

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AS A SOURCE OF COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MEXICAN AIRLINES

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Abstract: Organizations constantly innovate to adapt to the ever-changing market and, above all, to face competition, thus organizational culture is an intangible asset necessary for their adaptability to the same. The aim of this work is to analyze the organizational culture of the following companies: Concesionaria Vuela Compañía de Aviación, S.A.P.I. de C.V. (Volaris), Aeroenlaces Nacionales, S.A. de C.V. (Viva Aerobus) and Aerovías de México S.A. de C.V. (Aeroméxico) in order to identify the elements that currently act as a differential competitive factor. A methodology with a quantitative approach was used, with a longitudinal non-experimental design, which measured the market share of the competing companies, comparing the efforts to develop an appropriate organizational culture for each one, in addition to confirming the hypothesis raised, in which the organizational culture works as a competitive element for companies in the sector. In conclusion, culture does represent a differentiating factor in a company, since in addition to being related to the company's values, it allows employees to project them, which results in a better customer experience.

Keywords: airline industry, competitive advantage, organizational culture

JEL Classification: M14, M10, L93

Introduction

Companies are constantly innovating to attract and retain customers, compete, and maintain a prominent position in the market. However, in some cases, the absence of the right strategic approach allows competitors to achieve greater growth.

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Organizational culture has therefore become a critical factor. According to Cújar et al. (2013), it plays a key role in shaping the organizational environment and determining how companies are perceived by customers. For this reason, culture must be strategically designed as a frame of reference that connects with clients, fostering comfort and identification with the company's values (Yopan et al., 2020). Furthermore, organizational culture is closely related to the value chain, enabling companies to stand out from competitors. As Méndez (2019) notes, culture can be compared to human DNA – unique, with the capacity to leave a lasting impression on consumers.

While organizational culture has been widely studied in developed markets, little is known about its role in Latin American airlines. This study is original in linking cultural practices in Mexican carriers – Volaris, Viva Aerobus, and Aeroméxico – with quantitative indicators such as sales and market share, while also addressing unique elements like gender equality and inclusive policies. In doing so, it contributes new evidence to how organizational culture functions as a competitive advantage in emerging markets.

Literature review

Organizational culture and its role in a modern company

For authors such as Shein (1998), Anzola and Hinestrosa (2003), Garibaldi, Wetzel and Ferreira (2009), Cheung, Wong and Lam (2012) and Hernández, Méndez and Contreras (2014), organizational culture is a set of shared beliefs, values, meanings, and basic assumptions that shape the behavior, structure, and identity of an organization. It is expressed through social practices, symbols, and behaviors, creating a shared cognitive and emotional framework that not only guides how things are done but also serves as a strategic resource for the organization's continuity and sustainability.

Organizational culture encompasses diverse characteristics and is not defined uniformly, leading to various cultural types within organizations. According to IPADE Business School (2025), Pursell (2023), and Roger Harrison's classification, the four main types are: power-oriented (focused on competitiveness and strong leadership), rule-oriented (emphasizing stability and strict compliance), results-oriented (centered on efficiency and goal achievement), and people-oriented (prioritizing employee development, motivation, and social values).

Organizational culture is a shared system of meaning that distinguishes one organization from another, often referred to as its "psychology" or "human core" (León, 2019; Hernández, 2023). It comprises symbols, language, ideology, beliefs, rituals, and myths, shaping norms and identity to achieve business objectives (Guerrero & Silva, 2017). Méndez (2019) emphasizes its evolving, intangible nature, highlighting the need to adjust and strengthen it to align with corporate goals. As Bernal et al. (2015) note, cultivating a strong culture fosters collaboration and quality service, ultimately benefiting the organization.

Organizational culture, in its role as a differentiating factor, drives innovation in all types of processes. It is one of the main elements that can stimulate or inhibit innovation. Everything depends on its development. Furthermore, the type of culture

that prevails in the company is also considered important for innovation (Naranjo-Valencia et al., 2012). Innovation in organizations is important for growth. It is essential to foster it in the development of the organization's culture as it helps achieve the stated objectives and even surpass them if investment and training are made based on the company's philosophy and values.

Organizational values shape not only the company's ethical image but also its internal work environment and behaviors. Rodríguez & Romo (2013) emphasize that such values are often internally oriented, prioritizing employee well-being so that they become personal values, leading to more authentic external interactions. Fostering genuine, consistently applied values is essential as customers can sense the difference between professional obligation and true passion – ultimately impacting service quality.

According to Pursell (2023), strengthening organizational culture enhances a company's strategic capacity by guiding actions through shared values, improving overall efficiency. As a foundational element in internal operations, culture can positively influence key areas such as sales, ultimately benefiting the organization.

A strong organizational culture is reflected in a company's ability to project its achievements through a clear identity. Pursell (2023) and Mena (2019) identify key elements that support such a culture: a guiding philosophy, a clear mission and vision, shared values, a positive organizational climate, a strong sense of corporate identity, and well-defined norms that promote order and accountability.

According to Bernal et al. (2015), marketing should be conceived as a philosophy that guides both the organizational structure and goals, with the purpose of effectively serving a previously studied market, and citing Porter (2007), they state that the cultural context – made up of institutions and social groups – has a direct impact on the values and behaviors of consumers, which facilitates the detection of opportunities and threats within the target market.

Organizational culture exerts a significant influence on all areas of the company, encompassing all hierarchical levels. For Hugo, Nóbile, and Soledad (2014), factors such as stress and anxiety in the workplace are closely linked to organizational culture since they directly impact the way work is carried out. Salas (2018) concluded that a strong organizational culture has a positive impact on the well-being of an organization's members, particularly in the sales department. Elements such as fulfilling responsibilities, professionalism, and proper process execution contribute to employees feeling attuned to their work, which is reflected in the obtained results. In this sense, it is essential to maintain internal communication consistent with the institutional philosophy and organizational objectives, considering that employee well-being in the sales department can translate into direct benefits in customer relations.

Analyzing the relationship between culture and the achievement of strategic objectives, Méndez (2019) highlights that culture and strategy are interconnected in adapting to environmental changes, generating value, and creating competitive advantages, particularly in alignment with the organization's mission and vision. Moreover, culture strengthens corporate identity and fosters a sense of belonging, commitment, and the attainment of results through strategic actions, thus maintaining an interdependent relationship between both elements.

Organizational culture and organizational philosophy are closely linked because culture is the practical implementation of the values, beliefs and principles contained in the organizational philosophy, influencing the daily behaviors, norms and functioning of its members. As noted by Pérez (2008), García (2017), and Andrada (2019), organizational philosophy refers to a shared system of core values, beliefs, practices, and knowledge that reflects the ethics and collective psychology of a company. It is shaped by leadership and expressed through the mission, vision, and strategy, guiding the behavior and decision-making of its members. Santos (2023) states that the core elements of organizational philosophy – mission, vision, and values – define the company's strategic focus, stakeholder commitment, and value proposition. These elements are publicly accessible and evolve over time to meet changing needs.

Organizational culture in México

Cultural studies emerged in English-speaking countries in the 1950s-60s as part of a cultural democratization process. In Latin America, their adoption was more recent, influenced by the British tradition but also rooted in regional intellectual currents dating back to 19th-century essays and 20th-century critical thought (Bernal et al., 2015). From the 1930s, this tradition took on a political, mainly Marxist, orientation – solidified after the 1959 Cuban Revolution and the revolutionary movements of the 1960s-70s – shaping a continental discourse linking culture and politics across Latin America.

In Mexico, organizational culture is generally warmer than in other countries, but challenges like gender discrimination and harassment persist, rooted in traditional views of women's roles. Nonetheless, these behaviors are declining as professional attitudes among women grow. Bernal et al. (2015) argue for a new organizational culture that values human potential – encouraging employee creativity and effort while promoting personal development, autonomy, and recognition by employers. Such a model could enhance productivity, innovation, and employee commitment in a competitive global context.

Below is key information regarding the organizational culture and market position of selected airlines:

- **Vuela Compañía de Aviación, S.A.P.I. de C.V.** – This company has been recognized by 5050 Women on Boards and Women Corporate Directors for having one of the highest levels of female representation on its board among publicly traded companies. Women also hold 87% of operational roles and 26% of management positions within the company (Revista Turismo, 2023). In line with International Women's Day, Volaris reaffirmed its commitment to an inclusive organizational culture through policies that promote equity. For over 15 years, gender equality has been a core part of its organizational strategy, aimed at fostering optimal conditions for employee performance. Women represent 47% of Volaris' workforce – referred to as “Ambassadors” – with a notable female presence in operational (87%) and management (26%) roles, including one female captain for every two aircraft. Additionally, this company became the leading

airline in Mexico's commercial air transport market, holding a 26.6% share, ahead of Aeroméxico and Viva Aerobus (Redacción El Economista, 2022).

- **Aeroenlaces Nacionales, S.A. de C.V.** – Viva Aerobus, a Mexican airline, promotes an inclusive organizational culture and aims to be a leader in this area. As part of its commitment to diversity, it temporarily changed its logo to rainbow colors during LGBTQ+ Pride Month (La Agencia de Viajes México, 2021). This company integrates values like tolerance, respect, and equality into its institutional philosophy, affirming that all individuals deserve dignified treatment regardless of sexual orientation. Since 2020, it has been recognized as one of the best companies to work for LGBTQ+ individuals, thanks to its inclusive corporate culture and compliance with the three criteria set by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) Foundation: anti-discrimination policies, development of LGBTQ+ competencies – including a Diversity and Inclusion Committee – and commitment to the public through impactful actions (Transporte.mx, 2021).
- **Aerovías de México S.A. de C.V.** – Aeroméxico, one of Mexico's most recognized airlines, currently holds the second-largest market share after Interjet. Nevertheless, its share declined slightly compared to 2019, a change attributed to shifts in its organizational culture during that period (Redacción El Economista, 2022). According to Pineda (2019, 2023), this company hired a cultural change specialist in 2017 to foster a customer-oriented culture. This led to digital transformation in 2019 and the launch of a company-wide training program to align processes and behaviors, especially in customer service. In recent years, the airline has redefined its culture through development, training, and inclusion initiatives, promoting a unified, customer-centric approach. These efforts have improved efficiency and strengthened its position in the industry.

Methods

This study adopted a mixed qualitative-quantitative approach with a nonexperimental, longitudinal design. It analyzed the organizational culture of three major Mexican airlines – Volaris, Viva Aerobus, and Aeroméxico – while simultaneously measuring their market share between 2019 and 2024. This period was selected to capture pre-pandemic stability, the disruption caused by COVID-19, and the subsequent recovery, offering a comprehensive perspective on how cultural practices adapted under critical conditions (Hernández, Fernández & Baptista, 2014).

The qualitative data on organizational culture were collected from secondary sources (company reports, annual statements, official websites, and public documents). The quantitative data, such as annual sales and market share, were obtained from official aviation authorities and company financial statements. The comparison criteria focused on three dimensions: (1) mission, vision, and values; (2) cultural initiatives related to inclusion, diversity, and customer orientation; and (3) financial performance indicators.

A main limitation of the study is the reliance on secondary, self-reported data, which may restrict the depth of cultural analysis and carry potential biases. Nevertheless, triangulating multiple sources and combining qualitative and quantitative evidence strengthens the robustness of the findings.

Results

Volaris has experienced significant growth in recent years, maintaining the largest market share from 2019 to 2024. While various factors contribute to this success, the following tables highlight the role of organizational culture in supporting the company’s performance.

Table 1. Company approach to organizational culture

Company	Organizational culture approach
Volaris	The company’s customer-focused culture promotes gender equality through inclusive policies and equal opportunities for both women and men.
Viva Aerobus	It fosters a diverse, customer-oriented culture based on respect and inclusion.
Aeroméxico	Its approach centers on customer development by continually identifying unmet needs.

Source: Authors’ own elaboration

Table 1 shows that the three airlines share a customer-focused orientation, but with different emphases. Volaris highlights gender equality, Viva Aerobus fosters inclusion and diversity, and Aeroméxico emphasizes customer development.

Table 2. Mission, vision and values

Company	Mission	Vision	Values
Volaris	With top talent and low costs, we make quality travel accessible to more people.	Create and embody exceptional travel experiences.	Security, customer service, sustained profitability, credibility, respect, impartiality, companionship and pride.
Viva Aerobus	We aim to make travel more affordable so people can enjoy themselves, do business, and connect with loved ones.	The most popular, fun, and profitable low-cost airline in the Americas.	Customer priority, honesty, consistency, teamwork, innovation, authenticity, and passion.
Aeroméxico	Elevate travel into an extraordinary, responsible experience.	Leading sustainable aviation.	Sustained growth, consistent service, safety, and discipline.

Source: Prepared based on Volaris (2019); Volaris (2023a); Viva Aerobus (2023b); Aeroméxico (2023)

As seen in Table 2, all three companies emphasize customer service and continuous improvement in their missions and visions. Volaris incorporates impartiality and pride, Viva Aerobus highlights innovation and authenticity, while Aeroméxico stresses sustainability and discipline.

Table 3. Type of culture and market share

Company	Organizational culture	Market share			
		2019	2022	2023	2024
Volaris	Customer orientation	19.9%	26.3%	25.4%	22.4%
Aeroméxico	Customer orientation	20.1%	18.1%	20.6%	21.8%
Viva Aerobús	Customer orientation	11.1%	20.0%	19.8%	20.9%

Source: Based on Agencia Federal de Aviación Civil (2020, 2023, 2024, 2025)

Table 3 reveals the evolution of market share. Volaris consolidated its leadership between 2019 and 2022, while Aeroméxico stabilized after a slight decline. Viva Aerobus significantly expanded, reaching almost the same level as Aeroméxico by 2024. These trends suggest that cultural orientation – particularly inclusivity and customer service – has strengthened market presence.

Table 4. Airline revenues in dollars during 2019-2024

Airline	Revenue					
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Volaris	1,788,212	1,077,091	2,103,499	2,739,427	3,123,524	3,009,699
Aeroméxico	3,645.16	1,511.91	2,409.83	3,402.4	4,504.2	4,504.2
Viva Aerobús	682,430.43	435,789.37	346,003.34	1,461,226	668,714	650,223

Source: based on Grupo Aeroméxico (2022); Grupo Aeroméxico (2025); Viva Aerobús (2020); Viva Aerobús (2021); Viva Aerobús (2022); Viva Aerobús (2023a); Viva Aerobús (2025); Volaris (2020) Volaris (2021); Volaris (2022); Volaris (2023b); Volaris (2024); Volaris (2025a)

Table 4 indicates that Volaris experienced the strongest financial rebound after the pandemic, Aeroméxico achieved a steady recovery through digital transformation, and Viva Aerobus displayed fluctuations but consolidated its competitive position through inclusive branding.

Taken together, the evidence in Tables 1-4 confirms that organizational culture directly influences both market share and income. Volaris's inclusivity policies, Viva Aerobus's diversity initiatives, and Aeroméxico's digital transformation represent distinct cultural strategies that explain their respective performance patterns and competitive positioning.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the effective management of organizational culture has a direct positive impact on income and market share. This aligns with Kotter and Heskett's (1992) seminal study *Corporate Culture and Performance*, which analyzed 207 U.S. companies over eleven years and found that those with strong cultural management achieved significantly higher revenue, stock value, and net income growth compared to those without. These results highlight the strategic importance of cultivating a well-managed organizational culture (Rick, 2015).

In the case of Mexican airlines, cultural practices are not merely symbolic but translate into measurable outcomes. When organizational culture prioritizes inclusion, customer orientation, and adaptability, airlines are better positioned to expand their market presence and achieve financial resilience. Volaris's gender policies, Viva Aerobus's diversity practices, and Aeroméxico's digital transformation efforts each represent distinct cultural strategies that have contributed to competitive performance. These findings are consistent with Naranjo-Valencia, Jiménez, and Sanz-Valle (2012), who argue that organizational culture can stimulate or inhibit innovation, and in line with Bernal, Ochoa, and Álvarez (2015), who emphasize that cultivating a strong culture fosters collaboration and quality service.

Similar conclusions are supported in the broader Latin American context. Torres, Uvidia, and Carapaz (2021) emphasize that accurately diagnosing organizational culture is crucial for maintaining competitiveness as employee behavior reflects cultural alignment. Their study of Peruvian companies revealed a 68% effectiveness rate in teamwork, illustrating the direct influence of culture on role conformity. Likewise, Meza-Lizárraga, Palacios-Gómez, and Pérez-Lizárraga (2025) argue that a culture promoting motivation, collaboration, and commitment significantly enhances productivity. Thus, strengthening organizational culture should be considered a strategic priority to improve performance and achieve goals more efficiently.

However, these results must be contextualized. The practices observed in Volaris, Viva Aerobus, and Aeroméxico reflect the particular dynamics of the Mexican airline industry, characterized by strong competition among low-cost carriers and increasing social demands for inclusivity. As Porter (2007) suggests, cultural context directly influences consumer values and organizational behavior, which means that the generalizability of these findings to other countries or industries may be limited.

Conclusion

The analysis confirms a strong correlation between organizational culture, sales, and market share. These elements are interdependent: when a company cultivates a well-defined and customer-focused culture, it strengthens its relationship with clients, increasing satisfaction, loyalty, and ultimately market performance. This is consistent with Kotter and Heskett's (1992) argument that strong cultural management fosters long-term competitiveness.

Volaris exemplifies this dynamic, positioning its culture as a differentiator through inclusive values and gender equality policies that have contributed to its recognition as a top employer, particularly for women. Similarly, Viva Aerobus has consolidated its market position through inclusion and diversity initiatives, while Aeroméxico has invested in digital transformation and customer-oriented practices to enhance resilience. These cases demonstrate that success lies not in replicating competitors' models but in cultivating authentic cultural strategies aligned with organizational values and objectives (Naranjo-Valencia et al., 2012; Bernal et al., 2015).

Organizational culture also shapes how employees engage with customers. When effectively communicated – rather than imposed – it becomes part of employees'

professional identity and is reflected in the service they deliver, reinforcing the idea that culture operates as a strategic differentiator (Guerrero, 2020).

Nonetheless, challenges persist. As Méndez, Rosales, and Delgado (2020) note, consumers in the low-cost airline sector are increasingly demanding. Despite Volaris leading the market, it continues to face operational issues such as overbooking, delays, and weak service recovery mechanisms. These weaknesses suggest that cultural alignment must be complemented with improvements in operational efficiency and service quality (Volaris, 2025b).

In summary, this study highlights that organizational culture functions as a competitive advantage for Mexican airlines, influencing both market share and financial outcomes. Nevertheless, the findings are context-specific: practices such as gender equality initiatives, inclusivity, and customer orientation reflect the dynamics of the Mexican aviation industry, which is highly competitive and dominated by low-cost carriers. As Porter (2007) emphasizes, cultural context shapes consumer behavior, limiting the generalizability of results to other regions.

Future research should expand this analysis to other Latin American or international airlines, incorporating primary data – such as employee surveys or interviews – to capture internal perceptions of culture and assess whether similar strategies generate comparable results in different institutional contexts.

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KULTURA ORGANIZACYJNA JAKO PRZEWAGA KONKURENCYJNA: PRZYPADEK MEKSYKAŃSKICH LINII LOTNICZYCH

Streszczenie: Organizacje nieustannie wprowadzają innowacje, aby dostosować się do dynamicznie zmieniającego się rynku, a przede wszystkim sprostać konkurencji. Kultura organizacyjna jest niematerialnym zasobem, niezbędnym do ich zdolności adaptacyjnych. Celem niniejszej pracy jest analiza kultury organizacyjnej firm: Concesionaria Vuela Compañía de Aviación, S.A.P.I. de C.V. (Volaris), Aeroenlaces Nacionales, S.A. de C.V. (Viva Aerobus) oraz Aerovías de México S.A. de C.V. (Aeroméxico), w celu zidentyfikowania elementów, które obecnie działają jako czynnik różnicujący i konkurencyjny. Warto wspomnieć, że mimo iż ostatnia z wymienionych firm już nie prowadzi działalności, jej analiza pozostaje istotna dla tego badania. Zastosowano metodologię o podejściu ilościowym, z podłużnym (longitudinalnym), nieeksperymentalnym projektem badawczym, który mierzył udział w rynku konkurencyjnych firm oraz analizowanej spółki, porównując wysiłki wkładane w rozwój odpowiedniej kultury organizacyjnej w każdej z nich. Dodatkowo potwierdzono postawioną hipotezę, że kultura organizacyjna działa jako element przewagi konkurencyjnej dla firm z sektora. Podsumowując: kultura rzeczywiście stanowi czynnik różnicujący w przedsiębiorstwie, ponieważ – oprócz powiązania z wartościami firmy – pozwala pracownikom je wyrażać, co przekłada się na lepsze doświadczenia klientów.

Słowa kluczowe: przemysł lotniczy, przewaga konkurencyjna, kultura organizacyjna

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