

How to assess company culture in the interview process



Organizational culture is the invisible force that touches every facet of an organization, shaping everything from team performance to employee morale. To assess company culture effectively during the interview process, senior executives and individual contributors alike must approach the conversation with a keen eye for nuance and alignment. [Arbinger's recent research report](#) found that 88% of the leaders anticipate the importance of company culture will significantly increase in the coming year.

Assessing culture isn't about surface-level observations or generic answers to general questions; it's about understanding the [mindset](#) that drives the underlying values, communication styles, and decision-making processes that guide the team. Mindset is a key differentiator here—how people see and think about their work and each other influences their behavior and, ultimately, the culture itself.

What are good questions to ask about culture?

Before you start the interview process, take time to identify a good culture fit for you. Understanding if you are a culture

fit is essential for both personal satisfaction and professional success.

To make the most of your interview and assess culture accurately, ask questions about your potential role and how the organization envisions your integration into the team. For example, ask, *“How do you see my role fitting into the leadership team, and what level of autonomy would I have?”* or *“How does this role interact with other departments?”*

It's crucial to understand how your contributions will be valued and whether you'll have the autonomy and support needed to make an impact. Just because the job description states that you'll report directly to the CEO or be a core leadership team member doesn't guarantee you'll have a voice at the table or the freedom to drive change.

Four drivers of company culture

To truly understand and assess a company's culture, focus on these four critical drivers: accountability, collaboration, employee engagement, and psychological safety. These elements reflect the organization's underlying mindset and are pivotal in shaping how teams interact, make decisions, and work toward common goals.

1. Accountability
2. Collaboration
3. Employee engagement
4. Psychological safety

Accountability: Building trust through ownership

A culture of accountability is essential for trust and high performance. In accountable cultures, individuals take ownership of their actions and are responsible not only for their successes but also for their failures. This mindset fosters trust within the team, as everyone knows they can rely on their colleagues to follow through on commitments and own up to mistakes.

To gauge the level of accountability within a leadership team, ask, “How does the team handle accountability, especially when things don’t go as planned?” Strong responses will demonstrate that leaders encourage ownership and learning from setbacks, fostering an environment where people take accountability instead of a culture where fingers are pointed, and blame is assigned, and others are responsible for holding people accountable.

Collaboration: Fostering a team-oriented mindset

Collaboration is critical to effective teams, and high-performing organizations cultivate a mindset that values collective success over individual achievements. Ask questions such as, “*How does the leadership team promote collaboration across departments?*” or “*Can you provide an example of a cross-functional project and how it was managed?*”

Leaders actively facilitate open communication in collaborative cultures and create structures that allow teams to work together seamlessly. Look for responses that emphasize structured processes for collaboration, like taking the time to [start the right way](#) before kicking off a project—or regular [impact check-ins](#) once the project is underway.

These types of practices reveal a commitment to unity and collective problem-solving as well as understanding our impact on others and the big picture. When teams adopt a collaborative mindset, they are more adaptable and innovative, able to tackle complex challenges through shared insight and cooperation.

Employee engagement: Cultivating commitment and enthusiasm

Employee engagement reflects how connected and motivated team members feel toward their work and the organization. An engaged workforce demonstrates higher morale, productivity, and commitment to organizational goals. To assess this aspect, consider asking, *“How does the team keep employees engaged, particularly during challenging times?”* or *“What strategies are in place to support career development and motivation?”*

Responses highlighting ongoing efforts to connect with employees, such as employee development opportunities and regular feedback sessions, indicate a culture that values engagement and sees employees as integral to the organization’s success. A mindset focused on engagement shows that the organization understands the importance of fostering a committed, motivated workforce not just for the sake of productivity but overall employee satisfaction.

Psychological safety: The foundation of a high-trust culture

[Psychological safety](#) is increasingly recognized as a cornerstone of successful teams. When team members feel safe expressing ideas, taking risks, and voicing concerns without fear of repercussions, they are more likely to contribute innovative ideas and tackle challenges collaboratively.

To gauge the level of psychological safety within a leadership team, ask, *“How do team members support each other in expressing different viewpoints?”* or *“How do you create an environment where everyone feels safe to speak up?”* Leadership teams that value perspectives often have tangible practices, like regular feedback sessions or forums for open discussion, that encourage communication across all levels of an organization.

An environment lacking psychological safety can sometimes be identified by common mindsets, such as the philosophy of *“Don’t bring me a problem without a solution.”* While this approach may sound pragmatic, it discourages team members from raising concerns or identifying potential issues unless they have immediate answers.

This mindset can stifle innovation, brainstorming, and open communication, leading to a disengaged culture where people hesitate to speak up. High-performance cultures, in contrast, actively foster psychological safety, enabling everyone to contribute without fear of retribution or dismissal.

Finding cultural alignment

Evaluating a company’s culture through these five drivers—accountability, collaboration, employee engagement, and psychological safety—helps paint a clear picture of the organization’s mindset and approach to building a high-performance workplace.

Through thoughtful questions, close observation, and a focus on understanding how mindset shapes behavior, executives and individual contributors can make informed decisions about whether a team’s culture aligns with their values and career aspirations. By prioritizing these key cultural elements, you’ll be better equipped to join an organization where you can thrive, contribute meaningfully, and find long-term satisfaction.

To delve deeper into the nuances of company culture and its impact on the workplace, download our guide, [*Who Owns Company Culture?*](#)