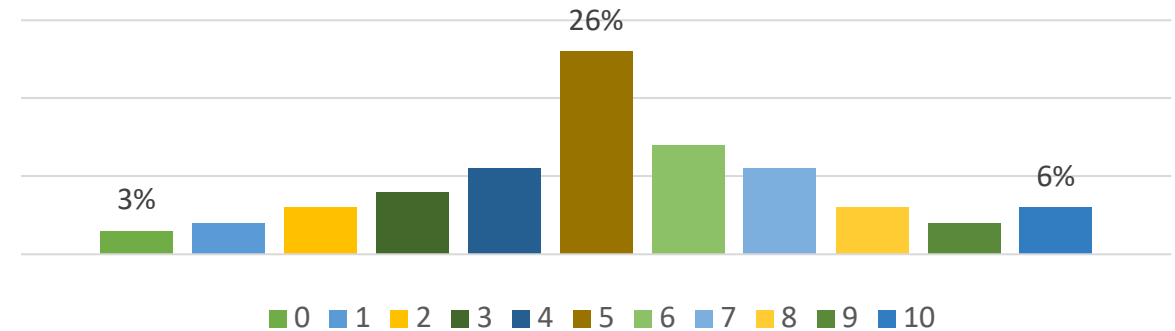
n= 1887

- In overall terms, those that are employed in the General Population tend to feel a larger dissonance between an "advertised" and "lived" culture than their peers.
- While the ends of the spectrum (0 and 10) remain relatively static, the mean of 5 is lower for the Employed by 4% points and the feeling of dissonance is higher for 6, 7 and 8.
- This suggests that the General Population are not immune to the dis-satisfaction of joining an organization and finding that their lived experience is worse than they anticipated.

Employed General Population



Total General Population



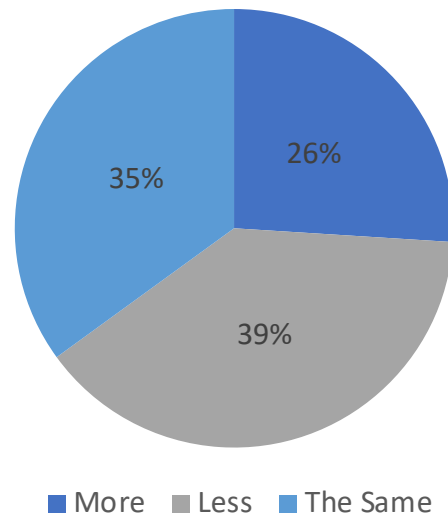
Q - In your most recent experience, how different is the culture inside an organization to how it is portrayed externally?

Employed respondents believe organizations are less authentic about culture than before

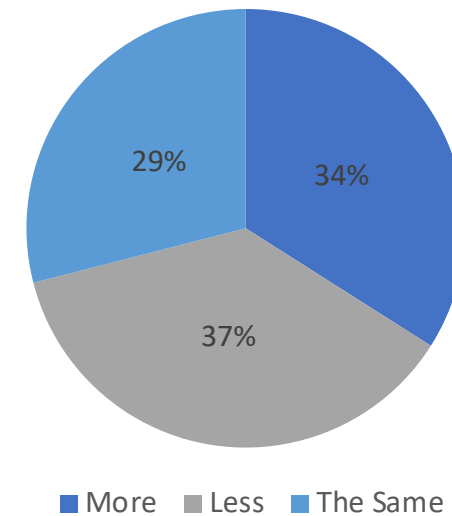
n= 1887

- There is an 8% variation between the Unemployed and the Employed on whether organizations are more authentic than before (34% v 26%). This suggests that those who are employed experience fewer examples of authentic cultures in their daily lives.
- The Unemployed with no "lived" frame of reference, possibly feel more optimistic about organizational authenticity.

Employed General Population



Unemployed General Population

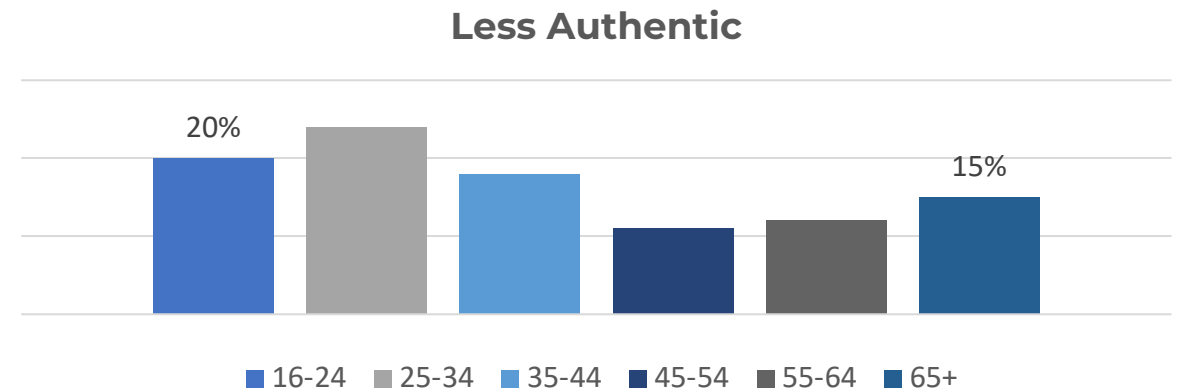
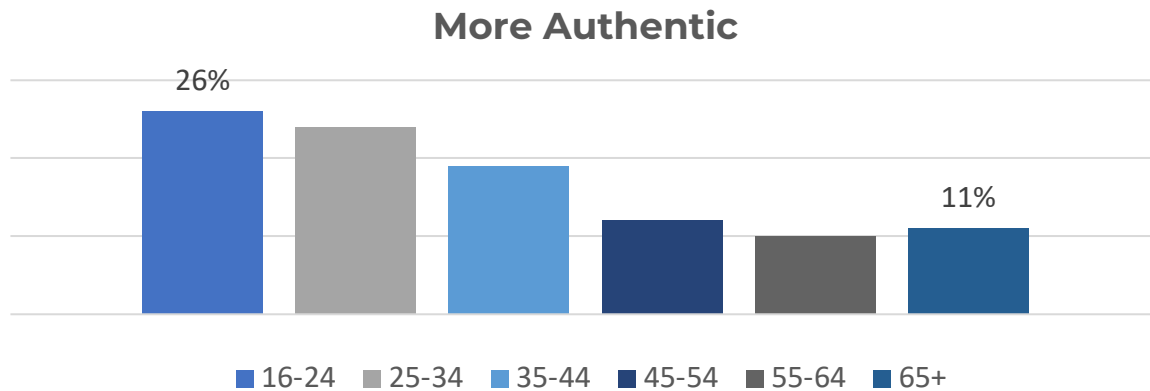


Q - Do you believe organizations today are more, or less, authentic about their cultures?

Younger respondents feel more positive about organizational authenticity than their older peers

n= 1887

- Encouraging to see that the younger cohort feel more optimistic about their working conditions with the 16-34 age range showing much higher correlation to organizational authenticity.
- Those respondents ranking their organizations as less authentic are predominantly in the 25-34 age group. This may reflect a time when "reality sets in" and they have experienced several years of real work. It may also reflect a heightened expectation during the COVID period that their organizations would step up...and they haven't.

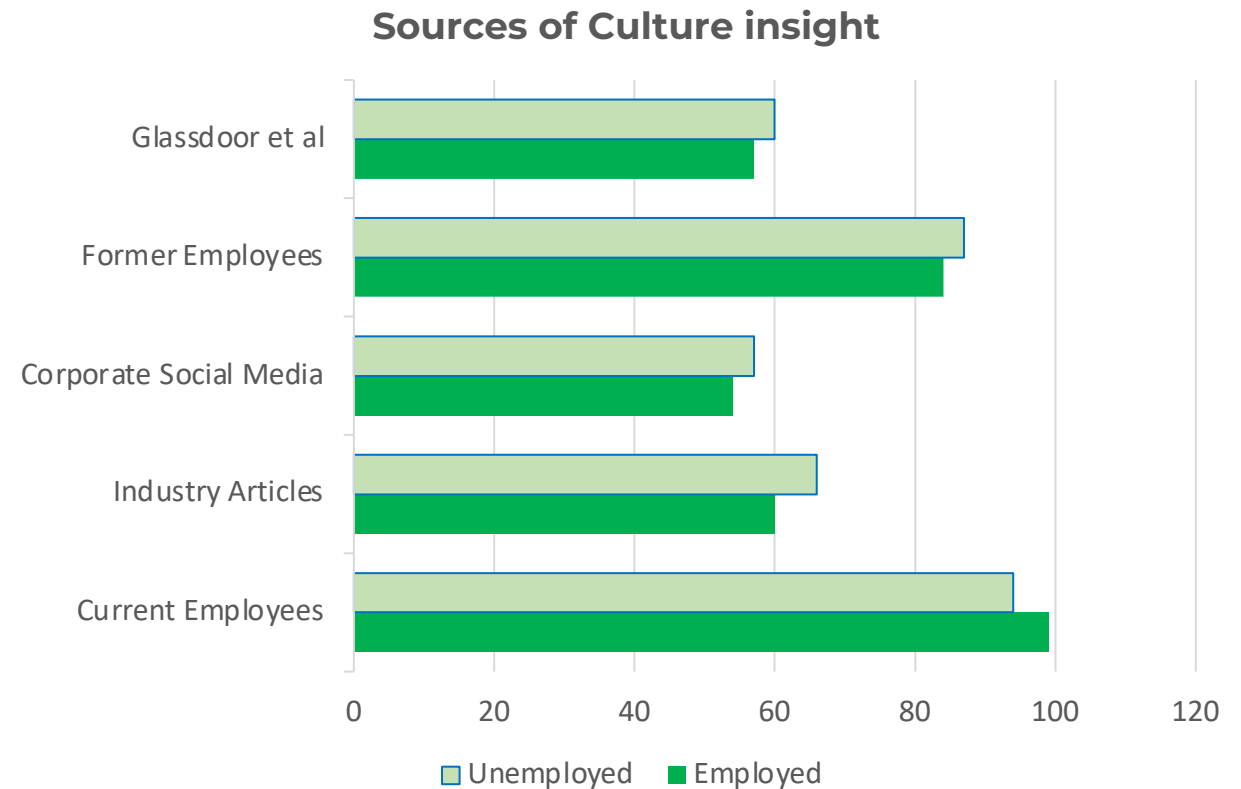


Q - In your most recent experience, how different is the culture inside an organization to how it is portrayed externally?

Employed and Unemployed show little difference in how they evaluate the credibility of sources

n = 547
n = 545

- There is little demonstrable difference in the perspectives of Employed and Unemployed respondents to which sources provide credible insight on culture.
- Variances are slight but the ranking remains consistent with current and former employees ranked as #1 and #2 sources.
- Interestingly Industry Articles do appear to have more weight than employee "review" sites like Glassdoor etc.



Q - What is the most credible source of information on an organization's real culture?



Verbatims

Verbatims from the Surveys: Positive

n = 110
n= 1887

- Amidst all the scathing and recurring themes, some wonderful colour comments emerged. I share these as comic relief and a reminder that very little gets past Joe and Jane Public. Wash at your own peril.

Probably Apple because they are always credible from the looks of it and have great customer service.

35-44. North America

Google. Their benefits make them seem like they care about their employees and when covid hit, they took care of the working parents

25-34. North America

Believe that Amazon and eBay do pretty good jobs at have incredible authentic culture in a workplace

35-44. North America

Amazon seems to be pretty honest about their company culture.

35-44. Europe

Verbatims from the Surveys: Negative

n = 110
n = 1887

- Amidst all the scathing and recurring themes, some wonderful colour comments emerged. I share these as comic relief and a reminder that very little gets past Joe and Jane Public. Wash at your own peril.

Maybe some of the newer tech companies. But not big corporations, it is all about the money and the share holders. Anything else is just for the show.

35-44. North America

I haven't encountered an organization that has the most credible or authentic culture. There's always something behind the scene

25-34. Europe

No company is exactly what they say they are. They're always redefining the rules and changing them, on they fly to suit their corporate image.

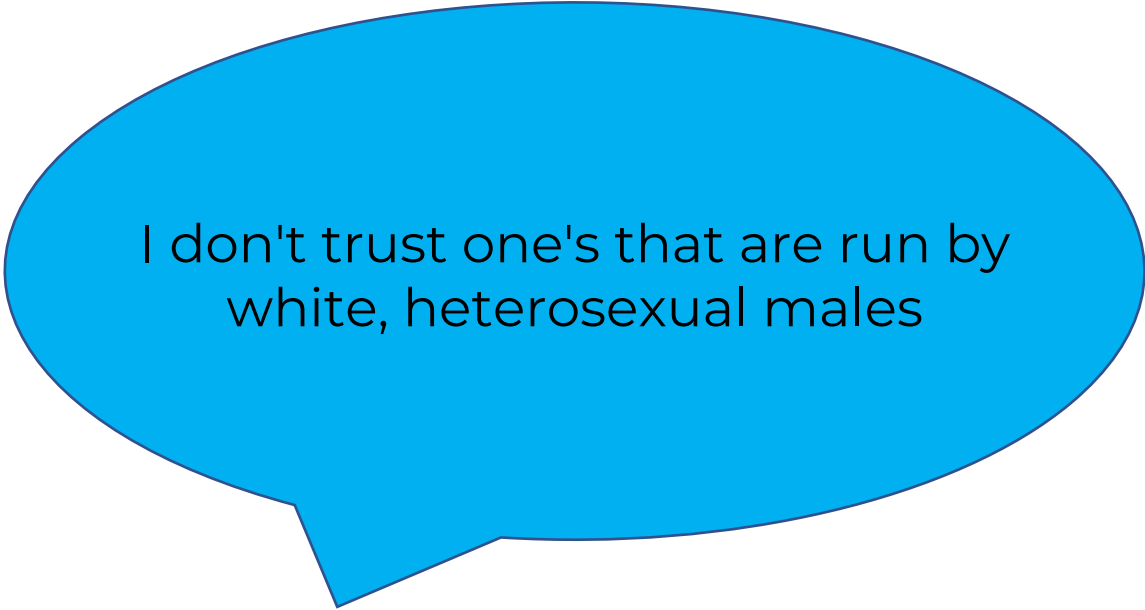
55-64. Europe

Not sure: I can see hypocrisy everywhere! It is very unsettling.

35-44. North America

The Mic-Drop

- Perhaps the verbatim that made me laugh out loud...but saddened me deeply.



I don't trust one's that are run by
white, heterosexual males

55-64. Europe

Culture Washing: So Now What?

Reviewing this data, and the colourful verbatims, I was reminded of one universal truth.

What you DO is more critical than what you SAY.

That yardstick – of your organization, your character, your leadership – has never been more in vogue. And more urgent to review. Just look at the figures for 16-34 year olds.

Perhaps another way to think of *Authentic* and *Inauthentic* is how big your DO>SAY gap is. As the preceding pages show, Joe Public knows when that gap is a chasm...and your Inauthentic colours shine through.

So where would I start?

Tactically, with a Culture Audit to gauge how "authentic" your current employees believe your culture is. They must be your first focus. [This will help you.](#)

And, ask your Executives – "how can we genuinely grow as a business if no-one believes that we'll do what we say?"

Respectfully, it's time to clean up your act.



FINAL THOUGHT

“In this ever-changing society, the most powerful and enduring brands are built from the heart. They are real and sustainable. Their foundations are stronger because they are built with the strength of the human spirit, not an ad campaign. The companies that are lasting are those that are authentic.”

– Howard Schultz, CEO, Starbucks

CONTACT



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