

White Paper

CORPORATE CULTURE: TOYOTA'S SECRET, COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Toyota currently enjoys a significant competitive advantage with respect to General Motors (GM). This advantage has been attributed to their "lean production" system. However, this paper focuses on what may be an equally significant component of Toyota's success: their "corporate culture."

This White Paper describes the Toyota "culture" in terms of its basic mission statement, its fundamental beliefs and values, and most importantly, how it puts these beliefs and values into practice. A comparison is made between the Toyota culture and the GM culture, as to how they are perceived at the operating, "shop floor" level, using the NUMMI workforce as the source of the perceptions. This is a unique location to do this type of analysis, since most of the workforce has worked under both cultures.

What was observed in looking at the two cultures was that while the "words" used to express the beliefs and values were quite similar, the "actions" seen at the shop floor were much different. In short, GM's words didn't match well with its actions. Information is then presented as to how Toyota tries to ensure its "words and actions" are congruent. The paper concludes with some ideas as to how GM can get its actions and words to match more closely, so as to attain a culture that is as much a competitive advantage as that which Toyota currently enjoys.

INTRODUCTION

Much has been written about the competitive advantage Toyota currently enjoys. In most cases, this competitive advantage is attributed to their lean production system, based on their fundamentals of "just-in-time" production and "Jidoka" (error-proofing — not passing defective products to the next operation) with the preconditions of standardized work and "Heijunka" (level scheduling). However, an equally important area of competitive advantage may be Toyota's corporate culture, which creates the environment and provides key drivers for their

production system. Without this culture, their system could easily deteriorate (a constant source of concern at Toyota) and cease to improve.

Gaining insight into the Toyota culture is not easily done during a short visit to NUMMI. Visitors see the "outward signs" of the culture as interpreted by NUMMI in the NUMMI cornerstones (i.e., mutual trust and respect, fairness and equity, teamwork, and involvement). But the Toyota culture goes much deeper than this. This paper will attempt to provide additional insight into the Toyota culture in terms of presenting the Toyota basic mission statement, its fundamental beliefs, its values, and most importantly, how it puts these values into practice.

The information presented in this paper was obtained from an executive training session presented by Toyota to its key North American operating executives (plant managers and above) in an attempt to explain the drivers behind the Toyota production system. In this aspect, Toyota faces a similar problem to that facing GM in trying to implement the quality network/synchronous manufacturing strategies. Perhaps by observing their method of "indoctrinating" their new managers into their production system, we can gain insights into how to drive the change process for implementing quality network/synchronous manufacturing in General Motors. A key point to note is that Toyota starts their indoctrination process by explaining and defining their corporate culture. Perhaps there's a lesson for us to learn here.

This paper will be divided into three sections. The first section deals with contrasting the Toyota culture with the "traditional" GM culture, as seen through the eyes of the most important people in the company — the team members (or workers) on the shop floor (including sixth, seventh, and eighth-level supervision). These are the people who execute the corporate plans and directly interpret the corporate culture, and put it into practice on a daily basis.

The second section will present the Toyota culture in terms of its mission, fundamental beliefs and values, and how Toyota puts these elements into operational practice on a daily basis.

The last section presents some ideas on how to improve our GM culture, based on observations made in the prior two sections, followed by a brief summary of the paper.

Cultural Differences

Area	Traditional Perception	Toyota Perception
<p>Beliefs and values</p> <p>"Please note the focus found in the TMC beliefs and values. They deal directly with their product (cars) and have many of the "basics" clearly stated. If you count all the words in the quality network statement (including "bullets") and compare it to the TMC statement, you'll find we take 30% more (98 vs. 62) to get our point across. Which set is easier to understand and remember?"</p>	<p>Not sure what "beliefs and values" are. Actions indicate that "make money to budget any way you can" (usually at someone else's expense or by reducing headcount) is important and that "bottom line" is "king" — not customer. (Quality is <i>third</i> behind cost and delivery). This does not appear to be in harmony with the published beliefs and values most recently expressed in the quality network as "customer satisfaction through people, teamwork, and continuous improvement. Note also that the QN statement had a total of 16 bullets to further explain "people, teamwork, and continuous improvement."</p>	<p>Very sure of "beliefs and values." Actions indicate that customer satisfaction is paramount (as evidenced by strict focus on quality) and that team members are extremely important. This appears to be in line with their "published" statements that corporate "mission" is to "enrich society through building cars" followed by their 7 basic values: (1) customer first; (2) competition and cooperation within our industry; (3) respect for the value of people; (4) mutual trust between employees and management; (5) challenge and courage; (6) applied creativity; and (7) cost consciousness</p>
<p>Problem-solving "environment"</p>	<p>Problems are "bad," sign of poor manager. Seek to find the who, not what or why.</p>	<p>Problems are "opportunities to improve." Poor manager is one who</p>

Area	Traditional Perception	Toyota Perception
		can see "no problems." Seek root cause by asking what, why, not who.
Focus (internal and external)	Cost focus, "Wall Street" stockholder driven, short-term gain.	Quality focus; customer driven, create long-term success by creating environment wherein team members have the same beliefs and values as company.
Corporate "power brokers"	Financial staff	Manufacturing/engineering staff. (Note: there are no "financial" people on the Board of Directors. Finance serves as advisors only.)
Management style	Indirect involvement. Manage by reading/analyzing computer reports. Little time or presence on shop floor.	Direct involvement, visit shop floor often. Expected to go see problems firsthand.
Union-management relations	Co-determination. Adversarial.	Co-destiny. Cooperation.
Reward system	Focus on individual and results. A "loner" environment.	Focus on teamwork and on process, as much as results. "Team" environment.
Standardization	Little effort to standardize. "Do your own thing" culture. Much "variation" in values, fundamentals from site to site.	Leave effort placed on standardizing as much as possible. Little variation in values; fundamentals from location to location.
Communication	"Closed" structure with	"Open structure with

Area	Traditional Perception	Toyota Perception
	many barriers (such as offices, walls, etc.). Information "hoarding" environment. A "tell" culture.	few barriers ("bullpen" atmosphere). Information "sharing" environment with a consensus culture.
Equality of treatment; worker status	Many signs of differences at workplace, such as dress codes (suit, tie, etc.), parking privileges, office furnishings, etc.	Effort made to eliminate distinctions in the workplace. Shown by use of "uniforms," common parking/cafeteria, few offices.
Team member "value"	View employee as variable cost and a "liability." Little recognition, much blame.	Team member viewed as a fixed cost "asset." Much effort placed on recognition, little focus on blame.
Training	Classroom style with little direct relationship to actual work environment. Teaching done by "outsider."	"On-the-job" focus with direct tie-in to work environment. Teaching done by supervisor as much as possible.

A VIEW OF THE GM AND TOYOTA CULTURES

This section — as well as this entire paper — will basically deal with "soft side" comparisons rather than the "hard side" (structural, production system, technological, and design) areas commonly compared. It is felt that a good portion of the competitive advantage Toyota currently enjoys has its roots in Toyota's corporate culture, and the environment this culture creates. One only has to listen to observations made by the many visitors to NUMMI about the work ethic and employee attitude they see at NUMMI (excited people, interested in their jobs, "fully utilized," productive, contributors, part of the team) in contrast to what they're seeing at their home plants, to understand the "competitive edge" Toyota's culture provides. To further emphasize this point, consider that NUMMI is

currently producing a relatively high-quality, low-cost vehicle in a former GM facility that is essentially "low-tech" in comparison to most GM plants. This is being done with much the same workforce the prior GM operation had (granted, they underwent a significant emotional event), at performance and productivity levels that are the envy of many GM plants, with an extremely low level of capital investment. Obviously, a portion of this is due to the Toyota production system. However, we must not lose sight that a significant portion of this result is also due to the environment and culture Toyota has put into place.

Perhaps the best way to gain insight into the cultural/environmental differences between Toyota and GM is to see how the two "systems" appear to the team members, first-level supervisors, and "middle managers" on the shop floor. NUMMI presents a unique opportunity to do this, since it has operated under both the GM and Toyota systems. There are enough personnel at NUMMI with a great deal of experience under both systems to provide a valid source of information for comparison purposes. This, the information presented in this section is based on interviews with NUMMI personnel who worked for GM in the past, Toyota Motor Corporation (TMC) personnel assigned to NUMMI, and GM personnel assigned to NUMMI as part of the joint venture. It is recognized that the comments from past GM employees now working for NUMMI may be "colored" by their experience during plant closing, and may not reflect the current GM culture (i.e., out-of-date). However, based on the comments and concerns expressed by the many GM visitors to the plant, they do not appear to be significantly "out-of-date."

Based on the information obtained, a summary in tabular form of how GM and Toyota are viewed in several "cultural" areas is described on the following pages.

One can observe from these tables that the "floor culture" is quite different between a traditional GM plant and a Toyota facility (NUMMI). Yet, when one looks at the written corporate beliefs, values, and mission of the two companies, they appear to be quite similar in content, if not intent. GM would like to have the same "shop floor culture" as evidenced at NUMMI. Given the similarity of values "at the top," we need to analyze why there are such different results on the shop floor. The next section will attempt to provide additional insights in this area.

THE TOYOTA "CULTURE"

As seen in the previous section, there appears to be a wide gap between the GM and Toyota shop floor cultures, in spite of the many similarities in beliefs and values in the respective corporate publications. Perhaps the reason for the difference is the manner in which Toyota puts its beliefs and values into practice. Before we get into this area, however, we need to more clearly understand what Toyota's beliefs and values (i.e., culture) are. The information that follows was taken from a Toyota executive training seminar conducted in November 1990 for its key North American personnel (plant manager level and above). It might be interesting to review the purpose of the meeting, as shown in the invitation announcement. Note that the purpose is to get the North American (U.S.) managers up-to-speed in the Toyota culture *prior* to starting additional training in the Toyota production system.

TOYOTA'S BELIEFS AND VALUES

The fundamental beliefs of Toyota are:

- The company is not thought of as just a private, profit-making enterprise. There is a constant awareness that as a business, the company has a responsibility to society, to its employees, and to future generations. Toyota's company motto is: *"Enrich society through building cars."*
- Below are the ways that Toyota feels it can enrich society by building cars:
 - ✓ Contribution through product and service:
 - Creating desirable products (high quality, reasonable price, quick delivery).
 - Strong service system.
 - Technological advances.
 - ✓ Contribution to Toyota employees:
 - Job security.

- Training/education.
- ✓ Contribution to all economic levels by Toyota's continuous growth/development:
 - Creating more jobs.
 - Business opportunities for other companies.
 - Taxes paid to government.

The company's values are:

- Toyota has always realized the importance of the values listed below. Many of these values were learned through Toyota's history, and have come to be recognized as common values in the company through experience:
 - ✓ Customer first.
 - ✓ Competition and cooperation within our industry.
 - ✓ Respect for the value of people.
 - ✓ Mutual trust between employees and management.
 - ✓ Challenge and courage.
 - ✓ Applied creativity.
 - ✓ Cost consciousness.
- As a business enterprise, Toyota feels it is important to keep a good balance among its company values, and consistently apply those values in all its systems and policies.

An "in-depth" explanation of these values is presented next.

The Customer First

One of the distinctive characteristics of the automobile industry is that the customer receives the completed product directly. The customer evaluates his/her new vehicle (the product) on the basis of quality, price, and performance.

Toyota feels it can only make a profit when the customer purchases its products. Its goal as a business enterprise is, thus, to provide quality, price, technology, and service that is satisfying and attractive from the customer's point of view.

This desire leads to the belief that the customer comes first, which is a fundamental part of the thinking of the company.

Toyota's just-in-time approach is an example of this belief at work. The customer wants to have his/her car as soon as possible. Toyota tries to organize its sales and production systems so that is the shortest lead-time possible for the customer, between ordering and receiving the car.

The "customer first" idea is also applied to the way Toyota employees treat one another and go about their jobs. For example, they promote trying to think of the person, process, or unit which received their work, as their customer.

Competition and Cooperation Within Our Industry

Another characteristic of the automobile industry is its enormous size. There are many people and related companies involved. That's why the automobile industry can contribute to society on such a large scale, through its continuous growth and development.

An automobile manufacturer has many close business relationships, including its parts suppliers and dealers. All expect mutual growth as part of the same enterprise. For example, if Toyota grows, but its suppliers and dealers are unable to make a profit or provide job security, Toyota feels that it also will eventually go out of business.

That's why Toyota believes that over the long-term, both cooperation and healthy competition should be part of its relationship with its suppliers and dealers. "Competition" means that Toyota chooses several parts suppliers and lets them compete to produce the same parts, with the best quality, at the lowest price.

Cooperation means that Toyota also supports the long-term growth and stability of companies with which it has relationships, primarily through technological assistance. The long-term growth of the entire automobile industry, through cooperation and competition, is one of Toyota's goals.

Respect For the Value of People

Toyota believes its growth as a business enterprise comes through the growth of its people. This means to be successful, Toyota must utilize its employees' abilities as effectively as possible, and help each person develop the ability to think and execute the job more effectively.

Toyota has plants, equipment, and capital resources, but these things do not build cars. Its team members build the cars. Its team members also add value to its products by suggesting ways to improve their work and the production process. Toyota realizes that it is responsible for providing its employees the opportunity to contribute their ideas, as well as their labor.

Toyota also believes that to get the best from its employees, it must respect their competence, and provide them with jobs that use and challenge their abilities. Toyota realizes the value of its people, and wants them to think of the company as a place where everyone can learn from one another, and grow as individuals, rather than just as a place to work.

Mutual Trust Between Employees and Management

Mutual trust means that management and the employees have confidence in one another. Management and their employees have different jobs and different responsibilities in the company. Mutual trust comes from the belief that everyone is, however, striving for the same purpose: prosperity of the company, which means better and more secure employment for all.

The employees must be confident that management will make the right decisions for the prosperity of the company, while listening to them and rewarding fairly for their work.

Management must be confident that the employees will respect company policies and rules, and work hard for the prosperity of the company, to help secure everyone's welfare.

In other words, management and the employees must trust each other to try hard to meet their responsibilities for their mutual benefit.

Toyota realizes this kind of mutual trust is not a given condition between management and the employees. It must be earned through many mutual efforts that create confidence.

Toyota values and tries to maintain mutual trust, because it is the foundation for the growth of the company and its employees.

Challenge and Courage

To win the race for market share in the automobile industry, and to continue to make a profit, Toyota feels it must continue to grow as a company. Toyota has always tried to be ahead of business trends from its beginning. It challenges its team members to constantly look for new and better ways to do their work.

Toyota also realizes that meeting the challenge of continuous improvement requires courage. It urges its team members to try or suggest their new ideas, and not be afraid of making mistakes. Without some risk of failure, there is generally little opportunity for improvement. If a failure occurs, the important thing is to learn from it, and not to make the same mistake again.

Applied Creativity (Kaizen)

Toyota values "creativity" as much as "challenge and courage." Solving production and quality problems, and eliminating waste and reducing costs, are essential for Toyota's profit and growth. To accomplish these things, it is necessary to constantly look for and implement better ways of doing the work.

At Toyota, all employees are encouraged to search for and suggest better methods for performing their jobs. Toyota believes that the person who does the job is the most appropriate to discover and pinpoint problems accurately. It is their practice to promote creativity by all employees, not just management.

The best results come from the countermeasures created at the point of the problem. Toyota values creativity that can be applied and put into immediate use.

Cost Consciousness

Toyota must make a profit and have available capital to continue growing as a business. The company realized this very clearly in the recession period following World War II. The company was almost bankrupt. There were many layoffs, and the president resigned. Toyota vowed then to become debt-free, and has succeeded. This allows the company to make investments and expansions at the right time, and to make a profit.

Toyota was able to become debt-free because of its cost consciousness and continuous cost reduction activities. Cost consciousness is critical to the company. Toyota does not make a profit by adding to the cost of its cars for the customer. It prices its cars at the current market level. To make a profit, the company must reduce the costs for producing its cars, as much as possible, below the market price.

Toyota: Profit = price - cost
Others: Price = cost + profit

It is important for all Toyota team members to realize this approach and continue their cost reduction efforts on a daily basis. This is the kind of thinking that is required for the company to grow and continue growing in the future.

Toyota puts its values into practice through effective use of the systems and tools, such as the following:

- Management tools:
 - ✓ Kaizen.
 - ✓ PDCA cycle of management.

- Business-related systems:
 - ✓ Toyota production system.
 - ✓ Policy management system.
 - ✓ Cost control system.

- People-related systems:

- ✓ Employee development system.
- ✓ Creative suggestion system.
- ✓ QC circles.

- Company-wide committees:
 - ✓ Customer satisfaction committee.
 - ✓ Quality committee.
 - ✓ Cost control committee.
 - ✓ Creative suggestion committee.
 - ✓ Safety and health committee.
 - ✓ Contribution to society committee.

IMPLEMENTING VALUES

At this point, we are ready to look in greater detail as to how Toyota puts its values into practice. Toyota's explanation of how to do this is as follows:

- Toyota has created many systems, policies, and management methods to put its values into practice, and they have worked well. Every company has its own values, and finds its own methods to implement them. The important thing is that the employees understand the intent of a company's values, and find ways to put them into practice in every situation they face. A company's values and methods must be applied, and applied continuously, to get the results the company seeks. For that reason, Toyota gives its employees a great deal of information and training about its systems, policies, and methods, to help them understand the company's values.

[Graphic Not Available]

- In order to implement Toyota's systems and methods, every team member has several steps to follow.

[Graphic Not Available]

- Toyota emphasizes learning through the experience which comes from actually doing the job, and doing it continuously. Their values and working principles emerged from their experience and history as a company. Their team members learn about their values and principles through their experience every day on the job. This gives everyone in the company a common sense of the Toyota way, and its underlying values and principles.

Toyota has also developed a set of fundamental principles to further aid in implementing their beliefs and values. These principles are:

- Consider mid-term and long-term needs and improvements.
- See and experience what is actually occurring, firsthand.
- Seek the most rational way.
- Strive for cost-effectiveness.
- Promote teamwork for the best results.
- Develop subordinates.

Each principle is fundamental to the realization of Toyota's values, and a guide to the use of Toyota's systems, policies, methods, and management tools.

Let's look "in-depth" at what these principles mean.

Consider Mid-Term and Long-Term Needs and Improvements

Definition: It is not the Toyota way to focus just on management for short-term results. They always think about mid-term and long-term needs, as well. They set targets, make plans, and manage from the perspective of what is best for both the long-term and the short-term. Therefore, they focus on both process and results as they work toward their goals.

Reason/advantage: By taking a long-term perspective, they can avoid unnecessary risks by systematically planning investments to move step-by-step toward a goal.

Focusing on short-term gains can lead to long-term losses. For example, a company delayed scheduled equipment replacement to increase profits for that

year. The following year, they did not have the capital to invest in the new equipment planned for both years. As a result, they could not make product changes sought by their customers, and lost a large portion of their market share.

Model change projects and sales network expansions which can take five to 10 years from investigation to completion are impossible without long-range planning.

Developing employees who have the required skills and are prepared to progress in their careers takes time. Long-term planning for each employee's development creates the best results for both the company and employee.

See and Experience What Is Actually Occurring Firsthand

Definition: When addressing a problem or making a decision, it is important to get the facts yourself, rather than relying on the reports or opinions of others. To grasp what is actually occurring in a situation, it is necessary to observe the facts firsthand.

Reason/advantage: If a plan or countermeasure is made without first getting a grasp of the facts of the situation, the results will frequently be disappointing. The countermeasure may address the wrong problem, or the plan may not be practical for the situation.

To address a problem effectively, it is necessary to determine its cause from the facts of the situation. Otherwise, your countermeasure may be directed at a symptom, rather than the real cause.

Even a good plan or countermeasure can fail without an accurate grasp of the current situation at the work site. If you do not have the facts, you cannot know the right time to act or how you should adjust to succeed.

Seek the Most Rational Way

Definition: At Toyota, they do not assume that an idea is the "most rational way" because it makes sense on paper or sounds good in theory. To be rational, or "make sense," an idea must also be practical. The only way to determine if an idea

is practical is to apply it and see if it achieves the desired results without unnecessary work.

Reason/advantage: Each time you put an idea into practice, it reveals unnecessary work. By continually eliminating unnecessary work, while maintaining desired results, you make an idea more rational and more practical.

Business always requires results. Even a great idea cannot make a profit until it is implemented.

Strive For Cost-Effectiveness

Definition: You must always consider the cost when making a plan or an improvement. Examine the possibility that you can reach the same target with lower costs. Remember that manpower is a cost, too.

Reason/advantage: When you are trying to determine the most cost-effective approach, always look at ways you can eliminate unnecessary work, and thereby get the same results for less cost.

Remember, there is generally more than one way to "skin a cat," or reach a target. When you consider cost-effectiveness, you look at both results and cost. A "perfect" solution may be very expensive. Another approach may achieve nearly the same results for less cost. The most effective solution is the one that gives you the best balance between costs and results.

If there are several jobs to be done, prioritize them. Focus on the most important one first to get the work done more efficiently.

Promote Teamwork For the Best Results

Definition: Look company-wide. What is good for the company? How can you cooperate with others to get the best result for the company? That is what teamwork means at Toyota.

Reason/advantage: The time to complete the job is reduced when you divide the tasks among your team members, and all cooperate.

You raise the quality of the work when you combine ideas contributed by everyone.

If everyone participates in the planning stage, you can make a consensus in the team. This will carry over to the implementation stage, and you proceed toward the target together, without misunderstanding.

Teamwork increases communications, both vertically (between supervisor and subordinate) and horizontally (between members of related departments). This raises everyone's effectiveness and the ease of their jobs.

There is more job know-how shared among team members, which promotes everyone's development and work satisfaction.

As you can see, Toyota has a very logical and well-thought-out method of communicating its beliefs and values, as well as the basic operating fundamentals to its workforce. It is obvious that they spend a great deal of effort to maintain and promulgate them, as well.

LESSONS FOR GENERAL MOTORS

In view of the preceding information, it is logical to ask what we can do at GM to improve the "view from the bottom" in our company. Some suggestions are as follows:

- *Do not copy TMC.* We need to understand why they are such a strong competitor and what drives their systems, and then use that knowledge to create a "better" system at GM. To merely copy them will produce some successes, depending on how well we understand the "whys" behind the "whats" in their system. However, this will not allow us to recapture our place as the most competitive corporation in the world. Instead, we need to find the proper blend of what we do well with what they do well, to attain the best system possible.
- Change our "perceived" focus from that of being cost-driven, short-term gain-oriented, to that of being a customer-driven, long-term, steady, improvement-oriented company. Put the customer *first* and *mean*

it. Saturn's recent vehicle recall/exchange program is an excellent example of one way to demonstrate this change.

- *Refine and clearly define* our company mission, beliefs, values, and basic operating (fundamental) principles. It is especially important here to make these items *easy to visualize, understand, and remember*. We need to avoid a lot of "wordsmithing" in this area, and rigorously follow the KISS (keep it simple, stupid) system here.
- *Continuously* communicate the company mission, beliefs, values, and operating principles through the organization. This is, perhaps, the hardest task that confronts us. In doing this, we must always remember that our "actions speak louder than our words." When actions and words don't match, the actions prevail, and send what may be the *wrong* communication. To avoid this, we must always view our proposed actions in terms of what the team member "at the bottom" will see as its result, and the corresponding message this sends about our beliefs, values, and operating principles. Is the result of our actions in line with what these are? If not, we must revise actions so that they are in harmony with our beliefs, values, and operating principles. "Walking the talk" is *not easy*.
- *Standardize* the beliefs, values, and operating principles throughout the corporation. While the mission statement may vary slightly from group to group, division to division, the fundamental beliefs, values, and operating principles can, and should not. We must go to great lengths to ensure this doesn't happen, as it can lead to cross-purposes and poor execution of plans.

In short, we need to reassess, improve, and re-deploy our GM corporate culture. Our company has a long and proud history. We have nothing to be ashamed of. Currently, however, there is a sense of a loss of pride in our company and uncertainty about its future. We need to recapture our pride and secure our future, and it starts with an understanding by everyone of who we are, and what we stand for, as expressed by our beliefs, values, and operating principles.