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Economics

**Impact of organizational culture on voluntary  
employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms  
(OCET2040)**

Futures Studies

Master's thesis

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**Abstract:**

This thesis explores the impact of organizational culture on voluntary employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms by 2040. It also seeks to identify future-oriented strategies, grounded in organizational culture, to reduce employee turnover.

A two-round Disaggregative Delphi study was conducted to gather expert insights. The first round consisted of a structured survey combining both qualitative and quantitative questions. Experts were asked to assess the probability and desirability of various organizational culture attributes, along with open-ended responses to elaborate on their views. Based on the first-round data, a cluster analysis was performed to group different future outlooks on organizational culture and employee turnover. This analysis resulted in four distinct images of the future. In the second Delphi round, experts reviewed these images by evaluating their probability and desirability based on their professional experience, offering a deeper understanding of potential organizational culture and their implications for employee turnover.

The results indicate that organizational-oriented cultural dimensions, such as systems thinking, learning, and transparency, were seen as critical; people-oriented factors like well-being, equality, and work-life balance were rated as highly desirable yet less probable. The results of the Delphi process were organized into four future images, which provide practical insights for Chinese accounting firms seeking to address employee turnover through cultural transformation.

**Keywords:** organizational culture, employee turnover, Delphi method, Chinese accounting firms

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b> .....	7
	1.1 Background and research motivation .....	7
	1.2 Research aims, objectives, and questions .....	8
	1.3 Structure design.....	8
<b>2</b>	<b>Theoretical framework</b> .....	10
	2.1 Organizational culture and its influence on job satisfaction and organizational commitment .....	10
	2.2 Employee turnover.....	13
	2.3 The Organizational Culture–Employee Turnover (OCET) 2040 framework.....	14
<b>3</b>	<b>Methodology and the Disaggregative Delphi process</b> .....	16
	3.1 Research design.....	16
	3.2 Justification for using the Disaggregative Delphi method .....	17
	3.3 Expert panel.....	17
	3.4 First Delphi round questionnaire design .....	24
	3.5 Cluster analysis .....	25
	3.6 Images of the future .....	26
	3.7 Second Delphi round questionnaire design.....	27
	3.8 Ethical considerations .....	28
<b>4</b>	<b>Results</b> .....	29
	4.1 Overview of the results .....	29
	4.2 Results of cluster analysis .....	29
	4.2.1 Identifying four clusters .....	29
	4.2.2 Cluster 1: Highly systematic and process-oriented firms .....	33
	4.2.3 Cluster 2: People-oriented innovation firms.....	37
	4.2.4 Cluster 3: Traditional firms undergoing gradual reform .....	38

4.2.5 Cluster 4: Mission-oriented and rigidly structured firms.....	40
<b>4.3 Four images of the future .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>4.4 Expert evaluations of organizational culture dimensions .....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>4.5 Expert forecast on employee turnover by 2040 .....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>4.6 Expert views on key cultural factors and recommended changes .....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>4.7 Expert assessment of alternative future images .....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>5 Discussion.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>5.1 The influence of organizational culture on voluntary employee turnover     in Chinese accounting firms by 2040 .....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>5.2 Organizational culture measures to reduce voluntary employee     turnover in Chinese accounting firms by 2040.....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>5.3 Limitation .....</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>6 Conclusions.....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Appendix 1 Organizational culture dimensions and their reported impact     on job satisfaction and organizational commitment .....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Appendix 2 Questionnaire of the first round .....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Appendix 3 Questionnaire of the second round.....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Appendix 4 Consent statement of the first round.....</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Appendix 5 Consent statement of the second round .....</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>Appendix 6 Dimension scores, averages, and standard deviations for     Cluster 1, 2, 3, and 4.....</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Appendix 7 Expert comments on projected employee turnover in Chinese     accounting Firms by 2040.....</b>	<b>87</b>

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 The Organizational Culture–Employee Turnover (OCET)2040 framework (Created by the author) .....	14
Figure 2 The Disaggregative Delphi process was followed in the study. Adapted from Luoma, P., Penttinen, E., Tapio, P., & Toppinen, A. (2022) .....	16
Figure 3 Expert panel gender composition in Delphi Round 1 and Round 2.....	22
Figure 4 Distribution of expert types in Round I and II .....	23
Figure 5 Expert distribution by country in the first and second Delphi rounds ...	23
Figure 6 Dendrogram using Ward’s method.....	30
Figure 7 Average scores of each variable by cluster.....	32
Figure 8 Deviation from neutral value (4) in cluster responses across variables .	33
Figure 9 Average probability and desirability scores for each organizational culture variable .....	45
Figure 10 Expert predictions on employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms by 2040 (First Delphi Round) .....	46
Figure 11 Key aspects of organizational culture identified by experts as influencing employee turnover by 2040 (Q15 Responses) .....	48
Figure 12 Frequency of suggested organizational culture changes to reduce employee turnover by 2040 (Q16 Responses) .....	49
Figure 13 Average probability and desirability scores for each future image in the Second Delphi Round.....	51

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 First Delphi round expertise matrix .....	20
Table 2 Second Delphi round expertise matrix .....	21
Table 3 Quantitative responses to the first Delphi survey, grouped by cluster average and standard deviations.....	31
Table 4 Overview of expert-rated future images and their cultural characteristics .....	43
Table 5 Descriptive statistics of expert ratings for organizational culture variables (Q1–Q13) .....	43
Table 6 Descriptive statistics of expert ratings for the four future images (N = 25).....	51

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background and research motivation

Chinese accounting firms have experienced a high employee turnover rate in recent years, which negatively influences productivity, costs, audit quality, client retention, and the sustainable development of accounting companies (Bautista, 2024; Knechel et al., 2021; Khavis & Szerwo, 2022). Current indicators already reflect this issue; the employee turnover rate of Chinese accounting firms remained high in 2023, with the national average being above 25%. Among them, the employee turnover rate of the top 20 large local accounting firms is about 25%, and that of small and medium-sized accounting firms is 20% (Liu et al. 2023). Particularly, female auditors are more likely to feel pressure to balance work and family life; therefore, more likely to leave the accounting firms and move to in-house positions (Knechel et al., 2021).

Organizational culture refers to shared values, beliefs, symbols, and behaviors that shape members' attitudes and interactions (Scholes & Whittington, 2005; Cacciattolo, 2014; Gonzales-Limas et al., 2018; Morelli & Wang, 2020). It plays an important role in shaping employee satisfaction and organizational commitment, which ultimately influence employee turnover (Lee et al., 2017; Aldhuwaihi & Shee, 2015; Price, 2001). The author mainly focuses on identifying culture-based measures to reduce voluntary employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms. This focus is further supported by the author's work experience in a Chinese accounting firm, during which it became evident that factors such as a lack of equality and insufficient transparency were negatively affecting employee satisfaction and employee retention. Based on these observations and existing literature, a working hypothesis of this study is that specific dimensions of organizational culture, such as work-life balance, can enhance job satisfaction or organizational commitment. In turn, lowering voluntary employee turnover.

Investigating the impact of organizational culture on voluntary employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms has both academic and practical implications. On the one hand, although several studies have been conducted on the impact of organizational culture on employee turnover (Ehrhart & Kuenzi 2017), little has been done on Chinese accounting firms. Thus, this topic will fill the gap in the academic world. On the other

hand, this research will invite Chinese experts in the accounting industry, other industries, and university researchers to answer Delphi survey questions and provide valuable perspectives on lowering employee turnover. By analyzing the opinions of these experts, innovative ideas that benefit practice can be summarized. Therefore, the research outcome will help the Chinese accounting industry promote organizational culture transformation, address the high employee turnover problem, and achieve sustainable development to a certain degree.

## **1.2 Research aims, objectives, and questions**

This research aims to explore the impact of organizational culture on employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms and find some solutions to lower the employee turnover rate. The research is mainly based on expert views from China and target on large-scale accounting firms. It is worth noting that the research mainly focuses on voluntary employee turnover. The consequent objectives are to determine:

**Objective 1:** To observe how organizational culture influences voluntary employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms by 2040.

**Objective 2:** To identify the measures to lower voluntary employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms.

According to the research aim and research objectives, the research questions have been formulated as follows:

**Research question 1:** What potential influence could organizational culture have on voluntary employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms by 2040?

**Research question 2:** What future measures based on the organizational culture could be used to reduce voluntary employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms by 2040?

## **1.3 Structure design**

This paper is structured into six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the research topic, provides background information and research motivation, and outlines the theoretical basis for studying employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms from an organizational culture perspective. In addition, this chapter defines the research aims,

objectives, and explains the main research questions that guide the study. Chapter 2 introduces the theoretical framework of this study, presents the Organizational Culture–Employee Turnover (OCET) 2040 framework, and discusses related concepts such as organizational culture, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee turnover. In addition, this chapter outlines the thirteen organizational culture dimensions examined in the study.

Chapter 3 explains the methodology and the Delphi process, including the overall research design, the reasons for using the Disaggregative Delphi method, the composition of the expert panel, and the design of the questionnaire for the two-round Delphi, cluster analysis, images of the future, and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study. It begins with the findings from the first Delphi round, including cluster analysis, four future images, and descriptive statistics based on expert responses to the 13 cultural dimensions. It also summarizes expert views on expected changes in employee turnover by 2040 and qualitative insights on key cultural factors and potential solutions. This is followed by the results of the second Delphi round, in which experts assessed the probability and desirability of the four future images.

Chapter 5 discusses the implications of the results for the research questions. It first examines how organizational culture affects voluntary employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms by 2040, highlighting the strategic role of organization-oriented dimensions and the urgent importance of people-oriented values such as well-being and work-life balance. It then identifies a range of culture-based measures proposed by experts to address the high turnover rate, including promoting employee well-being, strengthening work-life balance, and enhancing transparency and gender equality. Finally, this chapter acknowledges the study's limitations, including platform constraints in the second Delphi round, potential subjectivity in the selection of cultural dimensions, and the inherent uncertainty of long-term forecasting. Chapter 6 summarizes the main findings of this paper and introduces the theoretical and practical contributions of this study. This chapter also outlines future research directions, including cross-country comparisons, expanding expert panels, and combining scenario planning with the Delphi method.

## **2 Theoretical framework**

### **2.1 Organizational culture and its influence on job satisfaction and organizational commitment**

Organizational culture is defined as a system of shared beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviors that guide members of an organization (Cacciattolo, 2014; Gonzales-Limas et al., 2018; Morelli & Wang, 2020). It brings employees together and shapes their perceptions and behaviors (Wambui & Gichanga, 2018). Organizational culture is expressed through symbols, organizational structure, routines, and stories (Martin, 2012). It can be divided into three levels: artifacts (visible and observable behaviors), values (strategies, goals, philosophies), and the deepest level, basic assumptions (Schein, 2004). Basic assumptions refer to the deeply held, often unconscious beliefs in the organization that guide the behavior, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings of organizational members. These assumptions are considered "non-negotiable" and "unquestionable" and are therefore difficult to change (Schein, 2004, p. 31).

Employee job satisfaction refers to a measure of employees' happiness with their work and work environment (Alrefaei, 2020). Organizational commitment refers to employees' psychological attachment and loyalty to their organization (Muthuveloo & Rose, 2005). They are both central mediators influenced by diverse organizational culture dimensions. While the selection of these dimensions draws on existing literature showing their significant impact on job satisfaction and organizational commitment, it also reflects the author's professional experience in Chinese accounting firms. This dual basis ensures that the chosen organizational cultural dimensions are both theoretically grounded and contextually relevant to the Chinese organizational environment. Appendix 1 summarizes the thirteen organizational culture dimensions and their reported impact on job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The following part expands on how each organizational culture dimension is expected to impact employee job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Technology is one such dimension, with studies indicating that technological infrastructure not only improves job satisfaction but also contributes to health, safety, and work-life balance, which is closely tied to job satisfaction (Ratna & Kaur, 2016).

For example, virtual meeting technology promotes the popularization of remote work and flexible office, which can encourage employees to arrange work and life more flexibly, thereby improving job satisfaction (Marbun, 2023; Ratna & Kaur, 2016). Moreover, technology acceptance has been found to influence both organizational commitment and turnover intention, particularly by enabling employees to adapt more effectively to organizational processes (Parvari et al., 2015).

A long-term perspective, which involves considering future outcomes and preparing for changes over extended periods, also positively influences job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Wheelwright, 2011; Lin et al., 2019; van Tuin et al., 2020; Hofstede, 2001). For instance, adopting a long-term perspective helps align individual and organizational goals, supports strategic decision-making (Lin et al., 2019). Furthermore, it can also foster a sense of purpose and stability among employees, thereby enhancing job satisfaction and engagement (van Tuin et al., 2020).

Systems thinking emphasizes holistic understanding, interdependence, and multidirectional communication (Peters, 2024). Systems thinking can enhance employee satisfaction by considering the complex factors affecting all stakeholders (Mutingi & Mbohwa, 2014). Moreover, adopting a systems-thinking approach promotes holistic coordination and problem-solving, fostering organizational commitment and employee loyalty (Jaaron & Backhouse, 2011).

In terms of internal development, innovation and learning are strongly linked to employee satisfaction and organizational commitment. Encouraging innovation positively influences employee job satisfaction (Ozsoy, 2022), and innovative human resource practices, especially those that engage employees in change processes, can increase organizational commitment (Agarwala, 2003). Moreover, fostering a learning-oriented cultural environment also positively impacts employees' feelings; for example, taking part in workplace learning programs positively affects job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Ryu & Moon, 2019). Besides, opportunities for organizational learning contribute to employees' perceptions of personal growth and organizational commitment (Rose & Pak, 2009).

Well-being and support are also key organizational culture dimensions that significantly influence both job satisfaction and organizational commitment. On the one hand, well-

being-related practices, such as providing mental health resources and fostering a respectful work environment, are positively associated with job satisfaction (Wright & Cropanzano, 2000). In addition, organizations that prioritize psychological and emotional well-being tend to strengthen affective bonds between employees and the organization, reinforcing a sense of belonging and loyalty (Islaha & Kadiyono, 2023). On the other hand, perceived organizational support contributes not only to emotional satisfaction and workplace engagement (Mary, 2015) but also significantly enhances affective commitment and reduces turnover intentions (Rhoades et al., 2001).

Furthermore, several justice and inclusion-related dimensions, such as transparency, equality, and diversity, have shown strong correlations with job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Transparency in decision-making and promotion processes enhances perceptions of procedural fairness and builds organizational trust, thereby improving both job satisfaction and long-term commitment (García-Izquierdo et al., 2012; Klimchak et al., 2020). Likewise, equality, including empowerment practices and fair treatment, has been shown to reduce workplace stressors and foster emotional satisfaction, as well as strengthen employees' sense of fairness and affective commitment (Ibukun & Pérotin, 2023; Dongrey & Rokade, 2022). Moreover, diversity management contributes to job satisfaction by reducing perceived discrimination and enhances commitment by cultivating a more inclusive organizational culture (Alam & Shin, 2021; Turek, 2017).

The sense of responsibility within organizations, through ethical behavior, accountability, and social commitment, has also been linked to improved job satisfaction by enhancing employees' sense of meaning (Edmans, 2012). It also strengthens employee commitment by reinforcing shared values and moral alignment (Piñeros Espinosa, 2022). Moreover, work-life balance and flexibility are both key contributors to employee satisfaction across generations and industries (Jaysan et al., 2024; Aliya & Saragih, 2020; Nasution & Ali, 2020; Cotti et al., 2014; Origo & Pagani, 2008). Additionally, work-life balance, encompassing time management, involvement, and satisfaction, has been found to positively predict organizational commitment (Rumangkit & Zuriana, 2019). Flexibility in work arrangements also contributes to a sense of autonomy and trust, thereby enhancing organizational commitment (Choo et

al., 2016; Eaton, 2003).

Together, these dimensions form the basis for understanding how organizational culture can be leveraged to enhance job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

## **2.2 Employee turnover**

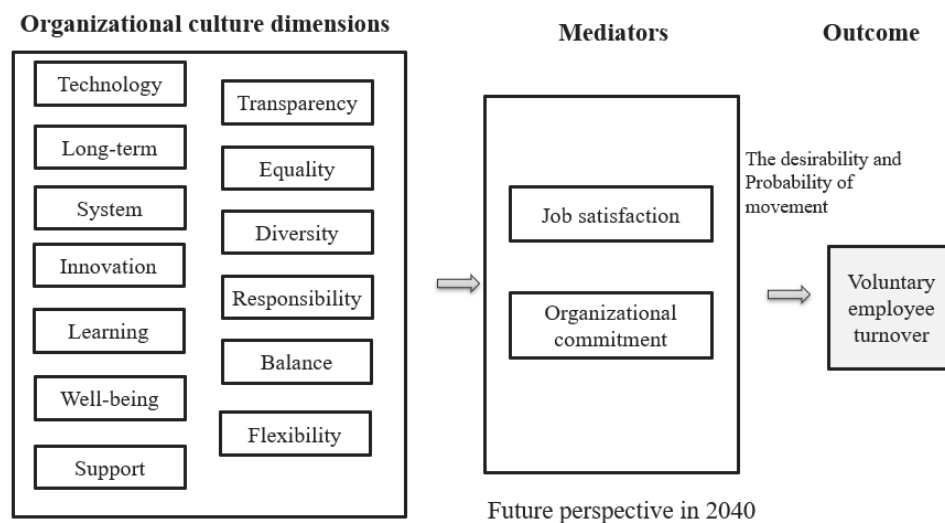
Employee turnover, defined as the rate at which employees leave and are replaced in an organization, remains a significant challenge for businesses due to its high cost and disruptive impact on operations (Bryant & Allen, 2013; Nouri & Parker, 2020; Khavis & Szerwo, 2022). This challenge is particularly pronounced in accounting firms, where both voluntary and involuntary turnover can undermine team stability and audit quality (Abbasi & Hollman, 2000; Ravinder & Saraswathi, 2020). A wide range of factors influence employee turnover. Personal attributes such as gender, educational background, and individual performance have been found to contribute to turnover decisions (Chi et al., 2013; Jankowski, 2016; Lu, 2022). Organizational conditions, including work-life balance, client-related stress, and limited career advancement, also play a critical role in employee turnover (Elsafty & Sayed, 2023).

A considerable number of employee turnover models have shown that job satisfaction and organizational commitment play important mediating roles. For example, Mobley's (1977) intermediate linkage model sees job satisfaction as the starting point in a process that can ultimately result in employee turnover. Price and Mueller's (1981) causal model goes further by placing both satisfaction and commitment at the core of how employee turnover develops. Subsequent studies, like Tett and Meyer's (1993) attitudinal model and Allen and Meyer's (1990) commitment framework, provide strong evidence that satisfaction and commitment bridge the gap between workplace experiences and employee turnover. More recent theories, including job embeddedness (Mitchell et al., 2001) and the turnover process model by Hom et al. (2017), also include satisfaction and commitment as crucial links between organizational context and employee turnover behavior. Most recently, Gulo and Ardiansyah (2025) identified job satisfaction and organizational commitment as key mediators of turnover intention. Their study examined how these two factors mediate the relationships between employee empowerment, perceived organizational support, ethical climate, and

turnover intention. All these models support the inclusion of job satisfaction and organizational commitment as essential mediators between organizational culture dimensions and voluntary employee turnover.

### 2.3 The Organizational Culture–Employee Turnover (OCET) 2040 framework

This study proposes the OCET2040 Framework (Figure 1) to explain the relationship between organizational culture and voluntary employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms by 2040. The framework was developed not only from the author's professional experience but also from insights drawn from the literature on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational culture, and employee turnover (e.g., Ratna & Kaur, 2016; Edmans, 2012; Parvari et al., 2015; Islaha & Kadiyono, 2023; Dongrey & Rokade, 2022; Rumangkit & Zuriana, 2019).



*Figure 1. The Organizational Culture–Employee Turnover (OCET)2040 framework (Created by the author)*

As shown in Figure 1, the OCET2040 Framework consists of three main components: organizational culture dimensions (inputs), mediating variables, and the outcome (voluntary employee turnover). The framework identifies 13 key cultural dimensions, which lay the foundation of this framework. Some of these organizational culture dimensions emphasize organizational aspects, such as systems thinking, innovation,

and long-term orientation, while others focus more on people-oriented concerns, such as employee well-being, diversity, work-life balance and equality.

The second level of the framework introduces two mediators: job satisfaction and organizational commitment. These mediating variables are supported by various turnover theories (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2001; Hom et al., 2017; Gulo & Ardiansyah, 2025), which consistently emphasize that organizational culture affects employee turnover by affecting job satisfaction and organizational commitment. In the OCET2040 framework, job satisfaction reflects employees' emotional evaluation of the work environment, while organizational commitment reflects their attachment and loyalty to the company (Alrefaei, 2020; Muthuveloo & Rose, 2005).

The third level is the behavioral outcome of employees: employee turnover. Employee turnover includes voluntary and involuntary turnover (Hom et al., 2012). In this model, mainly focus on voluntary employee turnover, which occurs when an employee chooses to leave an organization (Griffeth et al., 2000).

Finally, the OCET2040 Framework serves not only as a conceptual model but also as the operational basis of this study's Delphi research. The 13 cultural dimensions guided the construction of Likert-scale items used in expert surveys, while the mediators provided the logic for interpreting experts' opinions. Furthermore, the framework enabled a structured way to translate cultural variables into four images of the future, capturing different cultural transformation trajectories and their implications for voluntary employee turnover by 2040.

### 3 Methodology and the Disaggregative Delphi process

#### 3.1 Research design

This study employed the Delphi method to construct alternative future images regarding the impact of organizational culture on voluntary employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms. Based on experts' views, the method systematically identified key cultural drivers and their potential influence on future employee turnover (Linstone and Turoff, 1975). Specifically, I chose the non-consensual Disaggregative Delphi method, which groups expert opinions into clusters, allowing for the analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data and facilitating the construction of alternative future images (Tapio, 2003). On the one hand, cluster analysis can be used to group the quantitative data collected from the Delphi process. On the other hand, the qualitative answers will be associated with the clusters they belong to, and the qualitative data will help the researcher create images of the future (Tapio, 2003). Unlike traditional Delphi studies, which focus on reaching an agreement (Linstone & Turoff, 2002), this approach allows for highlighting diverse perspectives on organizational culture and its effects on employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms in 2040.

Figure 2 illustrates the five main stages of the Disaggregative Delphi process used in this study, including questionnaire development, expert selection, two Delphi rounds, and image construction. The timeline reflects the research progression from July 2024 to March 2025.

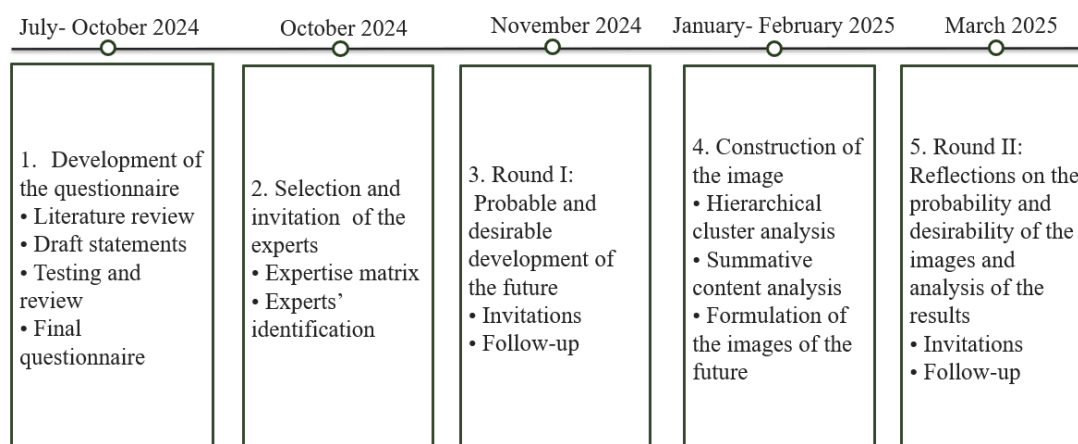


Figure 2. The Disaggregative Delphi process was followed in the study. Adapted from

*Luoma, P., Penttinen, E., Tapio, P., & Toppinen, A. (2022)*

### **3.2 Justification for using the Disaggregative Delphi method**

Based on my experience and literature review, Disaggregative Delphi is the best way to answer my research questions. Firstly, this method provided a more comprehensive understanding of investigating the impact of organizational culture on employee turnover, since a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis could benefit researchers when producing images of the future (Tapio, 2003). Purely quantitative research is not sufficient to reflect the experiences of each participant, while purely qualitative research lacks sufficient generalizability. Mixed methods helped explore the multiple dimensions within the topic systematically.

Second, this method emphasizes that experts answer anonymously and their opinions can be observed by each other. This helped to avoid interference caused by the authority effect and encouraged experts to make rational judgments based on independent thinking, thereby improving the objectivity and effectiveness of the research results (Linstone & Turoff 2002).

Third, the method is flexible and can collect expert opinions from geographically dispersed participants (Drumm et al. 2022). This is conducive to efficiently gathering high-quality expert opinions and improving the operability of the research when time and resources are limited (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004).

Fourth, the Disaggregative Delphi method focuses on diverse opinions rather than consensus, which is highly consistent with the goal of this study. This study aims to describe different organizational culture transformation paths and their potential impact on future employee turnover, so encouraging diversity of opinion and images is more important than reaching a unified prediction.

### **3.3 Expert panel**

The Delphi panel consisted of participants from different content areas of expertise and organizational backgrounds, who were selected based on the future-oriented research objectives and the central theme of this study: the impact of organizational culture on voluntary employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms by 2040. Most of the experts

invited in this study work in China, mainly from accounting firms, other related industries, and university research institutions. In addition, several future studies experts from the University of Turku in Finland were included. During the invitation process, I specifically selected experts who have a certain understanding of the Chinese accounting firms to ensure that they can provide valuable insights in the future image construction and evaluation process.

The first category included accounting experts, whose practical experience in accounting firms is crucial for understanding how organizational culture affects the dynamics of employee turnover in these firms. Their insights help to verify the relevance of future images and evaluate their consistency with current trends in the accounting industry.

The second category consisted of consulting experts, which is based on the fact that in Chinese accounting firms, employees are mainly composed of accounting experts and consulting experts; accounting experts are responsible for audit business, and consulting experts are responsible for management consulting and strategic consulting. Therefore, consulting experts have a deep understanding of the internal operation of the organization and organizational culture transformation. Their participation helps to evaluate the feasibility of the future organizational culture landscape, especially in the changing market environment, where the cultural adaptability and change capabilities of the consulting department have an important impact on employee turnover.

The third category consisted of human resources management experts, with a particular focus on those who are familiar with employee satisfaction, internal communication, and employee turnover. These experts provide professional insights into the relationship between organizational cultural practices and employee turnover behavior.

The fourth category is cultural transformation experts, who were selected because they understand how organizational culture can be reshaped over time. They play a particularly important role in evaluating the probability and desirability of the future image formed in this study.

The fifth category is futurists. As this study not only applies methods from futures studies but is also grounded in a future-oriented perspective, the insights of futurists are

particularly valuable. Their ability to evaluate long-term impacts helps to enhance the credibility and forward-looking nature of the future images developed in this research.

Finally, to further strengthen the academic foundation of the study, I invited university scholars whose disciplinary expertise and methodological knowledge contributed to the theoretical depth of the Delphi process.

In sum, the Delphi panel brought together experts with diverse professional backgrounds, including accounting, consulting, HR, cultural transformation, and futures studies. It is worth noting that some of these experts have overlapping expertise in multiple fields. In the first round of Delphi questionnaires, I sent the questionnaire made on the eDelphi platform to 50 experts via email or WeChat, and finally received 21 valid responses. In the second round of Delphi questionnaires, I sent the questionnaire to the same group of experts in the same way and obtained 25 valid responses.

According to the expert categories filled in by the experts in the two rounds of Delphi questionnaires, I created corresponding expertise matrices (See Tables 1 and 2). The number of participants in the second round was slightly more than that in the first round, which may be due to the short time and simple operation of the second round of questionnaires. In the second round, although some experts did not participate in the first round, they all belonged to the original expert group and met the expert selection criteria. Given that this study adopts the Disaggregative Delphi method, which emphasizes the collection of multiple views rather than the continuity of experts, this operation is in line with the rationality of the research design.

Table 1. First Delphi round expertise matrix

	Within the accounting firms				Outside the accounting firms	
	Accounting experts	Consulting experts	Human resources management experts	Cultural transformation experts	Futurists	University scholar
EXPA		√				
EXPB	√					
EXPC						√
EXPD	√					
EXPE		√				
EXPF		√	√			
EXPG		√				
EXPH			√	√		
EXPI	√					
EXPJ			√			
EXPK	√	√				
EXPL			√	√		
EXPM	√		√			
EXPN						√
EXPO				√		
EXPP		√				
EXPQ						√
EXPR		√				
EXPS		√				
EXPT					√	√
EXPU					√	√

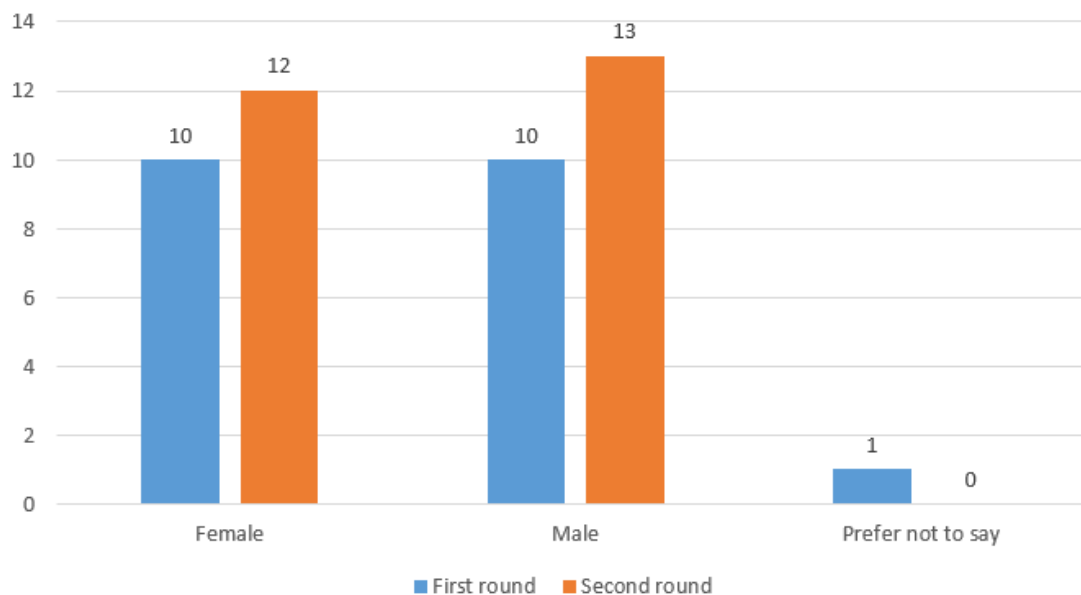
Table 2. Second Delphi round expertise matrix

	Within the accounting firms			Outside the accounting firms		
	Accounting experts	Consulting experts	Human resources management experts	Cultural transformation experts	Futurists	University scholar
EXP01	√					
EXP02		√				
EXP03		√				
EXP04		√				
EXP05	√					
EXP06			√			
EXP07		√				
EXP08	√					
EXP09				√		
EXP10	√					
EXP11			√			
EXP12		√				
EXP13			√			
EXP14				√		
EXP15		√				
EXP16		√				
EXP17		√				
EXP18			√			
EXP19						√
EXP20						√
EXP21			√			
EXP22	√					
EXP23		√				
EXP24						√
EXP25					√	√

To preserve anonymity throughout the Delphi process, participants in the first-round survey are identified in this study using alphabetical labels (Experts A to U). As the responses from the first and second rounds could not be matched, participants in the second-round survey are instead identified numerically (Experts 1 to 25). In each round of the Delphi survey, experts were asked to answer background questions. These questions were designed to ensure an accurate understanding of the composition of the expert panel and to help assess any potential bias in the panel's overall profile.

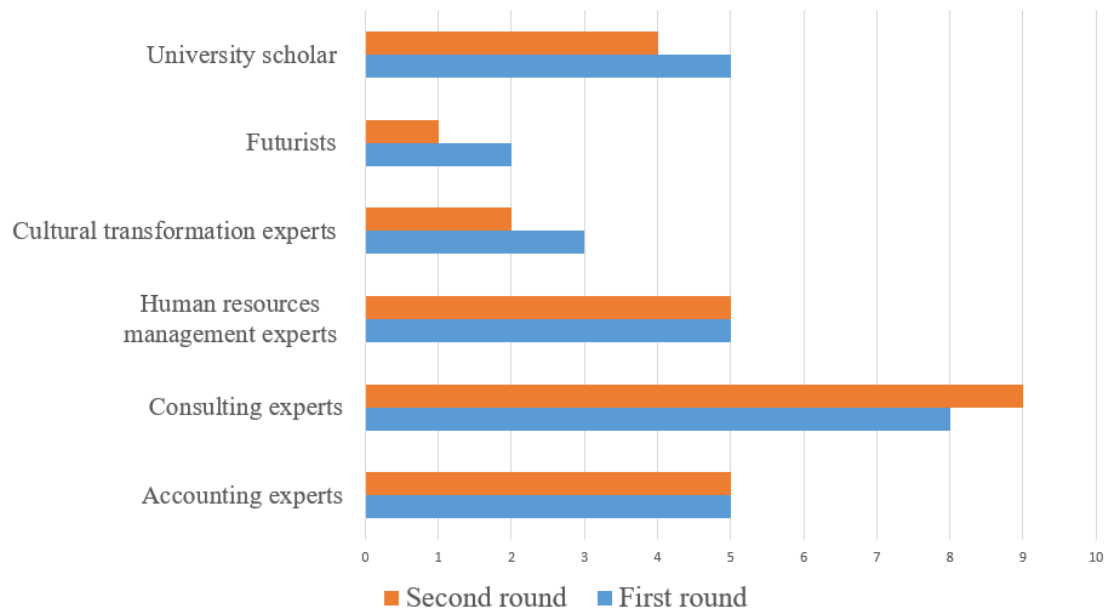
Figure 3 shows the gender distribution of the experts in the two rounds of the Delphi study. According to statistics, the number of female and male experts in both rounds

was similar, with a slight increase in the number of participants in the second round, and the overall gender composition of the experts was relatively balanced.



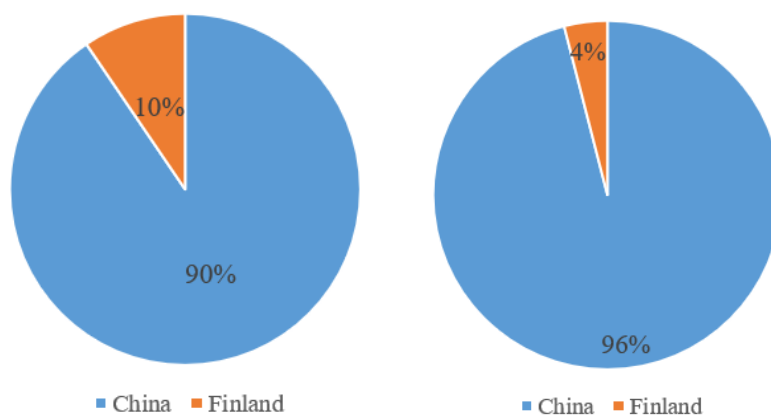
*Figure 3. Expert panel gender composition in Delphi Round 1 and Round 2*

Figure 4 shows the professional background of experts in both Delphi rounds. Most participants came from consulting, accounting, and human resource management. Consulting experts were the largest group in both rounds, with an increase in the second round. Human resource management and accounting experts remained stable, while the number of cultural transformation experts and futurists was relatively low. Overall, the panel included a balanced mix of domain expertise and strategic insight, ensuring diverse perspectives for the future-oriented analysis.



*Figure 4. Distribution of expert types in Round I and II*

As shown in Figure 5, the majority of experts in both Delphi rounds were from China. In the first round, 90% of participants were from China and 10% were from Finland. In the second round, the proportion of participants from China increased to 96%, with only 4% from Finland. While the study focuses on employee turnover in accounting firms in China, a small number of futurists from Finland were intentionally invited to contribute external foresight perspectives and enrich the diversity of views.



*Figure 5. Expert distribution by country in the first and second Delphi rounds*

### **3.4 First Delphi round questionnaire design**

The first round of the Delphi survey of this study was conducted on the eDelphi platform in November 2024. The questionnaire was distributed to 50 experts, and 21 experts ultimately completed a valid response, with a response rate of 42%.

The first round of questionnaires adopted a mixed method, combining quantitative and qualitative questions, because qualitative answers can support the cluster analysis of quantitative data (Tapio 2003). The specific content of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 2. The questionnaire is titled "Impact of organizational culture on employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms by 2040," and before the questionnaire, has a consent statement to ensure that participants understand the purpose of this study and the ethical requirements. After the participants agree, they can enter the formal questionnaire.

There is disagreement about the appropriate number of questions in a Delphi study questionnaire, but Zolingen & Klaassen (2003, 326) suggest a maximum of 20 to 25 questions. The first round of Delphi questionnaires has a total of 16 questions, of which 2 are open-ended questions and 14 are seven-point Likert scale questions. To avoid overly structured inquiry that might limit new ideas, the panelists were asked to openly explain the reasons behind their expectations regarding both the desirable future and the probable future (Tapio, 2002). Therefore, a comment box was provided under each quantitative question for experts to comment on the reasons behind the answer to collect qualitative data. The Likert scale was developed by Rensis Likert in 1932 and is a widely used psychometric tool in social science research (Sullivan & Artino, 2013). The scale usually includes 5 or 7 ordered response categories and can effectively measure respondents' attitudes, feelings, and opinions on specific topics (Jamieson, 2004; Nemoto & Beglar, 2014). This study mainly uses seven-point Likert scale questions, each of which contains two dimensions: desirability and probability. These questions are designed based on the OCET2040 framework in Chapter 2 and my own work experience in accounting firms. The two dimensions, desirability and probability, are included to capture experts' ideal expectations and realistic assessments of organizational culture transformation, respectively.

The Q1-Q13 of the first Delphi round questionnaire represent thirteen different organizational culture dimensions in the OCET2040 framework. In addition, the questionnaire had an overall question (Q14) and two open-ended questions (Q15-Q16). The Q15 aims to identify the most critical factors in organizational culture affect employee turnover. The Q16 is more specific and targeted, focusing on how to effectively reduce employee turnover through changes in organizational culture. The specific content of the questionnaire is in Appendix 2.

### **3.5 Cluster analysis**

Cluster analysis is an important data analysis tool in the Disaggregative Delphi study (Tapio 2003). The purpose of cluster analysis is to reveal groups in the data, group the data, and identify patterns within the data set (Everitt et al., 2011). Cluster analysis is a useful tool, but the "groups" it identifies are not necessarily real groups and need to be verified and explained by other methods (Everitt et al., 2011; Hennig, 2015). Therefore, when this study used cluster analysis to find the grouping of data, it also used qualitative analysis results to check and confirm whether these groupings are real and reasonable. Due to some experts skipping the comment sections, the final dataset included 72 valid qualitative responses, which were used to support the interpretation of the identified clusters.

Before starting data analysis, the collected data was preprocessed. First, the data matrix in Excel format was exported from the eDelphi platform, which contained the seven-point Likert scale answers of all expert panel members. Invalid cases were eliminated, and quantitative data were uniformly converted into numerical forms from 1 to 7. Subsequently, the data matrix was reorganized, making the probable and desirable future separate cases, and each case was named according to its respondent and category, for example, A\_des represents the desirable future idea from expert A. Cluster analysis was performed using the statistical software SPSS. The data used were the experts' responses to quantitative questions, covering the two dimensions of "desirability" and "probability", constituting a total of 42 cases and 13 variables. This study adopted a hierarchical clustering method, initially treating each case as an independent category and gradually merging similar cases to eventually form a cluster dendrogram, rather than presetting the number of clusters (Tapio et al., 2017). In the hierarchical cluster

analysis, I applied the Ward method as it produced clusters with clearer distinctions and more uniform sizes, facilitating analysis (Tapio et al. 2017).

After obtaining the cluster dendrogram, the study identified distinct clusters, each cluster was also interpreted to the qualitative data. Experts' open-ended comments and standard deviations of each cluster were reviewed to validate whether the cluster groupings made conceptual sense. This step ensured that the statistical groupings were not just artificial but reflected meaningful differences in expert perspectives. Based on the clustering results and qualitative insights, distinct future images were constructed after the first round. These future images combined both desirable and probable dimensions and were used as input for the second Delphi round.

### **3.6 Images of the future**

In this study, four alternative images of the future were constructed to illustrate the alternative cultural paths that Chinese accounting firms might take by 2040. These images were derived from a cluster analysis conducted on the first round of the Delphi study. The analysis grouped expert responses based on their evaluations of the probability and desirability of different organizational culture dimensions. Each cluster represented a distinct combination of cultural characteristics and implied a particular image regarding employee retention outcomes.

To enrich these clusters and ground them in real-world logic, qualitative responses from the first round were associated with each corresponding cluster. Expert comments were analyzed thematically to capture deeper reasoning and add narrative detail to the numerical clusters. As a result, the final four images reflected not only statistical groupings but also diverse expert perspectives on organizational transformation.

These images were not intended to predict the future but to provide structured alternatives that explore how variations in cultural priorities may lead to different outcomes in employee turnover. In the second round of the Delphi process, experts were invited to evaluate each image in terms of its perceived probability and desirability, allowing the study to further examine which futures are seen as likely and which are viewed as ideal. This approach helped to map both practical expectations and aspirational visions for the evolution of organizational culture in Chinese accounting

firms.

### **3.7 Second Delphi round questionnaire design**

The second round of the Delphi questionnaire survey was conducted in March 2025. The questionnaire was distributed to the 50 experts invited in the first round, who were the original expert panel members of the first round, thus ensuring the continuity and consistency of the Delphi process. In the second Delphi panel survey, 25 experts finally completed the valid questionnaire, with a 50% response rate. Two platforms were used in the second round of the survey. Chinese experts completed the questionnaire via Wenjuanxing, a widely used domestic survey platform, as experts were unable to access the eDelphi link at the time. Meanwhile, international experts responded through the eDelphi platform, which supports interactive Delphi processes.

The specific questionnaire layout and content can be found in Appendix 3. The title of the questionnaire was the same as the first round, "The Impact of Organizational Culture on Employee Resignation in Chinese Accounting Firms in 2040", and there was an informed consent to ensure that participants understood the purpose and ethical requirements of this study. Only after the participants agreed, they could enter the formal questionnaire.

The second-round survey adopted a quantitative method. The questionnaire included four images of the future, which were developed based on the analysis results of the first-round survey. The four images of the future are:

- Highly systematic and process-oriented firms (Image 1),
- People-oriented innovation firms (Image 2),
- Traditional firms undergoing gradual reform (Image 3),
- Mission-oriented and rigidly structured firms (Image 4).

For each image of the future, participants were asked to evaluate the probability and desirability of the future images based on their professional experience. Therefore, the questionnaire consisted of four 7-point Likert scale questions based on the four different images of the future. Participants were required to evaluate all four future images to successfully submit the questionnaire. The descriptions of the four future images are in

4.3, *Four images of the future*.

### **3.8 Ethical considerations**

Ethical principles and responsible conduct are essential for the validity and integrity of academic research (Chao et al. 2024). In this study, all participants participated voluntarily and anonymously, and participants could withdraw at any time without any penalty. Besides, participants were informed about how personal data was processed, the research background, and the research topic. Finnish experts were contacted via email, and Chinese experts were contacted via WeChat to invite them to participate in the study. At the beginning of the first and second rounds of Delphi questionnaires, I provided a consent statement, which included information on the purpose of the research, the rights of participants, data protection, and the use of anonymity. Participants had to give their consent before continuing to fill in the questionnaire. The full text of the two consent statements is detailed in Appendix 4 and Appendix 5.

## **4 Results**

### **4.1 Overview of the results**

This chapter presents the main findings of the Delphi study conducted for this thesis. The first round of the Delphi survey included both quantitative and qualitative items. The quantitative part consisted of 13 Likert-scale questions (Q1–Q13) measuring expert views on key dimensions of organizational culture, which were used for descriptive statistics and to conduct a cluster analysis. The cluster analysis results formed the basis for four distinct clusters, which were further interpreted using expert comments and used to construct four images of the future. In addition to these questions, the first-round survey included one Likert-scale item (Q14) regarding the expected change in employee turnover by 2040, as well as two open-ended items (Q15–Q16) designed to collect qualitative insights into the most influential cultural factors and proposed changes for reducing turnover. The second round of the Delphi survey asked experts to evaluate the four future images generated in the first round, based on their probability and desirability. The results from both rounds are presented in Sections 4.2 to 4.7.

### **4.2 Results of cluster analysis**

#### **4.2.1 Identifying four clusters**

This section presents the results of the cluster analysis based on the first-round Delphi survey. Figure 6 presents the dendrogram generated from the hierarchical cluster analysis. Based on both qualitative and quantitative feedback, the study identified four distinct clusters. The analysis of standard deviations within each group further supports the decision to retain four clusters. Although Cluster 4 includes more cases and shows slightly higher variability on some variables, its standard deviations remain comparable to those of the other clusters. This suggests that the internal differences within Cluster 4 are not large enough to justify splitting it into smaller groups. Each cluster represents a foundation for the future images discussed in this thesis. The red dots in the diagram indicate the points at which the clusters are formed. These groups will be referred to as Cluster 1, Cluster 2, Cluster 3, and Cluster 4. Cluster 1 includes 10 cases. Cluster 2 also comprises 10 cases, with nine of them representing desirable future assessments.

Cluster 3 consists of 8 cases, most of which are associated with probable futures. Cluster 4 is the largest, containing 14 cases, evenly divided between desirable and probable future responses (see Figure 6).

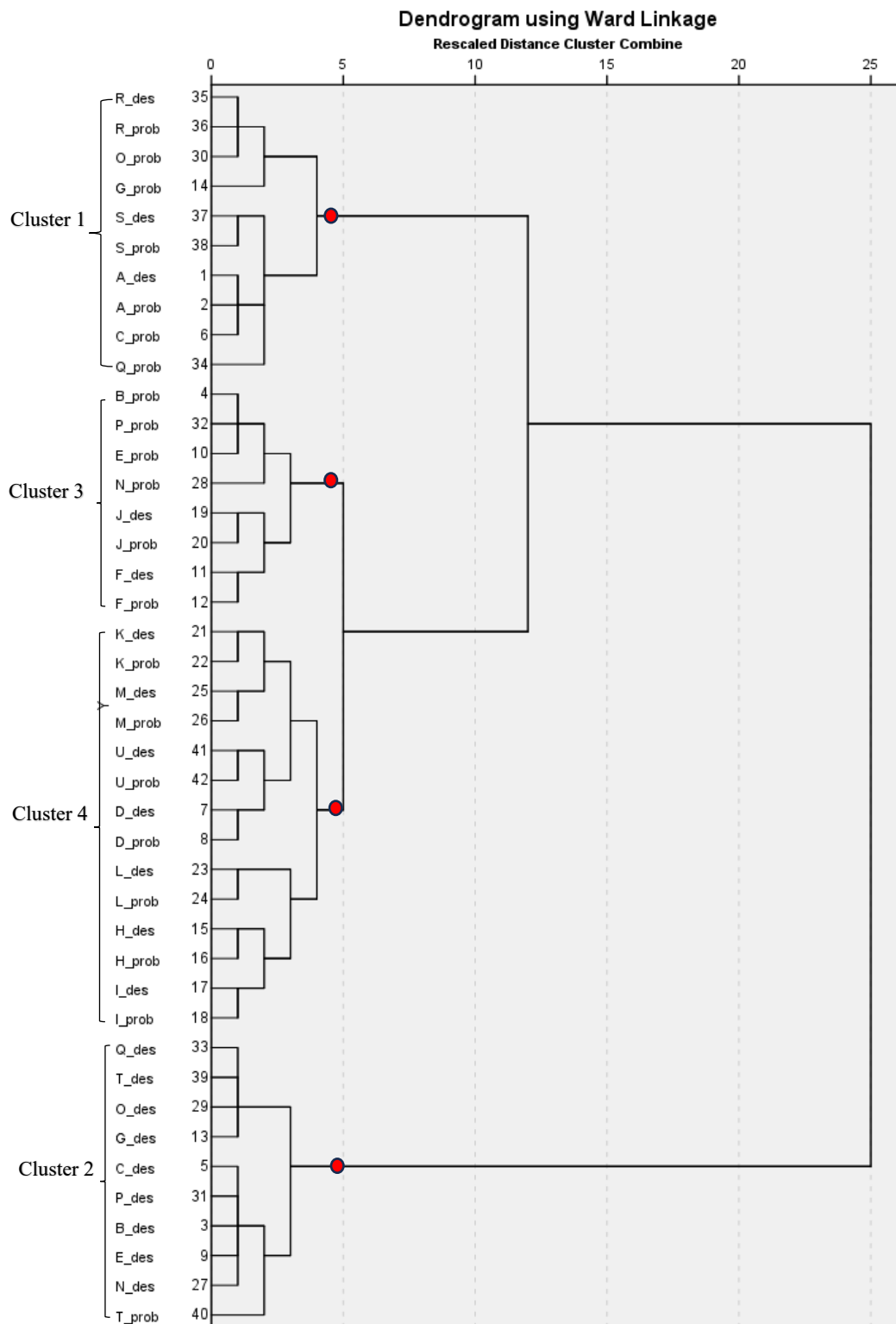


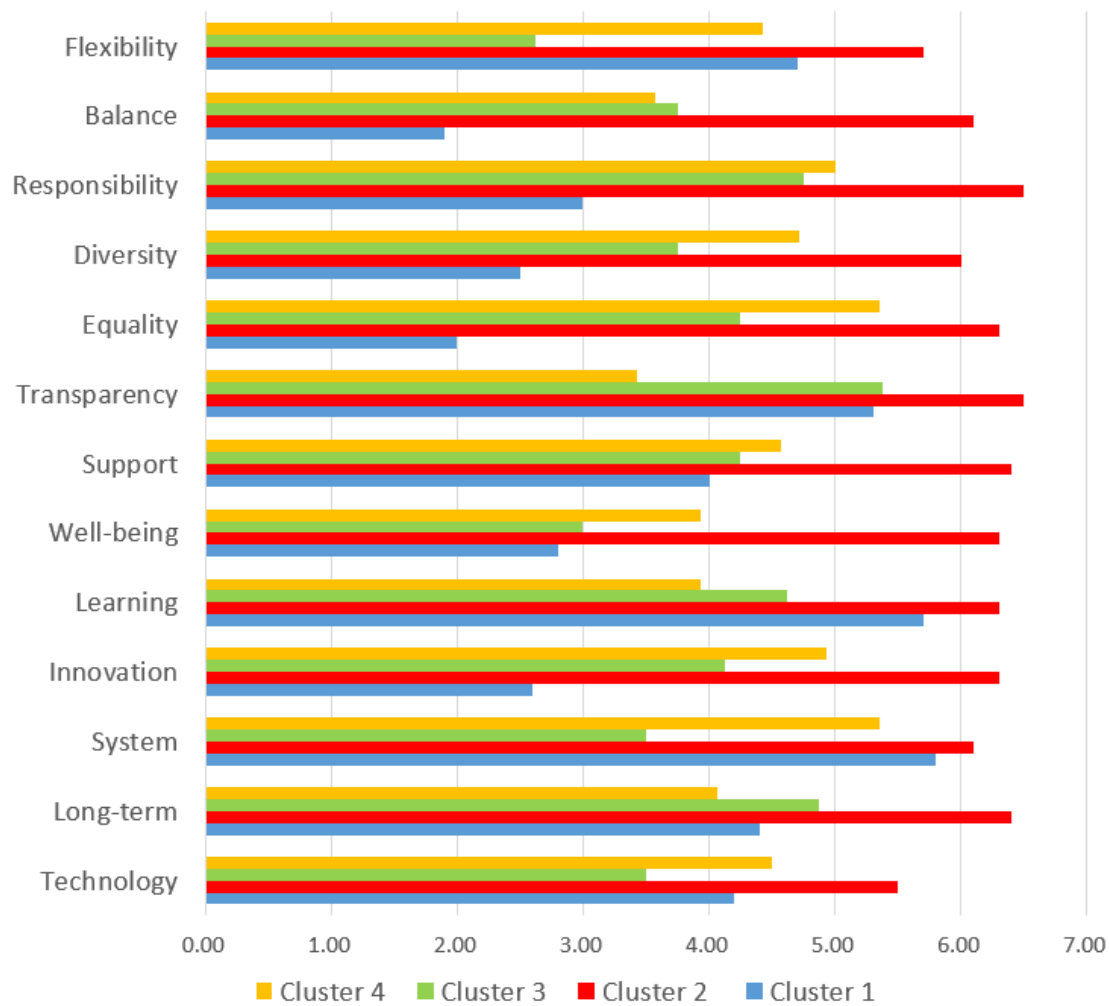
Figure 6. Dendrogram using Ward's method

The cluster analysis includes a comparison of the means and standard deviations for each cluster, as well as a comparison between desirable and probable future views. To strengthen the validity of the findings, expert qualitative feedback is also incorporated. For the average and standard deviation of each cluster, please refer to Table 3.

*Table 3. Quantitative responses to the first Delphi survey, grouped by cluster average and standard deviations*

	Cluster 1 AVG	Cluster 1 STD	Cluster 2 AVG	Cluster 2 STD	Cluster 3 AVG	Cluster 3 STD	Cluster 4 AVG	Cluster 4 STD
Technology	4.20	1.25	5.50	0.81	3.50	0.87	4.50	1.35
Long-term	4.40	1.02	6.40	0.66	4.88	1.17	4.07	1.49
System	5.80	0.60	6.10	0.83	3.50	1.00	5.36	0.48
Innovation	2.60	0.66	6.30	0.78	4.13	1.05	4.93	1.10
Learning	5.70	0.46	6.30	0.64	4.63	1.32	3.93	1.44
Well-being	2.80	1.60	6.30	0.78	3.00	1.22	3.93	1.28
Support	4.00	2.14	6.40	0.49	4.25	1.09	4.57	1.24
Transparency	5.30	1.68	6.50	0.67	5.38	0.48	3.43	1.40
Equality	2.00	0.63	6.30	0.78	4.25	1.30	5.36	0.61
Diversity	2.50	0.67	6.00	0.77	3.75	1.30	4.71	1.33
Responsibility	3.00	0.89	6.50	0.67	4.75	0.66	5.00	1.13
Balance	1.90	1.22	6.10	1.22	3.75	1.30	3.57	1.29
Flexibility	4.70	1.35	5.70	1.19	2.63	0.48	4.43	0.90

To better understand the differences among these four clusters, the average score of each variable was calculated per cluster. Figure 7 presents the average scores of each variable across the four identified clusters in the first-round Delphi survey. Each variable corresponds to a specific aspect of organizational culture, such as flexibility, transparency, or innovation. The figure provides a visual comparison of how different clusters evaluated these factors, highlighting the variation in perspectives among expert groups. This allows for a deeper understanding of how future probability and desirability assessments differ across the identified clusters.



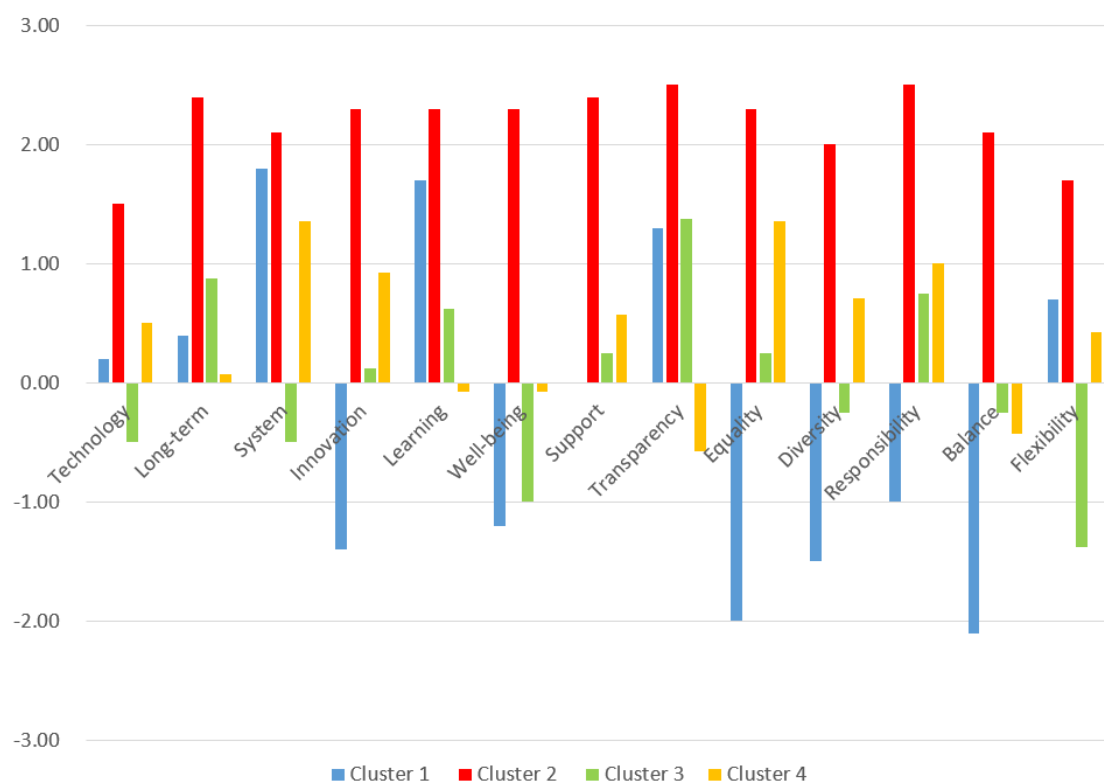
*Figure 7. Average scores of each variable by cluster*

To gain deeper insights into the differences in attitudes across clusters, the original Likert scale data were centered by subtracting the neutral midpoint value of 4. This transformation allows for the interpretation of scores as deviations from a neutral stance, where positive values indicate favorable views and negative values reflect unfavorable ones. Figure 8 illustrates the average deviation scores of each cluster across all organizational culture dimensions.

Based on Figure 8, an overall analysis of the four clusters was conducted. Cluster 2 demonstrates consistently positive deviations across all dimensions, indicating that the experts in this group generally hold optimistic and favorable expectations regarding the future of organizational culture in Chinese accounting firms. In contrast, Cluster 1 shows negative deviations on most dimensions, particularly in areas such as equality,

diversity, and work-life balance. This suggests that the experts in this cluster express concerns or reservations about the future development of these aspects.

The attitudes of Clusters 3 and 4 appear more moderate or neutral. Cluster 3 displays scores that are mostly close to zero across dimensions, reflecting a balanced or uncertain stance. Cluster 4, on the other hand, demonstrates relatively positive attitudes in dimensions such as systems thinking and equality, while showing more cautious views in areas like transparency and work-life balance



*Figure 8. Deviation from neutral value (4) in cluster responses across variables*

Next, I will analyze each cluster in more detail based on Figure 8, supplementing the quantitative analysis with qualitative data, namely the comments of experts. The analysis aims to explore the specific characteristics and future expectations of each cluster and provide a basis for the generation of four future images.

#### 4.2.2 Cluster 1: Highly systematic and process-oriented firms

Cluster 1 includes 10 cases, with a primary focus on probable futures and three cases reflecting desirable futures (see Appendix 6). This cluster is primarily shaped by the

views of consulting experts, followed by university scholars. According to the centered scores in Figure 8, Cluster 1 demonstrates highly positive deviations in system thinking and continuous learning, moderately positive deviations in transparency, suggesting generally favorable attitudes towards these aspects. In contrast, dimensions such as innovation, well-being, equality, diversity, responsibility, and work-life balance exhibit negative deviations, reflecting concerns or less optimistic expectations. Meanwhile, technology, long-term perspective, support, and flexibility remain close to neutral, indicating a more balanced or uncertain stance among experts in these organizational dimensions.

The highest average scores were observed in system thinking (5.80/7.00) and continuous learning (5.70/7.00), with relatively low standard deviations (0.60 and 0.46, respectively). This indicates strong consensus on the critical importance of these aspects for the sustainable growth of Chinese accounting firms. Strengthening these dimensions may therefore be essential strategies for reducing employee turnover by 2040. Several experts emphasized the significance of these cultural elements. For example, Expert Q noted:

*“I think the characteristics of accounting firms greatly increase the possibility of having systematic thinking, because the profession itself cultivates systematic thinking.”*

Similarly, Expert G highlighted the value of learning:

*“It is important to foster an environment of continuous learning and development to help employees improve their skills, which will help accounting firms to grow sustainably. I think there is a high probability that this will continue to be achieved in the future.”*

In addition, Expert R reinforced both aspects by stating that accounting work is inherently modular and systematic, and that continuous learning is necessary due to changing regulations and industry requirements.

Dimensions such as transparency (5.30/7.00) received moderately positive scores, indicating a generally favorable outlook among experts. For example, Expert C stated:

*“China's accounting firms have a more transparent promotion system than most other*

*professions, and this will continue in the future.”*

Similarly, Expert A noted that compensation structures in accounting firms are comparatively clear, reinforcing the perception of transparency in key organizational processes.

Conversely, work-life balance (1.90/7.00) and equality (2.00/7.00) showed the lowest average scores. The low standard deviation for equality (0.63) highlights widespread concerns about equity issues in the workplace. For example, experts C and G agree with this and provide supporting comments:

*“The issue of equality for women in the Chinese workplace still exists, especially when there is an oversupply of job seekers, companies still prefer male employees.” (Expert C)*

However, the relatively high standard deviation for work-life balance (1.22) indicates diverse opinions. While some experts expressed skepticism about improvements due to persistent workload issues, others remained cautiously optimistic. For example, expert C noted:

*“The work intensity of Chinese accounting firms is relatively high, and business trips will always occur. Work-life unbalance is inevitable and will be difficult to change in the future.”*

Similarly, Expert G believed that work-life balance remains difficult to achieve, at least in the short term. In contrast, Expert Q offered a more hopeful perspective, suggesting that:

*“Developments in technologies like AI may drive work-life balance.”*

Dimensions including innovation (2.6/7.00), well-being (2.8/7.00), diversity (2.5/7.00), and responsibility (3.0/7.00) have low average scores. Qualitative responses provided deeper insights into the reasons behind these assessments.

Several experts expressed doubts about the feasibility of fostering innovation in accounting firms. For instance, Expert G remarked:

*“I would love for firms to be innovative and creative, but I am not optimistic because it*

*is difficult to develop a culture of creativity in an organization.”*

Similarly, Expert R noted that accounting firms are not the birthplace of innovation because they are not physical industries and can only expect to improve efficiency through process innovation.

Concerns were also raised regarding well-being and diversity. Expert G commented:

*“I don’t think accounting firms in 2040 will prioritize employee benefits.”*

In terms of diversity, Experts C and Q both highlighted persistent structural biases. For example, expert C stated:

*“Discrimination against women and older people still exists in the Chinese workplace and the future is not optimistic enough.”*

Regarding social responsibility, some experts emphasized the dominance of profit motives. As Expert G stated:

*“I think that for most accounting firms, the priority is profit, and it is difficult for them to actively fulfill social responsibilities.”*

Dimensions such as technology (4.20/7.00), long-term perspective (4.40/7.00), support (4.00/7.00), and flexibility (4.70/7.00) showed near-neutral scores with moderate to relatively high standard deviations (1.25, 1.02, 2.14, and 1.35 respectively), reflecting uncertainty or variability in expert views. Experts’view reflected the diversity in opinion, particularly concerning the role of emerging technologies. For example, Expert A acknowledged the rapid development of technology, while also noting its current limitations:

*“Technology is developing rapidly, but there are still some areas where artificial intelligence cannot completely replace”*

Expert G stated both the opportunities and risks of utilizing technology:

*“I would love for firms to use technologies like VR to promote flexibility, for example, making working from home more popular. On the other hand, I don’t want firms to be overly AI-savvy, as that could put me at risk of losing my job. Overall, I think firms are likely to use AI heavily in the next 20 years.”*

#### 4.2.3 Cluster 2: People-oriented innovation firms

Cluster 2 consists of 10 cases, nine of which focused on the desirable future, with one case discussing the probable future (see Appendix 6). Most experts in this cluster come from university scholars, followed by consulting experts. According to the centered scores in Figure 8, Cluster 2 demonstrates consistently high positive deviations across all assessed dimensions, indicating broadly optimistic and favorable expectations among the experts in this group.

Overall, Cluster 2 demonstrates consistently high average scores across all organizational culture dimensions, with most values exceeding 5.5 out of 7.0 (see Appendix 6). The dimensions of transparency, responsibility, long-term perspective, and support are particularly prominent, indicating a strong collective expectation for positive cultural developments. Moreover, the relatively low standard deviations suggest a high degree of consensus among experts in this cluster. These findings imply that fostering these cultural elements is perceived as critical to reducing employee turnover and ensuring organizational sustainability by 2040.

Selected qualitative comments from the experts further illustrate the optimistic outlook and highlight the specific aspects of organizational culture that are considered crucial for shaping a desirable future by 2040. For example, Expert G noted:

*“I would love for firms to use technologies like VR to promote flexibility, for example, making working from home more popular. On the other hand, I don’t want firms to be overly AI-savvy, as that could put me at risk of losing my job. Overall, I think firms are likely to use AI heavily in the next 20 years.”*

In addition, Expert C observed progress in systems thinking:

*“Chinese accounting firms are making progress year by year in perfecting their systems thinking and are constantly filling in the gaps that were neglected in the past.”*

Moreover, expert B remarked on the continuing tradition of employee development and learning:

*“Accounting firms have always had a tradition of employee training, and I believe it will continue to improve in the future.”*

#### 4.2.4 Cluster 3: Traditional firms undergoing gradual reform

Cluster 3 consists of 8 cases, most of which focused on the probable future (see Appendix 6). This cluster is primarily shaped by the views of consulting experts, followed by HR management experts. According to the centered scores in Figure 8, Cluster 3 demonstrates relatively neutral to moderately positive deviations across most organizational culture dimensions, indicating a balanced but cautious attitude among the experts. While moderately positive deviations are observed particularly in dimensions such as long-term perspective, transparency, and responsibility, several dimensions, including flexibility, well-being, received lower average scores, reflecting notable concerns about future developments in these areas. The moderate standard deviations across most dimensions suggest a certain degree of diversity in expert opinions. These results imply that although some positive developments are anticipated, significant challenges remain in fully strengthening organizational culture and reducing employee turnover by 2040

The highest average scores were observed in transparency (5.38/7.00) and long-term perspective (4.88/7.00), which indicated that many experts agree these dimensions will play an important role in Chinese accounting firms. For example, expert B commented on transparency:

*“The remuneration system of accounting firms has now become gradually transparent, and the promotion mechanism is also open, and it should be further improved in the future.”*

In addition, the same expert expressed optimism about the long-term perspective:

*“China's accounting firms have been making progress in the long-term perspective in recent years, and I think they will continue to make progress in the future.”*

Conversely, flexibility (2.63/7.00) and well-being (3.00/7.00) showed the lowest average scores, reflecting expert concerns about the future of flexibility and well-being in Chinese accounting firms. As Expert B noted:

*“Flexible working is difficult to promote in China due to human laziness and traditions formed over the years.”*

In addition, the expert remarked:

*“I think this is difficult to achieve high employee well-being in China. The number of new graduates each year makes the job market a seller's market.”*

Dimensions including technology (3.5/7.00), system thinking (3.5/7.00), diversity (3.75/7.00), and work-life balance (3.75/7.00) have low average scores. Expert B provided several insights that help explain these lower evaluations.

Regarding technological limitations, the expert noted:

*“For accounting firms, a higher proportion of work is done manually, and some work is difficult to complete with AI.”*

On the topic of diversity, Expert B observed:

*“Gender and age issues are at a pessimistic level, but educational background and professional experience will be the focus when competition increases.”*

In terms of work-life balance, the expert highlighted ongoing structural challenges:

*“It is difficult for accounting firms to achieve work-life balance as the job already involves a heavy workload and lots of overtime, and this will be difficult to change in the future.”*

Dimensions such as innovation (4.13/7.00), support (4.25/7.00), and equality (4.25/7.00) showed near-neutral scores with moderate standard deviations (1.05, 1.09, and 1.30, respectively), reflecting uncertainty or variability in expert views. Expert B provided several comments that related these dimensions.

Regarding innovation, the expert noted:

*“Since the work of accounting firms is based on a series of framework requirements, I find it difficult to innovate.”*

On the issue of support, Expert B remarked:

*“Because much of the work of accounting firms is done by employees on business trips to client companies, the supportive work environment is likely to remain the same.”*

Concerning equality, the expert expressed concern over ongoing gender biases:

*“I believe that implicit gender discrimination will not disappear in China, and it mainly exists in the discrimination against women in childbearing.”*

#### 4.2.5 Cluster 4: Mission-oriented and rigidly structured firms

Cluster 4 consists of 14 cases, with a balanced distribution between desirable and probable future evaluations (see Appendix 6). Cluster 4 is primarily composed of accounting experts, making them the largest group in this cluster, followed by HR management experts and cultural transformation experts. According to the centered scores in Figure 8, Cluster 4 demonstrates generally modest positive deviations across most organizational culture dimensions, indicating a cautiously optimistic outlook among the experts in this group. Overall, scores for Cluster 4 are above the neutral midpoint in several dimensions, particularly in system thinking and equality, reflecting a mild expectation for gradual improvements by 2040. However, dimensions such as transparency and work-life balance show near-neutral or slightly negative deviations, suggesting lingering uncertainties about progress in these areas.

The highest average scores were recorded in system thinking (5.36/7.00) and equality (5.36/7.00). Dimensions including technology (4.5/7.00), innovation (4.93/7.00), supportive environment (4.57/7.00), diversity (4.71/7.00), and responsibility (5.00/7.00) also have high average scores. Conversely, transparency (3.43/7.00) and work-life balance (3.57/7.00) showed the lowest average scores.

Unlike the previous clusters, qualitative analysis was not conducted for Cluster 4, as the cases included in this cluster did not provide sufficient qualitative comments to support further interpretation.

### 4.3 Four images of the future

Based on the cluster analysis results and qualitative insights, four distinct future images were constructed after the first round. The descriptions of the four images of the future are below. Four images of the future, each image corresponds directly to one of the four clusters identified through cluster analysis in the first Delphi round (i.e., Image 1 = Cluster 1, Image 2 = Cluster 2, and so on).

#### **Image of the future 1: Highly systematic and process-oriented firms**

By 2040, accounting firms will have developed into highly systematized, continuous learning, transparent, and process-oriented organizations, but their level of technology application is relatively limited. The main competitiveness of the firm comes from strict rules, standardized process management, and efficient operating models, rather than AI or automation technology. The firm relies on traditional business process optimization and refined management to ensure the accuracy of financial reports and industry compliance. However, due to the slow adoption of innovation and technology by the firm, its industry competitiveness may face challenges. In addition, there are major issues with employee benefits, equality, diversity, responsibility, and work-life balance.

### **Image of the future 2: People-oriented innovation firms**

In 2040, accounting firms will fully realize talent-oriented operating model. Not only are they highly transparent, but they also provide the best environment for learning, growth, and diversity. The firms are making extensive use of technology tools such as AI and VR, employees can flexibly choose to work remotely or on-site. The firms also invest considerable resources in supporting talent growth and innovation, making the organizational culture very attractive. In addition, the firms pay attention to the employees' work-life balance, equality, attach importance to employee welfare, and actively participate in ESG responsibilities to promote socially sustainable development (ESG stands for Environmental, Social, and Governance and evaluates how companies manage their impact on the environment, society, and internal governance. By focusing on sustainability, employee welfare, and ethical leadership, ESG helps organizations create long-term value for both business and society).

### **Image of the future 3: Traditional firms undergoing gradual reform**

In 2040, the firms still maintain the traditional pyramid promotion system, but have implemented moderate reforms in long-term strategy and management practices. They demonstrate modest innovation capabilities and show some willingness to adopt emerging technologies. However, a significant proportion of work remains manual, primarily because certain tasks cannot be effectively automated with AI. While the firms perform well in transparency, particularly in areas such as governance, they still have certain conservative management characteristics (For example, not fully embracing new technologies or more flexible management practices, preferring to stick

with the established system and culture). This cautious approach contributes to a relatively inflexible working environment, besides leaving considerable room for improvement in employee well-being, work-life balance, gender equality, system thinking, and diversity.

#### **Image of the future 4: Mission-Oriented and Rigidly Structured Firms**

By 2040, accounting firms will become highly systematized and mission-driven organizations. Firms not only focus on innovation management but also assume strong social responsibility (ESG) and actively promote diversity, equality, and sustainable development. Furthermore, firms actively integrate advanced technologies, such as AI, into their daily operations and management activities. Although the firms have a strict internal management structure and implement a strict fair promotion system, the firms have always worked hard to ensure transparency in their decision-making process. Besides, although firms are actively creating supportive environments and implementing measures to improve work-life balance, achieving an optimal balance remains an ongoing challenge that will require continued effort over time.

#### **Overall**

Table 4 provides a comparative summary of the four future images derived from the Delphi study. Each image is characterized by its overall expert attitude, cultural dimensions with high or low average scores, and the type of future it represents. This overview helps illustrate how different cultural priorities and expert perspectives shape alternative paths for organizational development in Chinese accounting firms by 2040.

*Table 4. Overview of expert-rated future images and their cultural characteristics*

<b>Image</b>	<b>Future image name</b>	<b>Overall attitude</b>	<b>High-scoring dimensions</b>	<b>Low-scoring dimensions</b>	<b>Preferred future type</b>
Image 1	Highly systematic and process-oriented firms	Conservative, Realistic	Systems thinking, Continuous learning	Equality, Work-life balance, Innovation, Diversity, Well-being	Conservative, Pessimistic realism
Image 2	People-oriented innovation firms	Idealistic, Positive	All (Scores > 5.5)	None	Highly desirable futures
Image 3	Traditional firms undergoing gradual reform	Neutral, Cautious	Transparency, Long-term perspective	Flexibility, Well-being, System thinking	Mild reform scenarios
Image 4	Mission-oriented and rigidly structured firms	Moderately Optimistic	Systems thinking, Equality	Work-life balance, Transparency	Gradual improvement

#### 4.4 Expert evaluations of organizational culture dimensions

This section presents descriptive statistics for 13 Likert-scale items (Q1-Q13) assessing experts' views on key dimensions of organizational culture. Table 5 shows the mean score and standard deviation (STDEV) for each variable, covering two dimensions: probability and desirability.

*Table 5. Descriptive statistics of expert ratings for organizational culture variables (Q1–Q13)*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Probability</b>		<b>Desirability</b>	
	Average	STDEV	Average	STDEV
Technology	4.24	1.48	4.71	1.08
Long-term	4.52	1.47	5.14	1.39
System	5.29	1.28	5.29	1.03
Innovation	4.05	1.65	5.05	1.40
Learning	4.95	1.53	5.14	1.36
Well-being	3.24	1.60	4.86	1.70
Support	4.52	1.65	5.14	1.52
Transparency	4.67	1.83	5.24	1.48
Equality	3.90	1.85	5.19	1.43
Diversity	3.76	1.66	4.81	1.43
Responsibility	4.38	1.53	5.24	1.34
Balance	3.00	1.63	4.62	1.86
Flexibility	4.05	1.43	4.86	1.36

Among all variables, systems thinking received the highest score on both dimensions,

with a probability mean of 5.29 and a desirability mean of 5.29. This indicates that experts agree that systems thinking is not only highly desirable but also likely to become a core feature of future organizational culture. In addition, in the dimension of probability, the learning also presents a high mean value. In the dimension of desirability, transparency and responsibility present a high mean value.

Some variables show significant differences between probability and desirability. Well-being (3.24) and work-life balance (3.00) have the lowest probability scores, but their desirability scores are significantly higher (4.86 and 4.62, respectively), highlighting that experts believe these important organizational culture aspects may not be valued by 2040. Similarly, equality and diversity also show gaps between their perceived importance and expected likelihood of implementation.

Experts have different opinions on some variables. For example, in the desirability dimension, the standard deviation score of work-life balance is high, indicating that experts present diverse views on this variable. While some experts believe that improving work-life balance is the key to retaining talent, other experts may think that this factor is not so important. In my work experience, I have come across some colleagues who do not care about work-life balance after receiving high salaries. These different opinions may be caused by professional backgrounds and personal pursuits of the experts.

These findings are summarized in a visual manner in Figure 9, which shows the average probability and desirability scores for each organizational culture variable. The gap between probability and desirability is particularly obvious for dimensions such as well-being, work-life balance, equality, and diversity, reflecting the “desirable but unlikely” pattern observed in Table 5.

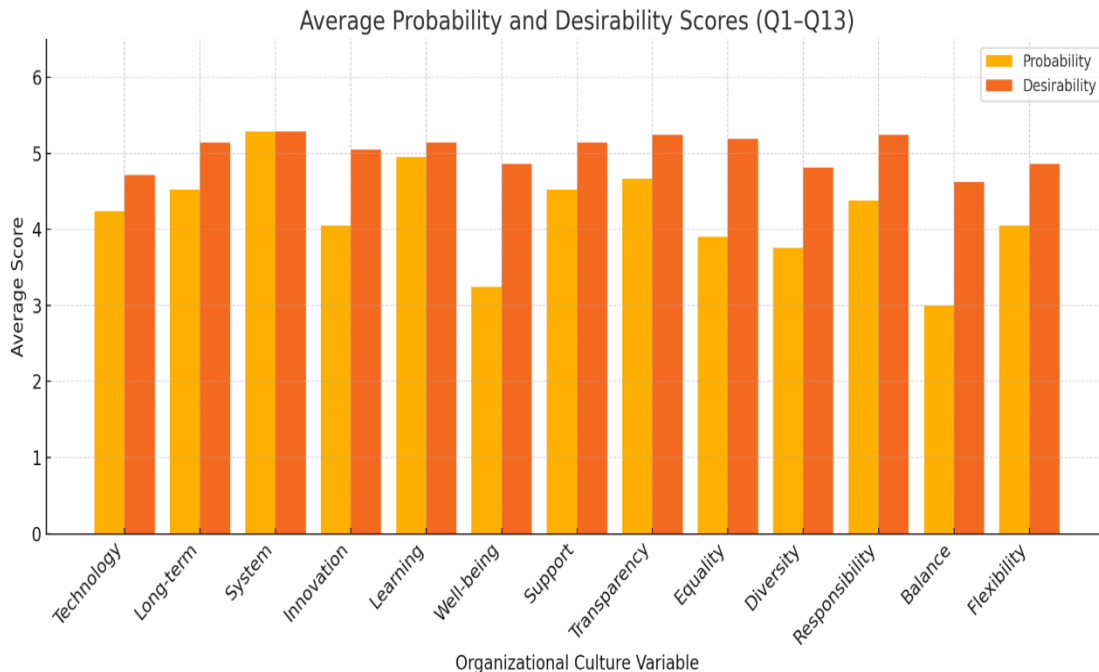


Figure 9. Average probability and desirability scores for each organizational culture variable

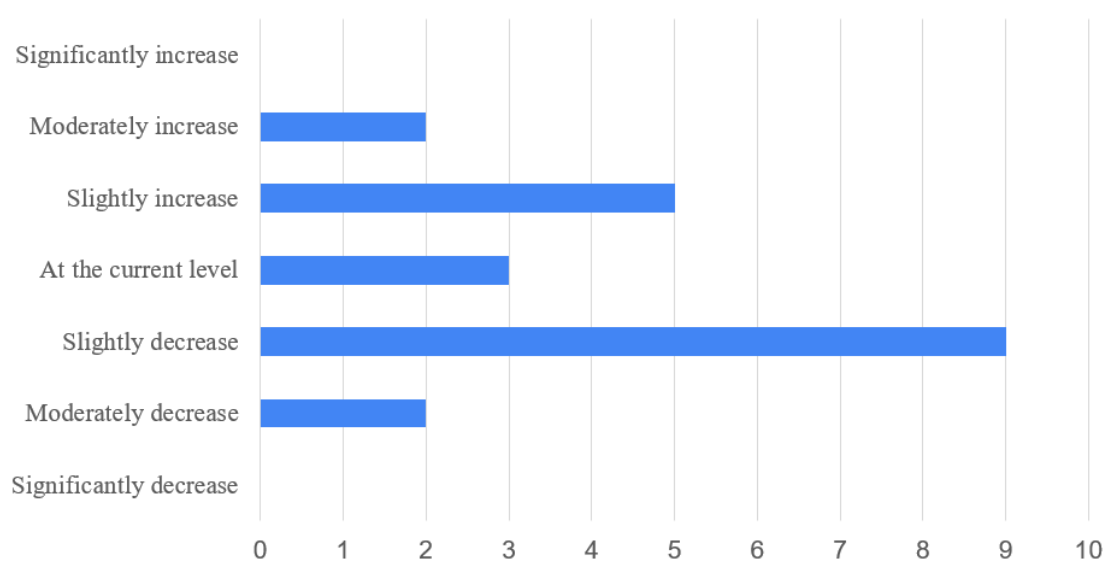
#### 4.5 Expert forecast on employee turnover by 2040

Question 14 asked: “Overall, considering all your previous responses, to what extent do you think employee turnover will increase or decrease by 2040?”

This question was measured using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from “Significantly decrease” (1) to “Significantly increase” (7), with the midpoint “At the current level” (4) representing no anticipated change. Moreover, a comment box was provided for experts to explain the reasoning behind their responses. This question was designed to capture the respondents' overall assumptions based on their evaluation of the 13 previous questions related to organizational culture.

Figure 10 shows the overall distribution of experts' assessments of the employee turnover trend in Chinese accounting firms in 2040. The results show that the highest proportion of experts predict that the employee turnover rate will decrease (a total of 11 people, accounting for 52.4% of the total number of people), among which "slightly decrease" is the most common answer (9 people), showing that experts are generally cautiously optimistic about the moderate improvement of employee retention rate;

another 2 people chose "moderately decrease", further supporting this view. Three experts (14.3%) believe that the employee turnover rate will remain stable at the "current level", indicating that some experts expect little overall change. In contrast, 7 experts (33.3%) predict that the employee turnover rate will increase, of which 5 people choose "slightly increase" and 2 people choose "moderately increase", indicating that some respondents still have some concerns about the risk of future employee turnover. It is worth noting that no expert selected "significantly increase" or "significantly decrease," suggesting that extreme changes in employee turnover are not anticipated by the panel.



*Figure 10. Expert predictions on employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms by 2040 (First Delphi Round)*

To better understand the underlying reasons behind experts' expectations regarding future employee turnover, the following section analyzes their qualitative comments. These insights help to reveal the contextual and cultural factors that shaped their assessments in the first-round survey. Experts gave various reasons for their employee turnover predictions, and the summary of all expert comments is provided in Appendix 7.

According to the comments of experts who predict a decrease in employee turnover (e.g., B, C, D, F, G, I, L, N, P, Q), there are both internal and external factors that contribute to this expectation. Some experts noted that the increasing difficulty of

finding a new job in China's competitive labor market may encourage employees to stay in their current positions. For example, expert C noted that "employment pressure in China is increasing," while expert Q emphasized that the increased difficulty of job hopping will naturally reduce employee turnover. Other experts emphasized that the continued development of the accounting industry is a stabilizing factor. Expert D said that industry growth may attract more talent and reduce employee turnover, while expert F believed that increased competition may prompt companies to increase compensation and benefits to retain employees. Some experts, such as G and L, emphasized the role of flexible work arrangements and technology (especially telecommuting) as mechanisms to improve employee satisfaction. Career development opportunities are also seen as key to improving employee retention, as reflected in expert I's comments.

Experts who expect employee turnover to increase (e.g., H, J, K, M, R, S) tend to focus on ongoing structural and cultural issues within accounting firms. Some experts noted that existing challenges, such as talent loss, high work pressure, and poor organizational culture, remain unresolved and may intensify over time. For example, expert H mentioned the problem of talent loss in the industry, while expert K believed that "if the corporate culture is poor, employees may seek more attractive alternatives." Expert M emphasized that high-intensity workloads and a lack of flexible work arrangements are major risk factors. In addition, expert J also pointed out that concerns about rapid technological changes and market competition are destabilizing factors that lead to an increase in employee turnover. Although expert S acknowledged the difficulties of job hopping, he believed that dissatisfaction within the company could still lead to employees leaving.

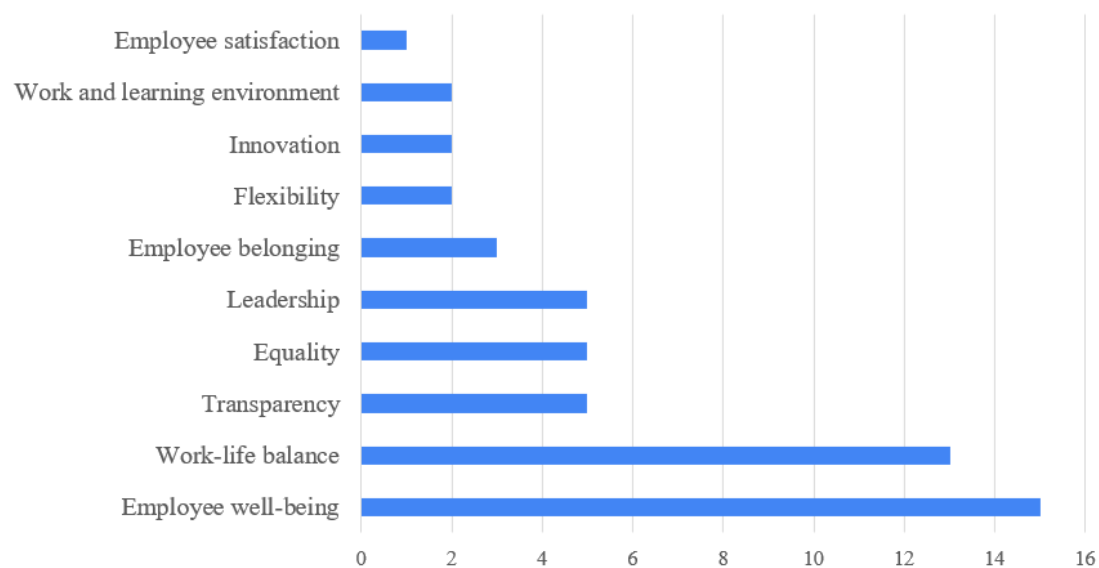
A small number of experts (e.g., A, E, O) believe that the overall employee turnover rate will remain stable. Their comments reflect their views on the balance between new employees and employees leaving, and doubt whether major structural changes will occur. Expert A said, "There will be new employees joining and some employees leaving," suggesting that this is a natural balance. Meanwhile, Expert O believed that high turnover is a long-standing problem for Chinese accounting firms that may not be easily resolved, reinforcing expectations of continuity rather than change.

#### 4.6 Expert views on key cultural factors and recommended changes

This section presents expert views on the most important organizational culture factors influencing employee turnover, as well as their suggestions for cultural changes that could help reduce turnover in Chinese accounting firms by 2040.

In the first round of the Delphi survey, participants were also invited to provide open-ended responses to two qualitative questions (Q15 & Q16). The following analysis focuses on the expert panel's responses to these two qualitative questions.

Firstly, the result of question 15 will be analyzed. Question 15 asked: "In your opinion, what are the three most important aspects of organizational culture that will influence employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms by 2040?". The experts' responses were reviewed to identify and summarize frequently mentioned keywords. A simple frequency-based statistical analysis was conducted, and the results are presented in Figure 11.



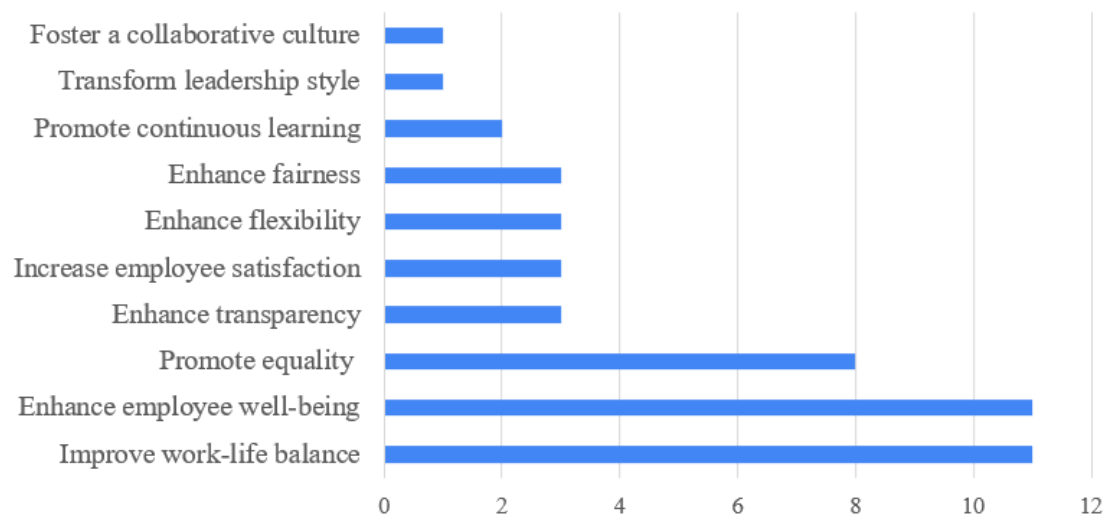
*Figure 11. Key aspects of organizational culture identified by experts as influencing employee turnover by 2040 (Q15 Responses)*

The responses to Question 15 reflect the experts' different views on the most important organizational culture factors that will affect the employee turnover rate of Chinese accounting firms by 2040. As shown in Figure 11, employee well-being (15 times) and work-life balance (14 times) are the two most frequently mentioned factors. The frequency of mention is much higher than other organizational culture factors,

indicating that experts generally believe that employee well-being and work-life balance are the most important factors affecting the turnover rate of Chinese accounting firms in 2040.

Other factors mentioned include transparency, equality, and leadership, each of which was mentioned by multiple experts, indicating that these organizational culture factors play an important role in affecting the turnover rate of Chinese accounting firms in 2040. Although mentioned less frequently, concepts such as flexibility, innovation, and work and learning environment still appear in the data, indicating that adaptability and development opportunities are also valued.

The results of Question 16 are analyzed below. Question 16 asked: “In your opinion, what kinds of organizational culture changes could help lower employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms by 2040?” Based on these responses, key themes and frequently mentioned keywords were identified and categorized. A simple frequency analysis was then conducted to produce the visual summary shown in Figure 12.



*Figure 12. Frequency of suggested organizational culture changes to reduce employee turnover by 2040 (Q16 Responses)*

*Note: Employee satisfaction and employee well-being are similar, but they represent different aspects of the employee experience. Satisfaction focuses on how the individual feels. In contrast, the other one refers to how the organization supports the overall health, stability, and emotional state of its employees.*

The responses to Question 16 reveal experts' views on what types of organizational culture changes can effectively lower the employee turnover of Chinese accounting firms in 2040. As shown in Figure 12, the two most frequently suggested changes are improving work-life balance and enhancing employee well-being, each of which was mentioned by 11 experts. This result shows that experts generally believe that these two organizational culture changes are the key to solving the problem of high employee turnover, which is highly consistent with the most frequently mentioned influencing factors mentioned in Question 15. In addition, 8 experts mentioned that promoting equality is also a key factor, mainly reflected in increasing the culture of gender equality. Other frequently suggested changes include enhancing transparency (3 times mentioned) and enhancing flexibility (3 times mentioned), and enhancing fairness (3 times mentioned). These responses show that creating a fair, open, and flexible work environment is key to reducing employee turnover in the long term. In addition, a small number of participants mentioned changes such as changing leadership styles and cultivating a more collaborative culture. Although these ideas were mentioned less frequently, they reflect their detailed understanding of how workplace culture can adapt to changing employee expectations.

Moreover, employee satisfaction was also mentioned by some experts. Although it does not belong to the type of organizational culture change itself, it frequently appears in the comments of experts. This phenomenon shows that employee satisfaction plays a key mediating role between organizational culture and employee turnover. It not only reflects employees' overall perception of cultural practices, but may also significantly affect whether they choose to stay. Therefore, although it is not classified as a specific cultural change dimension in the classification, its role cannot be ignored in future organizational strategies.

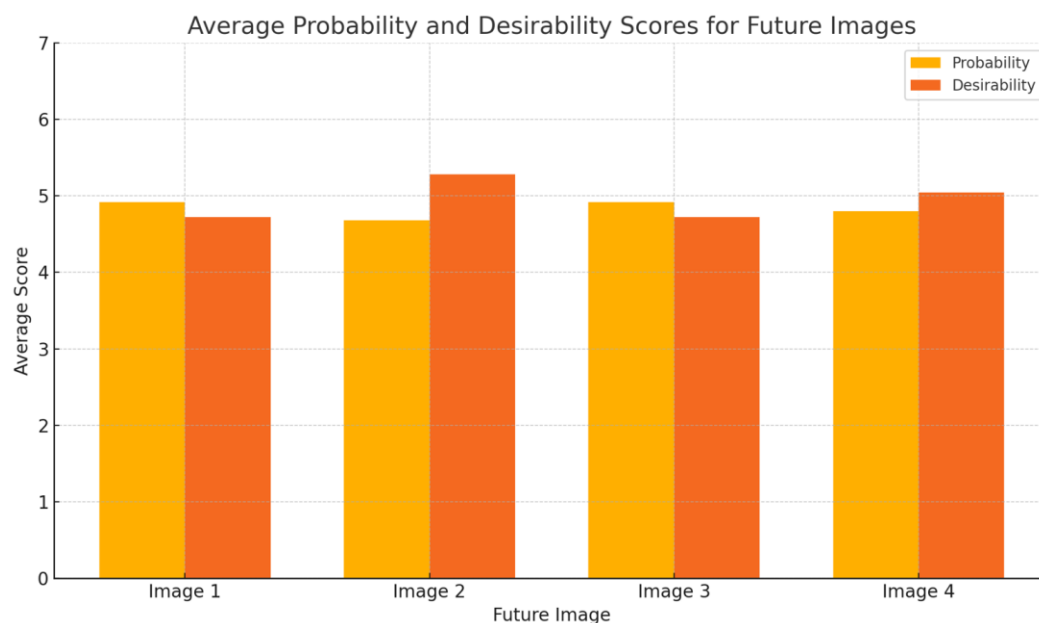
#### **4.7 Expert assessment of alternative future images**

In the second round of the Delphi survey, a total of 25 experts participated in the evaluation of four future images (Image 1–4), and gave quantitative scores of 1–7 points from the two dimensions of "Probability" and "Desirability". Among them, 1 point represents "extremely low probability/desirability" and 7 points represent "extremely

high probability/desirability". The statistical results show that there are certain differences in the scores of each image on the two dimensions (Table 6). These findings are also visually illustrated in Figure 13, which presents the average probability and desirability ratings for each future image.

*Table 6. Descriptive statistics of expert ratings for the four future images (N = 25)*

Image of the future	Probability		Desirability	
	Average	STDEV	Average	STDEV
Image 1: Highly systematic and process-oriented firms	4.92	1.74	4.72	1.91
Image 2: People-oriented innovation firms	4.68	1.93	5.28	1.78
Image 3: Traditional firms undergoing gradual reform	4.92	1.67	4.72	1.76
Image 4: Mission-oriented and rigidly structured firms	4.80	1.67	5.04	1.73



*Figure 13. Average probability and desirability scores for each future image in the Second Delphi Round*

Experts rated Image 1 and Image 3 the highest in terms of probability, with both receiving an average score of 4.92. Image 4 followed closely with an average of 4.80. However, Image 2 had the lowest average score of 4.68. This suggests that participants viewed Images 1, 3, and 4 as more likely to occur, while they were less confident about the likelihood of Image 2. In terms of desirability, Image 2 was rated the highest, with

an average score of 5.28, showing it was the most preferred image. Image 4 came second at 5.04. In contrast, both Image 1 and Image 3 received the lowest desirability average scores (4.72).

It is worth noting that Image 2 also presents a significant contrast feature: its desirability score is the highest, but its probability score is the lowest. This "high desirability-low probability" gap suggests that although experts have an idealistic attitude towards this image, they believe that there are obstacles to its realization in reality. This result is of great significance in the Delphi study because it may reveal that current policies, social structures, or technical conditions in China have not yet supported the development direction of this ideal image. In other words, Image 2 can be used as a future path that should be focused on and promoted in subsequent research or strategic planning.

In comparison, Image 1 and Image 3 have the highest "probability" score, but are tied for the lowest "desirability" score. This shows that experts generally believe that these two types of images are most likely to become a reality, but at the same time, do not expect such a future. This combination of "high probability-low desirability" may reflect that these two images contain some characteristics that are considered negative or undesirable, such as restrictions on personal freedom, low organizational flexibility, or the continuation of social inequality. Therefore, although these images represent a more realistic development path, they also indicate dissatisfaction and transformation needs in the current system, which deserves great attention in future strategic planning.

In terms of standard deviation, the dispersion of all scores is relatively close, ranging from 1.67 to 1.93. Overall, the expert opinions show a moderate consistency trend, and there is no extreme disagreement.

In summary, Image 2 has become the focus of attention in this round of surveys due to its high desirability score and gap between idealism and reality. This difference provides a basis for subsequent discussions and suggestions, and also reveals the structural challenges that may exist in the current future work life picture.

When considering the composition of experts in each image, clearer patterns emerge that help explain the differences in probability and desirability ratings across the four future images. The experts' professional backgrounds play an important role in how

they view the alternative futures. Image 2, composed primarily of university scholars. This group strongly emphasized people-oriented values such as well-being, equality, and transparency in the first round of the Delphi questionnaire. Their high desirability ratings for Image 2 reflect their vision for the future organizational culture. However, their lower probability scores indicate that they recognize that existing structural or institutional barriers may hinder the realization of this ideal. The contrast between high desirability and low probability highlights the normative importance of this image, despite questions about its feasibility. Images 1 and 3, composed primarily of consulting experts, received the highest average probability scores. This suggests that consulting experts tend to view Images 1 and 3 as more likely development paths, perhaps because they reflect more familiar or existing business structures. However, the desirability scores for Images 1 and 3 are also among the lowest, indicating that although experts believe this development trajectory is realistic, they may not support it. Image 4 is composed primarily of accounting and HR management experts. This group's assessment places image 4 in the middle, relatively high in both probability and desirability, suggesting that they hold a more balanced view based on actual work experience.

## 5 Discussion

### 5.1 The influence of organizational culture on voluntary employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms by 2040

The results of the two-round Delphi study show that organizational culture plays a key role in influencing employee turnover of Chinese accounting firms. Experts agree that certain organizational-oriented culture dimensions (such as systems thinking, transparency, learning, and long-term perspective) are essential for future companies, indicating that these factors are of great value in retaining talent. However, it is worth noting that on some variables closely related to people-oriented culture dimensions (such as well-being, work-life balance and equality), although their desirability scores are high, their probability scores are significantly low. This "high desirability-low probability" gap reflects the experts' general concern that these dimensions are difficult to fully reflect in real organizations.

As an answer to research question one, this study finds that organizational culture has both strategic and emotional influence on voluntary employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms. Structural dimensions like systems thinking and learning contribute to long-term retention, while unfulfilled people-oriented needs, such as well-being and work-life balance, are immediate drivers of voluntary employee turnover risk.

The first round of cluster analysis further revealed the relationship between different organizational cultures and employee turnover. Four images of the future, each representing a unique combination of values and cultural positioning. In the second round of the Delphi study, "people-oriented innovative companies" (Cluster 2) scored higher on all dimensions and showed more positive employee retention prospects. Although "highly systematic process-oriented companies" (Cluster 1) and "task-oriented, rigidly structured companies" (Cluster 4) are seen as more likely to be realized, they are considered by most experts to be undesirable paths, implying a higher risk of employee turnover.

In addition, the results of the answers to Question 14 (Q14) in the first round of questionnaires show that experts from more humanistic cultural orientations (such as Cluster 2) generally expect employee turnover rates to decrease by 2040, while other

groups show more conservative or even pessimistic judgments. This shows that experts' judgments on employee turnover trends are closely related to the cultural direction they identify with.

In addition, the answers to open-ended questions (Q15 and Q16) reveal a consistent concern among experts: terms such as “employee well-being,” “work-life balance,” “gender equality,” and “transparency” appeared frequently in their comments. This indicates that the current cultural environment is seriously insufficient in meeting employees' basic emotional and life needs.

This combination of quantitative and qualitative shows that experts have a dual understanding of organizational-oriented culture dimensions (such as systematic thinking, continues learning, etc.) and people-oriented culture dimensions (such as well-being and work-life balance): the former is the basis for achieving future organizational culture transformation, and the latter is the most urgent cause of high employee turnover. Experts generally believe that if companies cannot pay attention to people's well-being needs in addition to structural design, it will be difficult to effectively reduce the employee turnover rate, especially in the context of the younger generation paying more attention to the meaning of work, fairness, and physical and mental health.

A noticeable difference emerges between the quantitative data and the open-ended comments: while “system thinking” received the highest scores across both probability and desirability dimensions (Q1-Q13), experts consistently highlighted well-being, work-life balance, and equality in their qualitative responses(Q15-Q16). This contrast deserves deeper interpretation. This difference does not reflect a conflict in opinion, but instead highlights two sides of how experts understand organizational culture. On the one hand, the quantitative scores reflect the experts' emphasis on organizational-oriented culture dimensions, such as system-thinking, learning. on the other hand, the people-oriented culture dimensions emphasized by the experts in their free expression reflects their more direct and urgent concern about the risk of employee turnover in the current organizational reality. In other words, organizational-oriented culture dimensions are seen as the foundation for achieving long-term organizational culture transformation, while employee well-being, work-life balance are the key shortcoming

that currently affects employee turnover. This finding suggests that if organizations want to effectively reduce employee turnover in the future, they must not only build an efficient cultural system but also respond to employees' actual needs in terms of work experience, interpersonal relationships, and mental health.

## **5.2 Organizational culture measures to reduce voluntary employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms by 2040**

The results of the Delphi study suggest that future efforts to reduce employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms must focus on cultural transformation in both organizational-oriented and people-oriented domains. Experts widely emphasized that while organizational-oriented culture dimensions, such as systems thinking, transparency, and learning, are crucial for sustaining competitiveness, they are not sufficient on their own to retain talent. The most desirable future image (Image 2), which combined high employee well-being, high work-life balance, gender equality, and systems thinking, received the highest desirability score in the second Delphi round. However, its low probability score indicates that experts perceive substantial institutional or structural barriers to realizing this ideal.

As an answer to research question two, and to address the gap between the desirable future and its perceived feasibility, this study finds that reducing voluntary employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms requires integrated cultural measures that prioritize both structural efficiency and employee well-being.

To operationalize this transformation, several culture-based interventions were proposed across both Delphi rounds. In open-ended responses, experts consistently stressed the importance of promoting employee well-being through provide employee mental health training and stress management resources, expand paid leave options, including sick leave and annual leave. Besides, experts also pay attention to strengthen the work-life balance culture by multiple methods such as clearly discourage overtime culture and formulate a "working time boundary" policy to improve happiness and satisfaction. Moreover, enhancing gender equality, establish a flexible wok system and improve organizational transparency were also viewed as essential steps toward creating more inclusive and attractive work environments, and ultimately reduce

employee turnover. These findings suggest that Chinese accounting firms must actively reframe their cultural norms to prioritize not only operational efficiency, but also psychological safety, social fairness, and individual growth.

In addition, Image 2 provides an ideal picture for the cultural transformation of Chinese accounting firms. How these companies can combine people-oriented values with organization-oriented strategies is a process full of challenges and opportunities. Based on the environment of the Chinese accounting firm industry, the top-down management model makes leadership play an important role in this transformation. Therefore, it is important to cultivate transparent and responsible leadership culture and create a learning environment with Chinese accounting firms.

### **5.3 Limitation**

While this study generated valuable insights into the relationship between organizational culture and employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms, it also has certain limitations.

First, although the Disaggregative Delphi method is suitable for exploring diverse perspectives, some adjustments had to be made during the second round due to technical constraints. In the first round, all participants used the eDelphi platform, which supports real-time interaction and allows experts to view and reflect on each other's responses. However, in the second round, Chinese experts were unable to access the eDelphi platform due to regional restrictions. As a result, their responses were collected via an alternative Chinese platform, Wenjuanxing, which does not support interactive features. Meanwhile, international experts continued using the eDelphi platform. This division may have reduced the overall depth and dynamic feedback typically expected in an iterative Delphi process, especially among the Chinese expert subgroup.

In addition, the selection of organizational culture dimensions was based not only on the literature but also on the authors' own professional experience in accounting firms. While this increases practical relevance, it may introduce some subjective bias in terms of which dimensions are prioritized or how certain survey items are constructed.

Finally, although this study aims to explore the long-term future up to 2040, the views of the Delphi panel are still based on existing knowledge and assumptions. The nature of work is evolving rapidly, particularly in the context of accelerating technological and regulatory change, which means that some future developments may fall beyond the scope of this study's exploratory framework.

## 6 Conclusions

This study contributes both theoretically and practically to the understanding of how organizational culture may influence employee turnover in the context of Chinese accounting firms by 2040. By using the Disaggregative Delphi method, the research introduces a foresight-based approach to explore divergent cultural transformation paths and their implications for future talent retention. The OCET2040 framework developed in this thesis offers a structured way to interpret how different organizational culture dimensions are linked to employee satisfaction, commitment, and ultimately, employee turnover.

From a practical perspective, the study provides accounting firms with actionable insights into which cultural practices are considered both desirable and realistic by experts. The identification of a desirability–probability gap in people-oriented culture dimensions (such as well-being, equality, and work-life balance) offers a valuable warning: although these factors are seen as important for future retention, they may remain difficult to implement without institutional and structural change. This information can support HR professionals and organizational leaders in prioritizing interventions that align with future employee expectations.

For future research, several directions are worth exploring. First, similar studies could be conducted in other professional service sectors or across different cultural contexts to assess whether the patterns observed here hold elsewhere. Second, future Delphi studies could expand panel size and demographic diversity, particularly including more voices from mid-level and younger professionals, whose workplace preferences may shape future organizational dynamics. Finally, integrating scenario planning with Delphi-generated data could offer more dynamic visualizations of possible futures and help decision-makers better prepare for long-term human capital challenges.

In sum, this study lays the foundation for further exploration into how future-oriented organizational culture can support more sustainable and human-centered strategies for talent retention in Chinese accounting firms.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 Organizational culture dimensions and their reported impact on job satisfaction and organizational commitment

Organizational culture	Impact on job satisfaction	Authors
Technology	Technology has a positive impact on job satisfaction, but also affects other job-related factors like performance, health and safety, and work-life balance.	Ratna& Kaur (2016)
Long term perspective	Adopting a long-term perspective helps support strategic decision-making and fosters a sense of purpose and stability among employees, which can, in turn, enhance job satisfaction and engagement.	Lin et al. (2019) van Tuin et al. (2020)
System	Systems thinking can enhance employee satisfaction by considering the complex factors affecting all stakeholders.	Mutingi & Mbohwa (2014)
Innovation	Innovative organizational culture positively influences employee job satisfaction.	Ozsoy (2022)
Learning	Workplace learning opportunities have a significant positive impact on job satisfaction.	Ryu & Moon (2019)
Well-being	Promoting employees' psychological, emotional, and physical health through supportive practices—such as mental health resources, and a respectful workplace culture—that contribute to increased job satisfaction.	Wright & Cropanzano (2000)
Support	Perceived organizational support increases job satisfaction by meeting employees' socioemotional needs.	Mary (2015)
Transparency	Transparency in promotion methods increases perceived procedural justice, which is strongly related to job satisfaction.	Garcia-Izquierdo et al. (2012)
Equality	Employee empowerment and equality plans increase job satisfaction by mitigating the detrimental effects of job demands.	Ibukun & Pérotin (2023)
Diversity	Diversity management increases job satisfaction by reducing perceived discrimination, especially for employees high in openness to experience.	Alam & Shin (2021)
Responsibility	Fostering a culture of ethical behavior, accountability, and corporate social responsibility, which enhances employees' sense of purpose and increases job satisfaction.	Edmans (2012)
Work-life balance	Work-life balance has a positive and significant effect on employee job satisfaction.	Jaysan et al. (2024) Aliya & Saragih (2020) Nasution & Ali (2020)
Flexibility	Functional flexibility increases job satisfaction.	Cotti et al. (2014) Origo & Pagani (2008)

<b>Organizational culture</b>	<b>Impact on organizational commitment</b>	<b>Authors</b>
Technology	Technology acceptance impacts organizational commitment and turnover intention.	Parvari et al. (2015)
Long term perspective	A long-term perspective that values future planning and permanence tends to foster higher organizational commitment.	(Hofstede, 2001)
System	Systems thinking approaches can enhance employee commitment.	Jaaron & Backhouse (2011)
Innovation	Innovative human resource practices, particularly the extent of their introduction, increase organizational commitment.	Agarwala (2003)
Learning	Organizational learning positively affects organizational commitment.	Rose & Pak (2009)
Well-being	Organizational well-being positively influences organizational commitment, with the greatest impact on affective commitment.	Islaha & Kadiyono (2023)
Support	Perceived organizational support increases affective commitment, which in turn decreases employee turnover.	Rhoades et al. (2001)
Transparency	Research indicates that transparency leads to increased employee trust and affective commitment.	Klimchak et al. (2020)
Equality	Perceived equality in the workplace positively impacts affective commitment.	Dongrey & Rokade (2022)
Diversity	Diversity management has the potential to increase organizational commitment.	Turek (2017)
Responsibility	Responsible leadership increases organizational commitment through the mediating effect of corporate social responsibility.	Piñeros Espinosa (2022)
Work-life balance	Work-life balance dimensions (time, involvement, satisfaction) positively predict organizational commitment.	Rumangkit & Zuriana (2019)
Flexibility	Flexible working arrangements are positively related to organizational commitment.	Choo et al. (2016) Eaton (2003)

## Appendix 2 Questionnaire of the first round

### Impact of organizational culture on employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms by 2040

#### Background information:

SEX

- Male  
 Female

AGE

- 20-30  
 31-40  
 41-50  
 51-60  
 61-

NATIONALITY

#### Technology

- By 2040, Chinese accounting companies will effectively utilize new technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality (VR), and augmented reality (AR).

DESIRABILITY

Low	--	-	+/-	+	++	High
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

PROBABILITY

Low	--	-	+/-	+	++	High
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

#### Long-term perspective & System Thinking

- Chinese accounting companies will have long-term perspectives, and make

foresight decisions by 2040.

DESIRABILITY						
Low	--	-	+/-	+	++	High
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

PROBABILITY						
Low	--	-	+/-	+	++	High
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. By 2040, Chinese accounting companies will pay attention to system thinking.

DESIRABILITY						
Low	--	-	+/-	+	++	High
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

PROBABILITY						
Low	--	-	+/-	+	++	High
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### **Innovation & Learning**

4. Chinese accounting companies will focus on innovation and creativity by 2040.

DESIRABILITY						
Low	--	-	+/-	+	++	High
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

PROBABILITY						
Low	--	-	+/-	+	++	High
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. Chinese accounting companies will cultivate a continuous learning and



### Transparency & Equality

8. By 2040, Chinese accounting companies will be more transparent, including in their salary systems and career development opportunities.

DESIRABILITY

Low    --    -    +/-    +    ++    High

PROBABILITY

Low    --    -    +/-    +    ++    High

9. By 2040, Chinese accounting companies will prioritize gender equality, including in recruitment and promotion.

DESIRABILITY

Low    --    -    +/-    +    ++    High

PROBABILITY

Low    --    -    +/-    +    ++    High

### Diversity & Responsibility

10. Chinese accounting companies will encourage diversity, including gender, age, educational background, and professional experience.



13. Chinese accounting companies will have more flexibility, such as remote working and flexible working hours by 2040.

DESIRABILITY

Low    --    -    +/-    +    ++    High

PROBABILITY

Low    --    -    +/-    +    ++    High

**Overall**

14. Overall, considering all your previous responses, to what extent do you think employee turnover will increase or decrease by 2040?

OVERALL

Significantly decrease    Moderately decrease    Slightly decrease    At the current level    Slightly increase    Moderately increase    Significantly increase

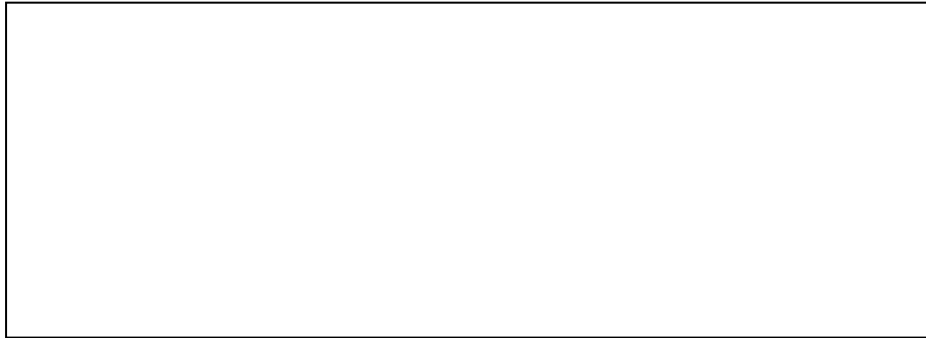
                

**Open-ended questions**

15. In your opinion, What are the three most important aspects of organizational culture that will influence employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms by 2040?

16. In your opinion, what kinds of organizational culture changes could help lower

employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms by 2040?



**Finally, please select your professional background:**

- Accounting experts
- Consulting experts
- Human resources management experts
- Cultural transformation experts
- Futurists
- University scholar

### Appendix 3 Questionnaire of the second round

## Impact of organizational culture on employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms by 2040

### Background information:

SEX

- Male  
 Female

AGE

- 20-30  
 31-40  
 41-50  
 51-60  
 61-

NATIONALITY

### Image 1: Highly systematic and process-oriented firms

By 2040, accounting firms will have developed into highly systematized, continuous learning, transparent, and process-oriented organizations, but their level of technology application is relatively limited. The main competitiveness of the firm comes from strict rules, standardized process management, and efficient operating models, rather than AI or automation technology. The firm relies on traditional business process optimization and refined management to ensure the accuracy of financial reports and industry compliance. However, due to the slow adoption of innovation and technology by the firm, its industry competitiveness may face challenges. In addition, there are major issues with employee benefits, equality, diversity, responsibility, and work-life balance:

DESIRABILITY

Low    --    -    +/-    +    ++    High

PROBABILITY

Low    --    -    +/-    +    ++    High

### Image 2: People-oriented innovation firms

In 2040, accounting firms will fully realize talent-oriented operating model. Not only are they highly transparent, but they also provide the best environment for learning, growth, and diversity. The firms are making extensive use of technology tools such as AI and VR, employees can flexibly choose to work remotely or on-site. The firms also invest considerable resources in supporting talent growth and innovation, making the organizational culture very attractive. In addition, the firms pay attention to the employees' work-life balance, equality, attach importance to employee welfare, and actively participate in ESG responsibilities to promote socially sustainable development (ESG stands for Environmental, Social, and Governance and evaluates how companies manage their impact on the environment, society, and internal governance. By focusing on sustainability, employee welfare, and ethical leadership, ESG helps organizations create long-term value for both business and society).

Based on your judgment, please evaluate the desirability and probability of this image:

DESIRABILITY

Low    --    -    +/-    +    ++    High

PROBABILITY

Low    --    -    +/-    +    ++    High

### Image 3: Traditional firms undergoing gradual reform

In 2040, the firms still maintain the traditional pyramid promotion system, but have implemented moderate reforms in long-term strategy and management practices. They demonstrate modest innovation capabilities and show some willingness to adopt emerging technologies. However, a significant proportion of work remains manual, primarily because certain tasks cannot be effectively automated with AI. While the firms perform well in transparency, particularly in areas such as governance, they still have certain conservative management characteristics (For example, not fully embracing new technologies or more flexible management practices, preferring to stick with the established system and culture). This cautious approach contributes to a relatively inflexible working environment, besides leaving considerable room for improvement in employee well-being, work-life balance, gender equality, system thinking, and diversity.

Based on your judgment, please evaluate the desirability and probability of this image:

DESIRABILITY						
Low	--	-	+/-	+	++	High
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

PROBABILITY						
Low	--	-	+/-	+	++	High
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

#### **Image 4: Mission-Oriented and Rigidly Structured Firms**

By 2040, accounting firms will become highly systematized and mission-driven organizations. Firms not only focus on innovation management but also assume strong social responsibility (ESG) and actively promote diversity, equality, and sustainable development. Furthermore, firms actively integrate advanced technologies, such as AI, into their daily operations and management activities. Although the firms have a strict internal management structure and implement a strict fair promotion system, the firms have always worked hard to ensure transparency in their decision-making process. Besides, although firms are actively creating supportive environments and

implementing measures to improve work-life balance, achieving an optimal balance remains an ongoing challenge that will require continued effort over time.

Based on your judgment, please evaluate the desirability and probability of this image:

DESIRABILITY

Low	--	-	+/-	+	++	High
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

PROBABILITY

Low	--	-	+/-	+	++	High
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Finally, please select your professional background:**

- Accounting experts
- Consulting experts
- Human resources management experts
- Cultural transformation experts
- Futurists
- University scholar

#### **Appendix 4 Consent statement of the first round**

Hello, thanks for participating in this survey! This survey is part of my research on the impact of organizational culture on employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms in 2040. My major is Futures Studies, and I am currently conducting research at the Turku School of Economics.

Recently, employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms has been rather high, and I am interested in understanding experts' views on how this might change in the future. As you go through the questions, please consider how the proposed statements differ from the current situation and what driving forces might lead to these potential changes.

Please answer all the questions according to your past experience and current knowledge/ideas. There are 16 questions in total. Two are open-ended questions, and the others are seven-step Likert scale questions that can be answered with a single selection. A space is also provided for you to comment on the underlying reasons for your responses.

All information collected in this survey will be kept strictly confidential and used solely for academic purposes. Your responses will be anonymized to ensure that no individual participant can be identified.

By selecting the checkbox below, you confirm that:

You have read and understood the information provided above.

You voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

You understand that you can withdraw at any time without penalty.

## **Appendix 5 Consent statement of the second round**

Hello, thanks for participating in this survey! This survey is part of my research on the impact of organizational culture on employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms in 2040. My major is Futures Studies, and I am currently conducting research at the Turku School of Economics.

Recently, employee turnover in Chinese accounting firms has been rather high, and I am interested in understanding experts' views on how this might change in the future. Based on the first round of surveys, I conducted data analysis and generated four different Images of the Future. In this round of questionnaires, I will show you these future images and ask you to evaluate the probability and desirability of the future images based on your professional experience.

All information collected in this survey will be kept strictly confidential and used solely for academic purposes. Your responses will be anonymized to ensure that no individual participant can be identified.

By selecting the checkbox below, you confirm that:

You have read and understood the information provided above.

You voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

You understand that you can withdraw at any time without penalty.

**Appendix 6 Dimension scores, averages, and standard deviations for Cluster 1, 2, 3, and 4**

	Technology	Long-term	System	Innovation	Learning	Well-being	Support	Transparency	Equality	Diversity	Responsibility	Balance	Flexibility
A_des	5	5	5	3	5	2	5	5	2	3	3	1	5
A_prob	5	3	6	2	5	2	5	5	2	3	3	1	5
C_prob	2	6	6	3	6	3	6	6	2	2	5	2	5
G_prob	5	4	5	2	6	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	4
O_prob	5	5	6	4	6	1	2	5	1	3	4	1	6
Q_prob	5	5	7	3	6	4	7	7	3	2	2	5	7
R_des	5	5	6	2	6	2	1	7	2	3	3	2	5
R_prob	5	5	6	2	6	2	1	7	2	3	3	2	5
S_des	3	3	5	3	5	5	5	5	3	3	3	3	3
S_prob	2	3	6	2	6	6	6	5	2	2	2	1	2
Cluster 1 average	4.20	4.40	5.80	2.60	5.70	2.80	4.00	5.30	2.00	2.50	3.00	1.90	4.70
Cluster 1 STDEV	1.25	1.02	0.60	0.66	0.46	1.60	2.14	1.68	0.63	0.67	0.89	1.22	1.35

	Technology	Long-term	System	Innovation	Learning	Well-being	Support	Transparency	Equality	Diversity	Responsibility	Balance	Flexibility
B_des	6	6	6	6	6	7	7	7	7	6	6	7	6
C_des	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
E_des	5	5	5	6	5	5	6	5	5	5	5	5	5
G_des	4	7	6	7	7	7	6	7	7	5	7	7	7
N_des	6	6	5	5	6	6	6	6	5	6	7	6	3
O_des	6	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	6
P_des	6	6	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	5
Q_des	5	7	7	7	6	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
T_des	5	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
T_prob	7	7	7	7	7	5	6	7	6	5	7	3	5
Cluster 2 average	5.50	6.40	6.10	6.30	6.30	6.30	6.40	6.50	6.30	6.00	6.50	6.10	5.70
Cluster 2 STDEV	0.81	0.66	0.83	0.78	0.64	0.78	0.49	0.67	0.78	0.77	0.67	1.22	1.19

	Technology	Long-term	System	Innovation	Learning	Well-being	Support	Transparency	Equality	Diversity	Responsibility	Balance	Flexibility
B_prob	3	5	5	4	6	2	4	5	3	5	5	2	2
E_prob	3	3	4	3	5	2	3	5	5	5	5	5	3
F_des	5	5	3	5	5	3	5	5	5	3	5	5	3
F_prob	5	6	3	6	6	2	6	6	5	2	5	6	3
J_des	3	5	3	4	3	5	3	5	5	3	5	3	3
J_prob	3	6	2	3	3	5	3	6	6	2	5	3	2
N_prob	3	6	3	5	3	3	5	6	2	5	3	3	2
P_prob	3	3	5	3	6	2	5	5	3	5	5	3	3
Cluster 3 average	3.50	4.88	3.50	4.13	4.63	3.00	4.25	5.38	4.25	3.75	4.75	3.75	2.63
Cluster 3 STDEV	0.87	1.17	1.00	1.05	1.32	1.22	1.09	0.48	1.30	1.30	0.66	1.30	0.48

	Technology	Long-term	System	Innovation	Learning	Well-being	Support	Transparency	Equality	Diversity	Responsibility	Balance	Flexibility
D_des	5	6	5	5	3	5	5	3	5	5	5	5	5
D_prob	6	7	6	6	3	6	6	2	6	6	5	6	5
H_des	3	3	5	5	5	3	5	3	5	5	5	5	3
H_prob	3	3	5	6	6	3	5	3	6	6	6	6	3
I_des	5	3	5	5	6	3	5	3	5	3	5	3	5
I_prob	6	3	6	6	6	3	6	2	6	3	6	2	5
K_des	3	3	5	5	3	5	5	5	5	5	5	3	5
K_prob	3	3	6	5	3	6	6	6	6	6	6	3	5
L_des	5	3	5	5	3	3	3	3	5	3	3	3	3
L_prob	6	2	6	6	2	2	3	2	6	2	2	3	3
M_des	3	5	5	3	3	3	5	3	5	5	5	3	5
M_prob	3	5	6	2	2	3	5	2	4	6	6	2	5
U_des	6	5	5	5	5	5	3	5	5	5	5	3	5
U_prob	6	6	5	5	5	5	2	6	6	6	6	3	5
Cluster 4 average	4.50	4.07	5.36	4.93	3.93	3.93	4.57	3.43	5.36	4.71	5.00	3.57	4.43
Cluster 4 STDEV	1.35	1.49	0.48	1.10	1.44	1.28	1.24	1.40	0.61	1.33	1.13	1.29	0.90

## Appendix 7 Expert comments on projected employee turnover in Chinese accounting Firms by 2040

Expert	Overall	Comment
A	At the current level	Keep the status quo. There will be new employees and some will leave. Overall, it is still in a balanced state.
B	Slightly decrease	I think there may be a slight decrease, because accounting firms themselves are companies with high staff turnover, but if it becomes difficult to find a job in the future, many people may not choose to leave.
C	Slightly decrease	Employment pressure in China is increasing, causing employees to consider the difficulty of finding a job when deciding to resign.
D	Slightly decrease	If China's accounting firm industry continues to maintain rapid development in the next decade or so, the demand for employees is likely to continue to rise, which will attract more people to join the industry and thus reduce employee turnover to a certain extent.
E	At the current level	---
F	Slightly decrease	As competition in the industry intensifies, accounting firms may increase their compensation and benefits in order to attract and retain talent. If compensation and benefits are significantly improved, employee turnover may decrease.
G	Slightly decrease	In my opinion, the employee turnover rate in accounting firms will decrease slightly in 2040, mainly because the development of technology has promoted the popularity of working from home. However, due to the high-intensity work in accounting firms, the employee turnover rate will be difficult to control well.
H	Moderately increase	If the problem of talent loss within the industry continues, employee turnover may remain high.
I	Moderately decrease	Accounting firms can provide employees with more career development and promotion opportunities, and employees may be more willing to stay in the industry for a long time. Therefore, more career development and promotion opportunities may reduce employee turnover.
J	Slightly increase	Accounting firms may face more challenges and uncertainties, such as technological changes, intensified market competition, etc. These challenges may cause some employees to choose to leave the industry, thereby increasing employee turnover.
K	Slightly increase	If the corporate culture is not good, employees may seek other more attractive work environments.
L	Slightly decrease	Providing more flexibility in work hours, remote work policies, etc. may attract more employees and reduce turnover.
M	Slightly increase	If the work pressure is too high and there is a lack of flexible work arrangements, employees may choose to leave.
N	Slightly decrease	---
O	At the current level	I think the high turnover rate of Chinese accounting firms is hard to change.
P	Slightly decrease	---
Q	Slightly decrease	Considering the employment environment in China, it is more difficult for employees to find other jobs after leaving the firm, so the turnover rate may be reduced to a certain extent.
R	Moderately increase	The improvement of domestic living standards and the increase in wages in various industries will continue to reduce the cost-effectiveness of firm income, resulting in a high turnover rate.
S	Slightly increase	Although many things are impossible to achieve in the short term, it is difficult to find a job, so I think everyone will stay here.
T	Moderately decrease	---
U	Slightly increase	---