



British Columbia
Charter Chapter



A CULTURE ASSESSMENT GUIDE: PRACTICAL QUESTIONS FOR CPAs

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February 4th, 2026 | 3:00 PM – 4:30 PM | Zoom

Organization Culture Assessment Questions

Intention

- Asking these questions to get the “right” answer.
- Asking questions to see how people think, hesitate, justify, or deflect.”

We’ve crafted this list of some questions you may want to pose during your next job interview or informational interview.

We hope they will help you gain a deeper understanding of the culture at a firm you may be thinking of joining, and whether there is a good fit with your own values and preferences.

Use your active listening skills to make good use of the information contained in the answers you receive.



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Identity, Story & Reputation

Purpose

- To understand how the organization sees itself – and how honestly it can talk about that identity
- These questions help you detect gaps between branding and reality. Listen for defensiveness, rehearsed language, or overly polished answers

Questions

Public narrative (surfaces branding and reputation)

1. What do people say about your company?
2. Why do people say that?
3. How do you see (specific value) playing out each day?

Lived examples (reality testing)

1. Can you give an example of how the company lives its values in action?
2. Can you share an example of a time you witnessed that the desired culture of the company was evident/present in a challenging situation?

Where culture reveals itself

1. What is one thing you are proud of your company's culture?
2. What is one thing you are not proud of your company's culture?
3. What are the Rose (works well), Thorn (difficult) and Bud (emerging) when it comes to your company's culture?

Tangible examples

1. How would you describe the work environment: is it more fast-paced, relaxed competitive or collaborative?
2. What adjectives would you use to describe the culture here? Something that is not the company jargon?
3. If you could describe your team in three words, what would they be and why?

Comparative insight

1. What's different about working here than anywhere else you've worked?
2. What is the best part of working here?

Synthesis

1. On a scale of 1-10 (1 low and 10 high), where do you evaluate the culture of your company?
2. If you wanted to use a metaphor about your company's culture, what would that be?



Learning and Development Culture

Purpose

- To understand how people learn, ask questions, and recover from mistakes
- These questions help you detect whether learning is actively supported or quietly outsourced to individual effort

Questions

1. What happens if I do not know something?
2. How are questions treated here?
3. How are mistakes typically handled when someone is still learning?
4. Who reviews my work, and how?
5. What does “good development” look like for a junior CPA here in the first year?
6. How do people continue to grow once they are technically competent?



Workload Reality

Purpose

- To understand what the work actually demands on a day-to-day and seasonal basis
- These questions help you distinguish peak intensity from chronic overload

Questions

1. How are meetings typically run here? If you ever wanted to make one change in the way meetings are held, what would that be?
2. What happens during busy season?
3. What does a typical busy season week look like for a first-year CPA?
4. How much is this team into celebrating success versus pinpointing mistakes /penalizing for failure?How many people burn out in their first two years?
5. What happens when someone hits their limit?
6. How does your company support work-life fit in action? Examples?



Psychological Safety & Power

Purpose

- To understand who can speak, disagree, and survive within the organization
- These questions help you understand how power operates in practice and how disagreement, mistakes, and accountability actually operate

Questions

1. How easy is it to admit you do not know something here?
2. How safe is it to say “I made a mistake”?
3. How is conflict handled here?
4. How is feedback given and received, especially when someone makes a mistake?
5. What happens when a junior makes a serious mistake?
6. What behaviours are practically encouraged and what behaviours are practically discouraged and not tolerated here in action? Can you give/share an example?
7. Can a junior disagree with a senior?
8. What happens if I point out a problem?
9. Who can say no to a partner or senior leader?
10. How easy is it to challenge a partner here?
11. To what extent are people held accountable for results in your company?
12. What behaviour gets rewarded with bonuses?
13. What behaviour quietly gets people sidelined?
14. Can you give an example of a time that the company managed the polarity between people and tasks/objectives?
15. Can you give me an example of a time when someone raised an ethical or professional concern, and how leadership handled it?



Career Trajectory

Purpose

- To understand how advancement, stagnation, and exit actually work within the organization
- These questions help you understand how success, advancement, and exit actually work in practice

Questions

1. What changes have you noticed about company culture in recent years or since you started working here?
2. Who gets promoted here?
3. Who tends to leave in their first two years, and why?
4. Who quietly leaves?
5. Who tends to stall here, and why?
6. What kind of CPA thrives here long-term?

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Sustainability & Well-Being

Purpose

- To assess whether the pace of work is survivable over time
- These questions help you distinguish temporary intensity from chronic depletion

Questions

1. What does a burned-out person look like here?
2. How do you know when someone is struggling, and what happens then?
3. How do you know when someone is burning out, and what happens then?
4. What helps people recover after intense periods of work here?
5. How often do people actually take vacations?
6. What tends to happen to people who stay for 5-10 years?
7. How does the firm signal that well-being actually matters in practice?



Social Fit & Belonging

Purpose

- To understand who feels at home in the organization - and who does not.
- These questions are about belonging, not performance. Notice whether difference is welcomed or merely tolerated

Questions

1. What was the biggest adjustment for you when you started working here?
2. What do new employees typically find surprising after they start?
3. What type of person works well with this team?
4. Is there a personality type that tends to succeed at (company)?
5. What's your favourite office tradition? What is the biggest office tradition here?
6. Do you ever do joint events with other departments or teams?
7. Who tends to feel out of place here, even if they are competent?

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Stability, Change and Risk

Purpose

- To understand where the organization is heading and how it responds to pressure and risk
- These questions help you assess whether the organization is stable, adaptive, or under strain – and how honestly leadership names risk.

Questions

1. Where is this culture heading?
2. What pressure is the firm under right now?
3. What is breaking?
4. What keeps leadership up at night right now?

Closing Meta-Question

Purpose

- To surface what may have been avoided, minimized, or left unsaid. Strong cultures invite this question. Weak ones deflect it.
- This question helps you surface what may have been avoided, minimized, or left unsaid.

Questions

1. What am I not asking you that I should?



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