

Interplay of National and Corporate Cultures: A Japan–Malaysia comparison

Noraini Ahmad¹, Kizuna Kuramoto², Nor Azrul Mohd Zin³, Muhammad Shahid Khan⁴

¹ School of Business Asia Pacific University of Technology & Innovation, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, ² School of Business Asia Pacific University of Technology & Innovation, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, ³ Fakulti Sains Sosial & Kemanusiaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, ⁴ Business School, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University,

noraini@apu.edu.my, kizunoe92528@gmail.com, norazrul.zin@ukm.edu.my, shahid.kh@ssru.ac.th
Tel: +60389961000

Abstract

This study explores how national cultures influence corporate cultures in Japan and Malaysia using secondary data—a method that minimizes bias from small samples or personal perspectives. By analyzing keywords in the visions, missions, and values of 90 multinational corporations' websites, the research identifies cultural patterns across a developed and a developing nation. The findings affirm past studies, showing that national culture shapes corporate behavior. It also highlights the need for international companies to clearly communicate shared values to culturally diverse employees to achieve organizational goals. Secondary data proved effective in capturing cultural characteristics accurately.

Keywords: National culture; Corporate culture; Multinational corporation; Context

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The study of culture's impact on business gained traction only after the 1970s, with Hall, Adler, and especially Hofstede, who introduced cultural dimensions in the 1980s, enabling a more quantitative approach (Hofstede, 1984). As globalization surged post-World War II, cross-cultural management became essential due to increasing international collaboration. Initially, globalisation focused on trade and offshore production, but modern firms now work with culturally diverse teams domestically. Japanese firms, shaped by uniform cultural structures, must adapt to manage global diversity. Meanwhile, Malaysia's multicultural environment serves as a model. Understanding national cultural influence on corporate behavior is vital for success in today's global business landscape.

1.1 Problem Statement

According to Adler (1997), culture is "something that is shared by all or almost all members of some social group, something that the older members of the group try to pass to the younger members, and something (as in the case of morals, laws and customers) that shaped behavior, or structures one's perception of the world". Corporate culture is defined as "the collection of values, beliefs, ethics and attitude that characterize an organization and guide its practices" (Pratt, 2020). Understanding cultural differences in management, decision-making, and attitude to work and others is critical because organizational culture impacts job satisfaction (Nebojsa, Gordana, Vladimir, 2018).

However, research about corporate culture has been done through surveys or interviews with employees in certain firms. For example, the GROBE project collected data from questionnaires to middle managers. The average number of answers for each corporation was 18.6 people in the GROBE project, and it is hard to say their answers represent the whole corporation perfectly (Ono, 2017). Thus, this research relied on individual perspectives and made it possible to research a limited part of corporate culture.

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On the other hand, the research about national cultures, such as Hofstede's (1984), also used a survey of individuals as the methodology, and the GROBE project followed similar questions to analyze national and corporate cultures. Therefore, it has risks that national and corporate cultures are very similar because of the research method.

Corporate culture is "shared" by all or almost all members of a company, so shared missions, visions, values, beliefs, and policies in a firm represent corporate culture. The management philosophy and company policy satisfy the definition of corporate culture; thus, this research used those to identify the influence of national culture on corporate culture.

1.2 Research Questions

- a) What is the impact of Japanese culture on corporate cultures of Japanese multinational corporations?
- b) What is the impact of Malaysian culture on corporate cultures of Malaysian multinational corporations?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This research aims to identify how the national cultures of the parent country affect the corporate cultures of Japanese and Malaysian multinational corporations, based on past studies about national cultures. Mainly, by analysing Japanese corporate cultures, this research discussed the importance of cross-cultural management in multinational corporations from the perspective of how national cultures affect corporate culture.

1.4 Definitions of Key Terms

Table 1: Definition of key terms

Term	Definition
Culture	Something that is shared by all or almost all members of some social group, something that the older members of the group try to pass to the younger members, and something (as in the case of morals, laws and customs) that shaped behavior, or structures one's perceptions of the world (Adler, 1997)
Corporate Culture	The collection of values, beliefs, ethics and attitudes that characterize an organization and guide its practices (Pratt, 2020)
Multinational Corporation	Company which holds assets in more than two countries (United Nations, 2021)

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Hofstede's Cultural Study

Hofstede (1984) was the first person to verify culture in business management studies with a statistical approach. He compared the cultures of multinational corporations in 40 countries. He identified that people in the same company but with different national cultures would act based on their country's culture's values, which would affect organisational management. Hofstede's cultural dimensions are four: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity, and individualism. He also added long-term orientation and indulgence. After releasing his research, many researchers started to use his framework or expand their study by collecting data from employees in one company and employees from different countries and companies. According to Lowe, Gibson, and Kirkman (2006), there were 180 articles which used more than one of Hofstede's dimensions to identify the impact of culture on business management from 1980 to 2002. Many business studies use Hofstede's cultural dimensions. For example, Sagarika, Zhiqiang, and Asela (2020) found that high power distance influences the performance of employees more because workers are more loyal to managers, so when an employee has a good supportive manager, then the growth of performance will be better than that of an employee in a low power distance culture. As another example, transformational leadership enhances employee innovation in higher uncertainty avoidance cultures more than in low uncertainty avoidance cultures, according to Watts, Steele, and Hartog (2020).

Regarding individualism and collectivism, it has been found that trust in business is stronger in a collectivist culture (Zlamgeer, 2022). This is because people in collectivism consider individuals to be a part of society and trust the community in which they belong. Also, in individualistic cultures, job satisfaction and organisational citizenship behaviours have a stronger relationship (Alkhadher, Beehr, Meng, 2020).

2.2 Hall's Cultural Context Study

Hall (1985) is the researcher who focused more communication to study culture. He evaluated national cultures based on context. People strongly emphasise the message's physical context in a high context culture. In a high-context culture, people take a more indirect communication approach and expect the people they are communicating with to decode the implied message. The messages tend to lack verbal directness for people in low-context culture. Non-verbal communication is more important in a high-context culture, sometimes more than verbal messages.

On the other hand, people who are in low context culture communicate very directly. To minimise misunderstanding or doubts is very important for them. Furthermore, he identified some factors that can be seen between high context culture and low context culture, such as locus of control, people bonds, level of commitment to relationships, and flexibility of time.

2.3 GROBE Project's Cultural Study

In 1993, Robert J. House from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania founded the Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness Project (GLOBE Project) to analyse leaders' organisational values, beliefs, and norms in different societies

(Kennedy, 2021). This project has grown to have over 200 researchers from 62 countries (GLOBE, 2020). They first measured 62 societal cultures based on nine cultural dimensions (uncertainty avoidance, power distance, future orientation, assertiveness orientation, gender egalitarianism, institutional collectivism, societal collectivism, performance orientation, and human orientation) and classified them into ten societal cultures. One of the characteristics of GLOBE projects is that they divide culture not only by country, but by societal cultures. Societal cultures are Anglo, Confucian Asia, Germanic Europe, Nordic Europe, Middle East, Latin America, Latin Europe, Southern Asia, Eastern Europe, and Sub-Saharan Africa, and those categories are based on social anthropology which considers religions, languages, races, climates, and history (Dorfman, Hanges, Brodbeck, 2004).

Uncertainty avoidance, power distance, institutional collectivism, and societal collectivism are the standard cultural divisions between Hofstede's study and GLOBE project. However, the six other GLOBE Project divisions- future orientation, assertiveness, gender egalitarianism, performance orientation, human orientation, and two collectivists- are unique. GLOBE Project's dimension has institutional collectivism and in-group collectivism. Institutional collectivism means "the degree to which organisational and societal institutional practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action", and in-group collectivism refers to "the degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in their organisations or families" (Cornelius, 2005). In other words, institutional collectivism is more about how an organisation or group is structured, while in-group collectivism is about the family size of the group and the attitude towards the group in which a person is.

Some research has used the GLOBE Project's cultural dimensions. For instance, research by Ishii, Ozone, Masumoto, and Maeno (2023) found that high assertiveness led to a higher frequency of pharmacist-initiated prescription changes. This research is not directly related to business, but it helps to understand that people in a high assertiveness culture have strong egos and opinions.

3.0 Methodology

This study adopted a secondary data approach to analyse corporate culture, emphasising its value as a less biased and more representative method than traditional qualitative approaches relying on primary data. While interviews and surveys often struggle with small sample sizes and subjective responses, secondary data, specifically corporate websites, offers a broader and more objective foundation. These websites provide insights into company visions, missions, and values that reflect organizational culture without distortion from individual viewpoints. The analysis was contextualized using established cultural models such as Hofstede's dimensions, Hall's context theory, and the GLOBE Project.

The methodological choice for this study was thematic analysis, a strategy well-suited to comparative cultural research. Drawing from examples like Paliwal et al. (2023), thematic analysis identifies recurring patterns across large datasets, making it ideal for comparing Japan and Malaysia's corporate cultures from multiple dimensions. These prior studies also relied on secondary data, validating its practicality for context-heavy, cross-cultural analysis.

A cross-sectional time horizon was applied, where data were collected at a specific point in time. Since corporate visions, missions, and values rarely undergo short-term changes, this approach is methodologically sound.

Regarding data type, keywords were extracted directly from company websites. For Japanese firms, original Japanese terms were prioritized and then translated into English, while only companies with public English websites were included. Malaysian firms, whose sites are primarily in English, were sampled accordingly.

The sample consisted of 90 multinational companies, 50 from Japan and 40 from Malaysia, selected across various industries. Only firms with publicly stated corporate values or philosophies were included, based on the United Nations (2021) definition of a multinational corporation.

Finally, the research upheld strict ethical standards. All secondary data were publicly available, eliminating risks related to informed consent or privacy. Proper citation and plagiarism safeguards were maintained, and an ethics disclaimer was appended with supervisory signatures.

4.0 Findings

This chapter shows the findings of research. The findings are supported by the analysis by context software: KH Coder as it can be seen in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

4.1 Corporate Culture of Japanese Companies

By researching 50 Japanese international companies, the keywords which are seen in their corporate missions, visions, and values were frequently identified. Figure 1 shows the result of the research. Some tendencies can be found in the results. More than half of researched companies mentioned "world", and this shows that many Japanese companies let the world market come into their views. Also, the words "society" and "life/lifestyle" play significant parts in Japanese corporate culture. This tendency can be seen in research by Ono (2017). There is research that revealed "societal orientation can complement customer orientation to create stronger market performance", and most Japanese companies' focus is also committed to creating social values, building bonds with customers, and performing well as a business (Lee Wei, 2023). Another similarity with her research is "creation" which is translated from the Japanese word "Monodukuri". This word cannot be translated into English, and of course, it is not used in the corporate cultures of Malaysian companies.

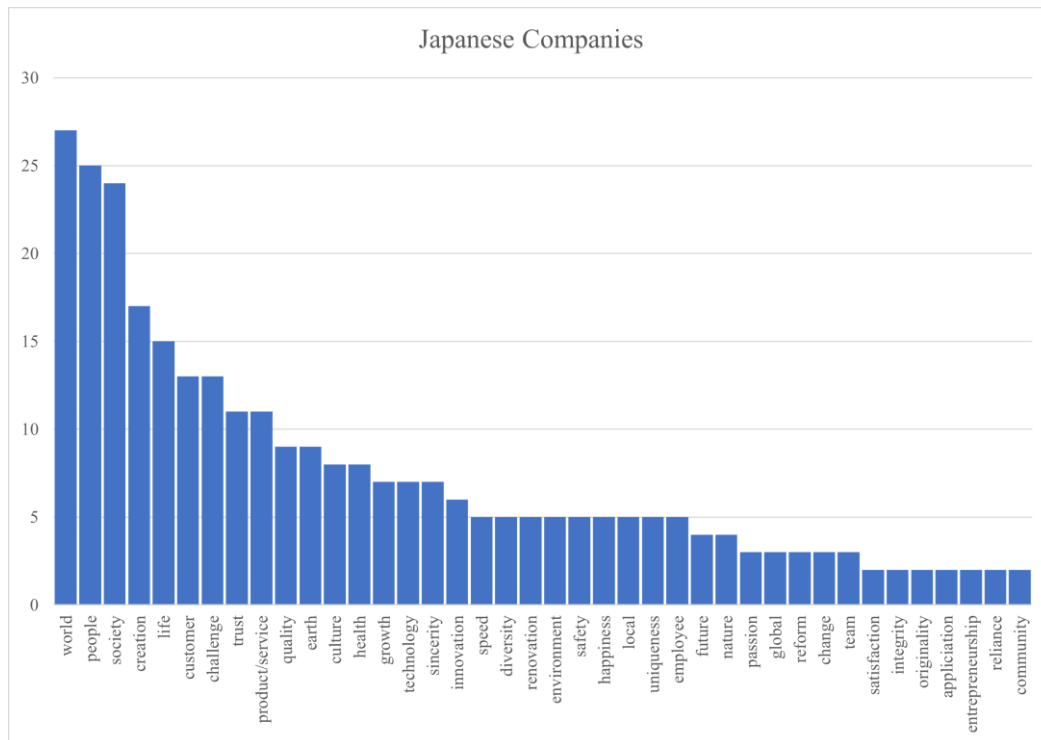


Figure 1: Analysis of Corporate Culture of Japan

4.2 Corporate Culture of Malaysia Companies

By researching 40 Malaysian companies, it was found that the most frequent word used in their corporate cultures was "innovation", as seen in Figure 2. Japanese companies also use this word, but only 12% of the research companies use it; meanwhile, 45% of Malaysian research companies use it. One of the significant differences between Malaysian companies and Japanese companies was the words "sustainability" and "leadership". This can be because of the situation when both countries develop. Malaysia is a developing country in the current age, and the trend of sustainability and Malaysia as a leading country in Southeast Asia might affect Malaysia's corporate culture.

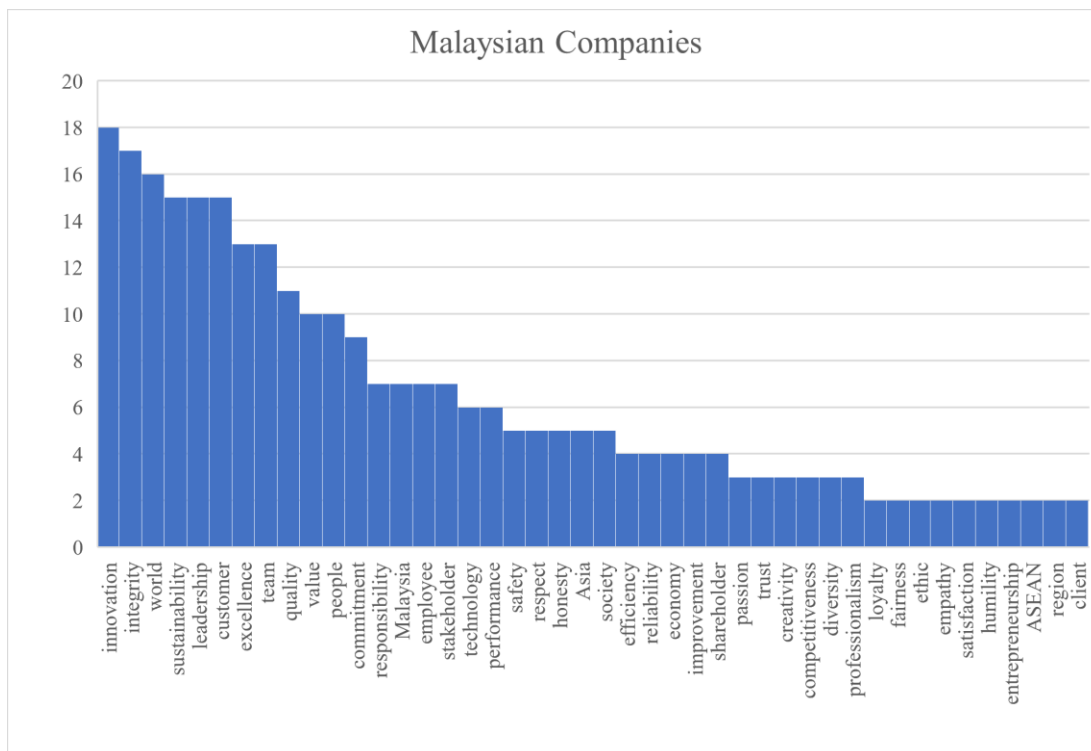


Figure 2: Analysis of Corporate Culture of Malaysia

5.0 Discussion

5.1 Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Hofstede's study introduced six cultural dimensions. The scores of Japan and Malaysia for each dimension are as shown in Table 2.

	Japan	Malaysia
Power Distance	54	100
Individualism	46	26
Masculinity	95	50
Uncertainty Avoidance	92	36
Long Term Orientation	88	41
Indulgence	42	57

Source: (Hofstede, Hofstede, Minkov, 2010)

This study reveals links between national cultural dimensions and corporate values in Japan and Malaysia. At the same time, many Malaysian companies highlight "sustainability," few explicitly reference "environment" or "nature," mirroring Japan's similarly limited environmental emphasis. Notably, only four Japanese firms appeared in the 2023 Global 100 Sustainable Companies ranking, suggesting sustainability is not a dominant cultural focus in either country (Corporate Knights, 2023). This may reflect Japan's high masculinity and uncertainty avoidance, cultural traits previously linked to lower green productivity (Wang, Guo, & Tang, 2021)

Power distance also shapes corporate culture. With its higher score in this dimension, Malaysia emphasizes employee care and loyalty more than Japan, as seen in the frequent appearance of "employees" on Malaysian corporate websites. This aligns with findings by Sagarika, Zhiqiang, and Asela (2020) and Yao, Qiu, and Wei (2019), highlighting the benefits of supportive managerial relationships.

Additionally, collectivism influences Malaysia's corporate discourse, with "team" and "teamwork" appearing more frequently—a reflection of its multicultural but collaborative business ethos (Latif, 2019). Conversely, Japanese firms focus on "society," consistent with their strong long-term orientation and CSR values (Kucharska & Kowalczyk, 2018). Both nations' shared indulgence scores also support a mutual emphasis on professionalism and product quality (Chan & Li, 2022).

5.2 Hall's Cultural Context

The result which was found in research by Ono was seen in this research (Ono, 2017). The second frequent word of Malaysian corporate culture is "integrity", and it is important to identify that a business is sincere and fair through their communication in low-context culture. Malaysia is considered as lower-context culture than Japanese culture. On the other hand, the people in high-context culture share consensus of integrity, thus Japanese companies might not mention "integrity" as their corporate culture as often as Malaysian companies. The research by Ono also identified the relationship with the integrity in corporate culture and national context culture.

Malaysian companies mention their target or area they want to develop their businesses more specifically like Malaysia, ASEAN, Asia. Not only their aim to lead those regions, but also lower-context culture might affect to specify their target area. Japan is one of the developed countries, so international companies of Japan tend to extend their market not only Asia region, but also world. In addition to the fact, Japanese high-context culture might give an effect on their corporate culture which does not specify their target region but use more abstract words such as "society", "local", and "global".

5.3 GLOBE Project

GLOBE Project provides 9 cultural divisions as it showed in Table 3. Cultural division of GLOBE Project has practice score and value score but, in this chapter, practice score will be referred.

	Japan	Malaysia	World Average
Performance Orientation	4.22	4.34	4.10
Assertiveness	3.59	3.87	4.14
Future Orientation	4.29	4.58	3.85
Humane Orientation	4.30	4.87	4.09
Institutional Collectivism	5.19	4.61	4.25
In-group Collectivism	4.63	5.51	5.13
Gender Egalitarianism	3.19	3.51	3.37
Power Distance	5.11	5.17	5.17
Uncertainty Avoidance	4.07	4.78	4.16

Source: [GLOBE, Japan, 2020] [GLOBE, Malaysia, 2020]

This study highlights how national cultural dimensions influence corporate values in Japan and Malaysia. Japan scores higher in institutional collectivism, emphasizing societal contribution and long-term development, reflected in frequent references to “society” in corporate visions (Ono, 2017). Its relatively high humane orientation also correlates with pro-social behavior, such as charitable actions (Gu et al., 2019). Conversely, Malaysia exhibits stronger in-group collectivism, fostering workplace loyalty and prioritizing employee welfare. This is evident in the emphasis on “employees” and “safety” in Malaysian corporate messaging.

Malaysia also leads Japan in gender egalitarianism, as confirmed by both the GLOBE Project and Global Gender Gap Report (World Economic Forum, 2023). Higher gender diversity contributes to greater corporate innovation, supported by frequent mentions of “innovation” in Malaysian corporate statements (Attah-Boakye et al., 2020). Loyalty-related terms like “integrity” and “commitment” are more common in Malaysian firms, aligning with Gampe et al.’s (2022) findings linking in-group collectivism to loyalty.

Lastly, Malaysia scores higher in performance orientation and assertiveness—traits associated with corporate cultures that prioritize customer and shareholder value (Ono, 2017). Malaysian firms emphasize “value” for customers, while Japanese companies focus more on internal development. These contrasts affirm how cultural dimensions shape corporate priorities across nations.

6.0 Conclusion

Japanese companies tend to have stronger passion towards worldwide business. Most of their visions and missions are creating people’s life and society better. On the other hand, Malaysian companies tend to put emphasize on innovation to lead the development of Southeast Asia. Their values are integrity and sustainability and those might be affected by current world business trends. It is one of the differences between Malaysian and Japanese corporate cultures.

7.0 Implication

National cultures significantly impact corporate cultures, highlighting the need for international organizations to carefully share values through cross-cultural management. Japanese firms, often using high-context communication, may struggle abroad if they don’t clearly express their mission and values, risking fragmented operations. Adopting low-context communication could help unify global branches. Cultural traits unique to Japanese or Malaysian companies can also be leveraged as competitive advantages. Successfully integrating corporate culture into foreign markets depends on cultural similarities and proximity. Despite regional differences, shared traits between Japan and Malaysia suggest that effectively conveying corporate culture in host countries plays a critical role in success.

8.0 Contribution

This study explored the influence of national cultures on corporate culture by analyzing secondary data, distinguishing it from past studies that used primary sources like interviews. By quantifying cultural elements and organizing them into keywords, the research offered measurable insights into corporate culture. These findings were then compared with established frameworks, Hofstede’s cultural dimensions, Hall’s context theory, and the GLOBE Project, to validate the relationship between national and corporate cultures. The study also referenced supporting literature to strengthen credibility. Ultimately, it confirmed that national culture significantly shapes corporate culture, even in multinational organizations, and affects how businesses operate globally.

9.0 Limitation and Future research

This study highlights key limitations and future research opportunities in understanding the relationship between national and corporate cultures. Company size and phase were not considered, though these may influence vision and values. Industry type also emerged as a potential factor, with differences in market expansion influencing corporate culture. The study encourages more diverse, international comparisons including low and high context cultures. It advocates for using secondary data to reduce personal bias, while suggesting a blend of primary and secondary sources to enhance reliability and deepen cultural insight in future research.

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Appendix

#	抽出語	品詞/活用	頻度				
1	社会	名詞	39				
2	世界	名詞	27				
3	価値	名詞	22				
4	貢献	サ変名詞	22				
5	人々	名詞	19				
6	創造	サ変名詞	17				
7	提供	サ変名詞	17				
8	人	名詞C	15				
9	挑戦	サ変名詞	14				
10	企業	名詞	13				
11	信頼	サ変名詞	13				
12	豊か	形容動詞	12				
13	サービス	サ変名詞	10				
14	商品	名詞	10				
15	生活	サ変名詞	10				
16	地球	名詞	10				
17	技術	名詞	9				
18	食	名詞C	9				
19	精神	名詞	9				
20	地域	名詞	9				
21	文化	名詞	9				
22	グループ	名詞	8				
23	健康	形容動詞	8				
24	環境	名詞	7				
25	実現	サ変名詞	7				
26	新しい	形容詞	7				
27	新た	形容動詞	7				
28	世界中	名詞	7				
29	成長	サ変名詞	7				
30	発展	サ変名詞	7				
31	品質	名詞	7				
32	お客	名詞	6				
33	イノベーション	名詞	6				
34	安心	サ変名詞	6				
35	安全	形容動詞	6				
36	可能	形容動詞	6				
37	会社	名詞	6				
38	活動	サ変名詞	6				
39	独自	形容動詞	6				
田 40	目指す	動詞	6				
41	お客様	名詞	5				
42	課題	名詞	5				
田 43	楽しい	形容詞	5				
44	感動	サ変名詞	5				
45	期待	サ変名詞	5				
46	最高	名詞	5				
47	自然	形容動詞	5				
48	製品	名詞	5				
49	誠実	形容動詞	5				
50	大切	形容動詞	5				
田 51	変える	動詞	5				
52	未来	名詞	5				
53	夢	名詞C	5				
田 54	良い	形容詞	5				
55	For	未知語	4				
56	すべて	副詞可能	4				
田 57	応える	動詞	4				
58	価格	名詞	4				
59	革新	サ変名詞	4				
60	向上	サ変名詞	4				
61	行動	サ変名詞	4				
田 62	高める	動詞	4				
63	視点	名詞	4				
64	持続	サ変名詞	4				
65	心	名詞C	4				
66	存在	サ変名詞	4				
67	多様	形容動詞	4				
68	服	名詞C	4				
69	グローバル	名詞	3				
70	スピード	名詞	3				
71	一人ひとり	名詞	3				
72	開発	サ変名詞	3				
田 73	楽しむ	動詞	3				
74	関係	サ変名詞	3				
75	健全	形容動詞	3				
76	個	名詞C	3				
77	個人	名詞	3				
78	顧客	名詞	3				
79	幸せ	形容動詞	3				
80	産業	名詞	3				
81	志	名詞C	3				
82	事業	名詞	3				
83	自分	名詞	3				
84	社員	名詞	3				
85	常に	副詞	3				
86	人間	名詞	3				
87	生み出す	動詞	3				
88	尊重	サ変名詞	3				
89	追求	サ変名詞	3				
90	店舗	名詞	3				
91	変化	サ変名詞	3				
92	変革	サ変名詞	3				
93	暮らし	名詞	3				
田 94	優れる	動詞	3				
95	力	名詞C	3				
96	Be	未知語	2				
97	ウェイ	名詞	2				
98	オリジナリティ	名詞	2				
99	クルマ	名詞	2				
100	コミュニティ	名詞	2				

Appendix 1: Words used in Japanese Corporate Culture Frequently

#	抽出語	品詞/活用	頻度					
1	we	PRP	47		54	economic	Adj	4
2	be	Verb	39		55	everyone	Noun	4
3	integrity	Noun	17		56	excellent	Adj	4
4	sustainable	Adj	17		57	governance	Noun	4
5	customer	Noun	15		58	group	Noun	4
6	product	Noun	13		59	it	PRP	4
7	service	Noun	13		60	manufacturer	Noun	4
8	quality	Noun	12		61	new	Adj	4
9	business	Noun	11		62	respect	Noun	4
10	create	Verb	11		63	responsibility	Noun	4
11	deliver	Verb	11		64	standard	Noun	4
12	innovation	Noun	11		65	strive	Verb	4
13	lead	Verb	11		66	sustainability	Noun	4
14	people	Noun	11		67	Teamwork	ProperNoun	4
15	excellence	Noun	10		68	that	W	4
16	provide	Verb	10		69	time	Noun	4
17	solution	Noun	10		70	always	Adv	3
18	value	Noun	10		71	brand	Noun	3
19	commitment	Noun	8		72	build	Verb	3
20	global	Adj	8		73	choice	Noun	3
21	glove	Noun	8		74	class	Noun	3
22	life	Noun	8		75	client	Noun	3
23	best	Adj	7		76	continuously	Adv	3
24	innovative	Adj	7		77	core	Noun	3
25	community	Noun	6		78	diverse	Adj	3
26	cost	Noun	6		79	embrace	Verb	3
27	enhance	Verb	6		80	Excellence	ProperNoun	3
28	high	Adj	6					
29	stakeholder	Noun	6		81	expectation	Noun	3
30	teamwork	Noun	6		82	first	Adv	3
31	technology	Noun	6		83	food	Noun	3
32	world	Noun	6		84	forward	Adv	3
33	Asia	ProperNoun	5		85	globally	Adv	3
34	commit	Verb	5		86	growth	Noun	3
35	company	Noun	5		87	Honesty	ProperNoun	3
36	develop	Verb	5		88	improve	Verb	3
37	do	Verb	5		89	improvement	Noun	3
38	employee	Noun	5		90	infrastructure	Noun	3
39	enrich	Verb	5		91	loyalty	Noun	3
40	environment	Noun	5		92	maintain	Verb	3
41	financial	Adj	5		93	Malaysia	ProperNoun	3
42	good	Adj	5		94	malaysian	Adj	3
43	its	PRP	5		95	management	Noun	3
44	leader	Noun	5		96	model	Noun	3
45	market	Noun	5		97	offer	Verb	3
46	performance	Noun	5		98	opportunity	Noun	3
47	shareholder	Noun	5		99	organisation	Noun	3
48	social	Adj	5		100	part	Noun	3
49	work	Noun	5					
50	achieve	Verb	4					
51	corporate	Adj	4					
52	corporation	Noun	4					
53	development	Noun	4					

Appendix 2: Words used in Malaysia Corporate Culture Frequently