ASCENT

Executive Assessment Report



Jennifer Russell

President & Chief Executive Officer
HarvestWay Foods Group

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Executive Summary

THE CONTEXT

- Cardinal Harvest Naturals (CHN) is a 50-year-old firm that has focused on fresh and healthy ingredients based on sustainable, organic, all-natural farming, growing from a couple with a pushcart in farmers' markets to become a $5b company with operations across 40 states and 7 countries.
- However, in recent years CHN has faced a number of challenges: two major recalls in 2024 and 2025, and the CEO needing to step down for health reasons, as well as getting pressure from an activist investor to replace the CEO quickly to begin addressing a declining market reputation for innovation and quality. The CEO will need to address both internal and external challenges.



Excellent fit
to role based on job specification



THE PERSON

Jennifer Russell, President & CEO, HarvestWay Foods Group

- Jennifer is a gifted innovation leader, with deep experience in the natural and organic food sector. As CEO of HarvestWay, she has advanced their offerings and product line, and consequently she has turned a volume decline into growth momentum with a renewed portfolio of offerings.
- After receiving a BA in Economics from Stanford, Jennifer joined the natural and organic food sector, where she has been her entire career, focused initially on marketing and strategy and moving into strategic leadership, obtaining an MBA along the way. She became Chief Brand Officer at Green Meadow Organics in 2014, and then CEO of HarvestWay in 2018 to create change - which she did.
- Jennifer has repeatedly demonstrated the ability to reposition brands and create improvements both through internal integration and external partnerships while publicly leading her company.
- In general, Jennifer is very comfortable working externally with the market, partners, and the public to create a powerful image of change; her opportunity is to scale up her internal leadership to delegate more of her innovative leadership to develop her staff.
- Jennifer has not run as large an organization as CHN; she's been able to act as a visible individual and lead change directly. While very capable, she may need to shift her outlook to empower the divisions of CHN to lead change themselves. And, while excellent at brand leadership, she has not operated this level and complexity of supply chains before, so may need some support early on to master them.

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Strengths & Opportunities

STRENGTHS

Strategic Marketing
Jennifer has a strong awareness of how their brands appear on the market, and quickly conceptualizes plans for how to build business across multiple brand lines and for the company as a whole. Beyond HarvestWay itself, she has become a recognized expert on the future of consumer food brands.

Innovation
Jennifer is not only personally creative and committed to innovation, but also encourages her organization to participate in innovation and change efforts. She fully recognizes the strength of others' ideas as well as her own, and furthermore finds ways to communicate new ideas in compelling ways.

Partnership
Jennifer has repeatedly found ways to collaborate with key players, whether with key stakeholders such as investors, her team, or potential allies such as advocacy organizations.
She has maintained excellent relationships with external stakeholders and in the process built a reputation for transparency and quality in her company and herself.

OPPORTUNITIES

Increasing Managerial Scope
While Jennifer is comfortable with managing her team and organization and could manage a larger one, she is a central player in strategy, operations, and marketing; she would benefit from building a team around her that shares or even exceeds her strengths to distribute responsibilities and more rapidly scale up an organization that already starts larger than her current company.

Operational Improvement Focus
Jennifer's changes are dramatic and contribute to market impact and growth, but in recent years she has often led high-level brand and marketing shifts rather than improvements in internal processes or the details of product quality. She tends to rely on the abilities of her staff and existing operations rather than challenging them to make internal quality improvements based on her significant expertise.

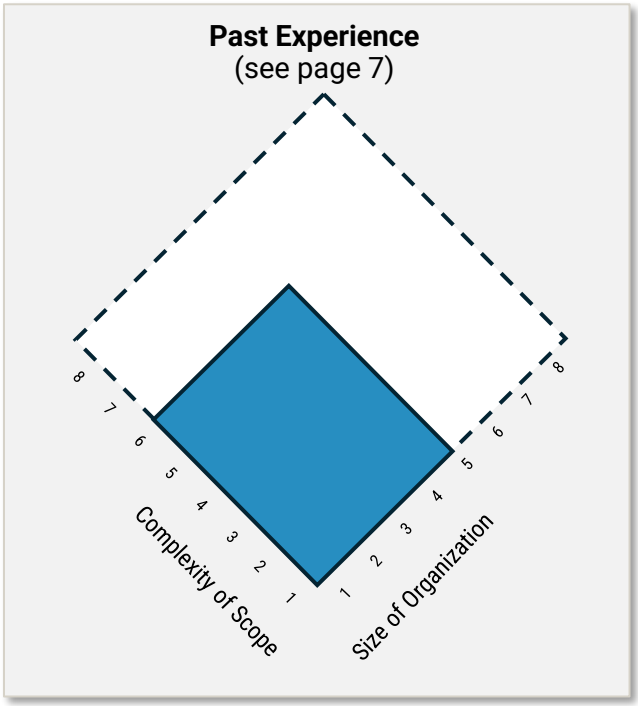
Empowering Staff
Jennifer is excellent at listening to her staff, acknowledging their contributions, and using them, but her great gifts at partnering with outside stakeholders, whether directors or vendors, suggests she might be able to partner more with her own staff and leverage their ability to lead as well.

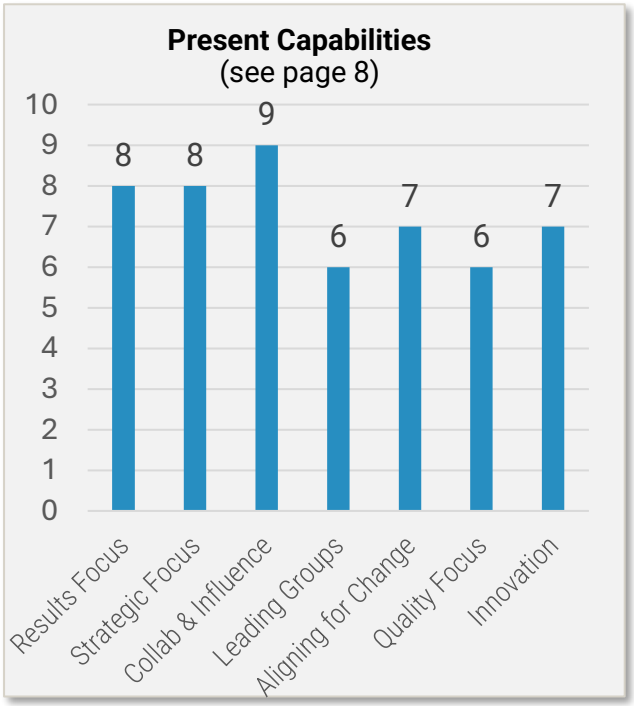
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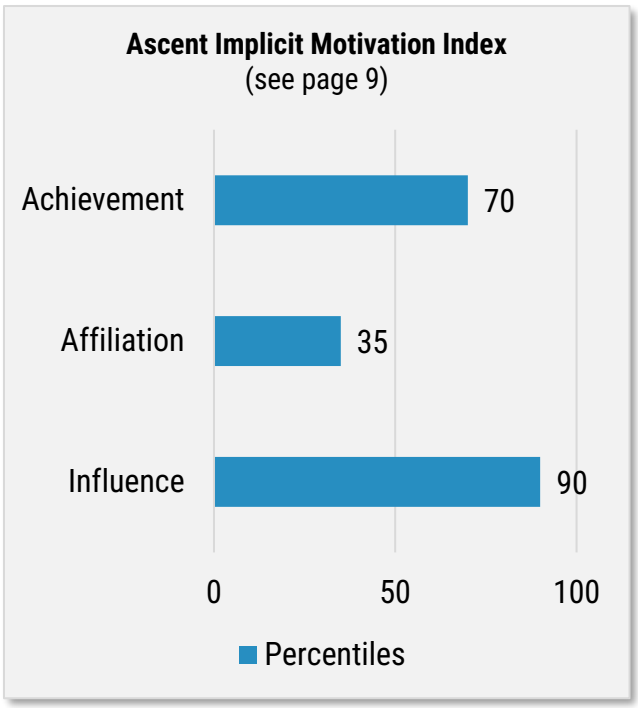
Past, Present, Motivation, Culture Fit

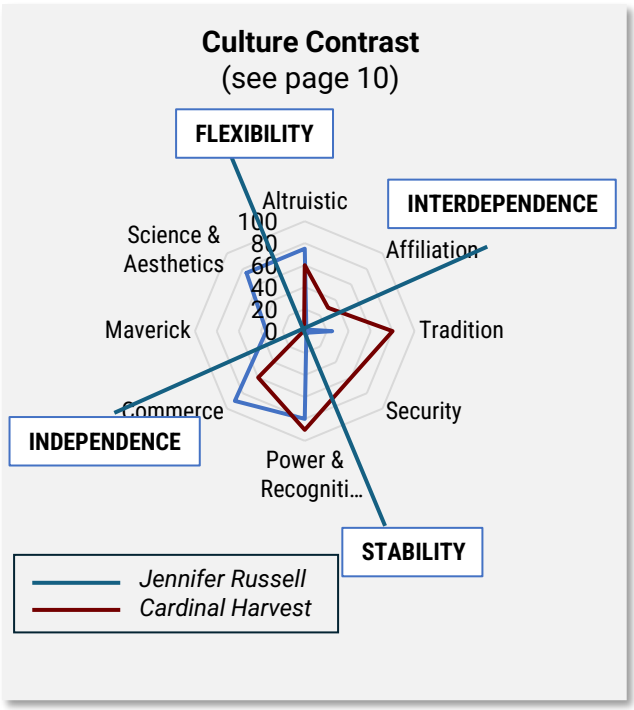
DATA SUMMARY

This page summarizes the graphs for each of the core assessment elements; each element has a page of its own going into the details of each element.









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Detailed Results

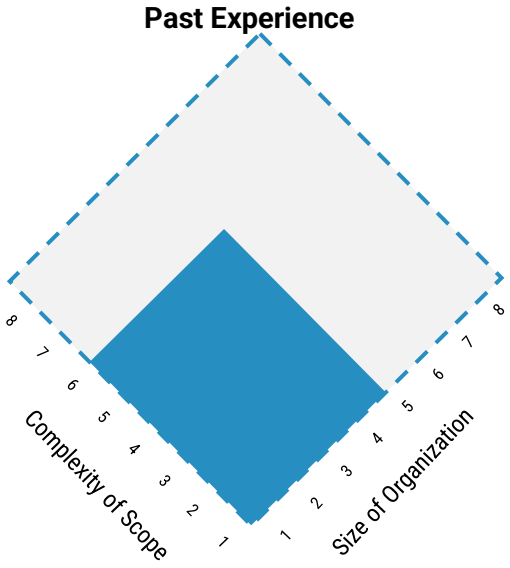
- Past Experience
- Current Capabilities
- Implicit Motivation
- Culture Contrast & Hogan’s MVPI
- Recommendations

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Candidate's Past Experience (Company Size & Scope)

SUMMARY

To date, Jennifer has managed an organization with approximately 9000 employees, as CEO.



Lvl	Size	Scope
1	<250	• Sub-function
2	250-499	• Function, e.g., head of HR, single country & business
3	500-999	• Multi-function single country/business or Regional function, e.g., regional CFO or Global Compensation
4	1,000-4,999	• Business head • Multi-country/regional multi-function • Global function, e.g., CFO
5	5,000-9,999	• Multi-business • Multi-country/regional • Global multi-function, e.g., Chief Admin
6	10,000-24,999	• Multi-country/regional multi-business, e.g. CEO Transport Group • Global Business, e.g., Group President
7	25,000-49,999	• Head of Global Multi-Business
8	50,000+	• CEO of Global Enterprise (~Fortune 250)

KEY FINDINGS

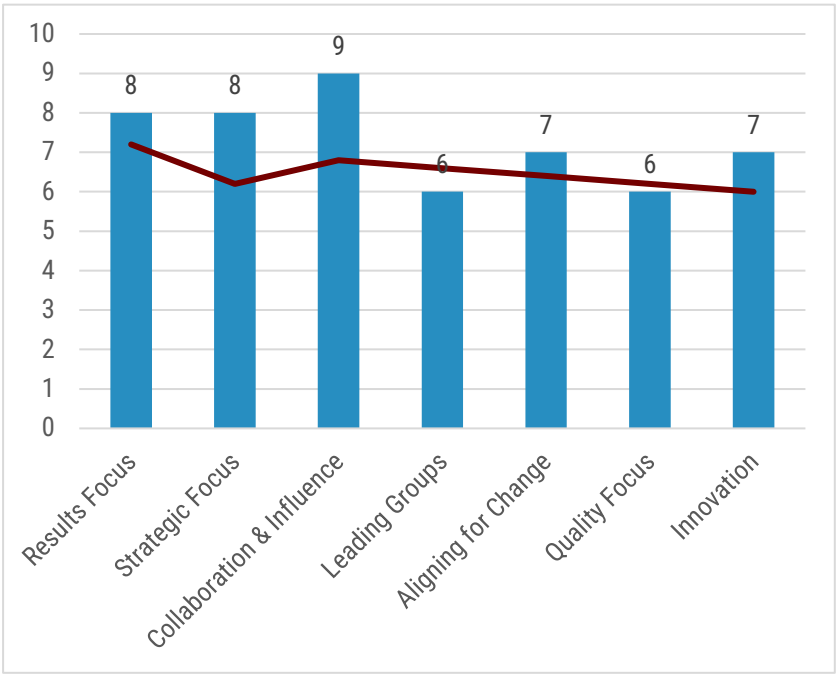
- **Size**: Jennifer is the CEO of approximately 9000 people at HarvestWay Food Group
- **Scope**: Jennifer is a top-of-house CEO of a full business, all standard functions

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Candidate's Current Capabilities

THE METRIC

Ascent's Executive Capabilities are behaviorally anchored capability scales designed for top leaders. The Core Six differentiate performance on virtually all senior leaders. Data are drawn from story-based behavioral interviewing.



Results Focus
8 [+.8 above F500 norm of 7.2]

Jennifer has repeatedly made thoughtful and calculated incremental improvements to HarvestWay Food Group

Strategic Focus
8 [+1.8 above F500 norm of 6.2]

Jennifer challenges existing strategy, defining the future of the market and the company's potential place in it, thinking 3-5 years ahead into the next business cycle

Collaboration and Influence
9 [+2.2 above F500 norm of 6.8]

Jennifer creates strong, open organizational partnerships despite traditional boundaries or barriers

Leading Groups
6 [-.6 below F500 norm of 6.6]

Jennifer invites and uses input from her team to form decisions and plans, and delegates projects with clear objectives based on their past experiences

Aligning for Change
7 [Half a Standard Deviation above F500 norm of 6.4]

Jennifer advocates for change with compelling message for people to join in. She tends to focus on new offerings and approaches rather than existing company processes.

Quality Focus
6 [~at F500 executive norm of 6.2]

Jennifer works to ensure that quality standards are set and met

Innovation
7 [+1 above F500 norm of 6]

Jennifer actively seeks out new sources or places to obtain innovative ideas; allocates resources for her team to experiment as well

BOTTOM LINE

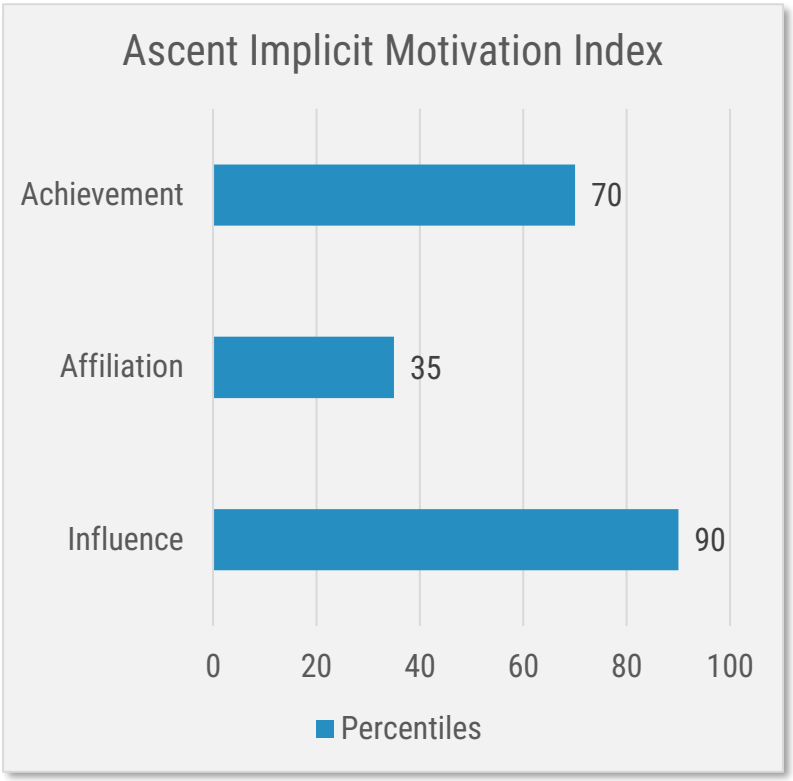
Jennifer scores at or above the level of large-scale executives for most capabilities, and significantly above the mean in terms of Collaboration & Influence, Strategic Focus, and Innovation. IOverall, she brings general management ability appropriate to larger organizations than she currently manages, and exceptional ability to strategize and partner to innovate.

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Candidate's Implicit Motivation

SUMMARY

Implicit motivation is the set of deep, nonconscious emotional drives that energize people over time. They do not indicate what people can do, but what people are motivated to do. This is measured through the Ascent Implicit Motivation tool, a specialized projective test of spontaneous expression, and key evidence components in the career and behavioral interview.



KEY FINDINGS

- Jennifer brings a profile that emphasizes making a strong impact on others for improvement.
- ***Achievement motive***: Jennifer shows a strong innovation-focused motive for improvement, looking for opportunities to find new, better ways of doing things, especially those that are unique and forward-looking.
- ***Affiliation motive***: Jennifer has low to average levels of Affiliation; her focus is more on agency than personal relationships at work. This may be one reason she tends to take and lead initiatives individually; but it also means she is unfazed by making organizational changes.
- ***Influence motive***: Jennifer has very high levels of this motive, which energizes her to make a profound impact on the company, the market, and the world at large. This would fuel her desire to make significant organizational growth and market impact.

IMPLICATIONS

Jennifer's profile (known as the Agentic profile) is found in effective change leaders and turnaround agents who must make dramatic and difficult changes to firms under pressure. Her combination of strong Achievement motive and very high Influence means she is willing to take drastic action if necessary, but with a full awareness of the impact it will make on the organization and its people, as well as the outside world so her changes are effective rather than disruptive. Her Achievement motive being tilted towards Innovation means she prefers doing something new and different than fixing the old, possibly underlined by her Influence-motivated desire for dramatic impact.

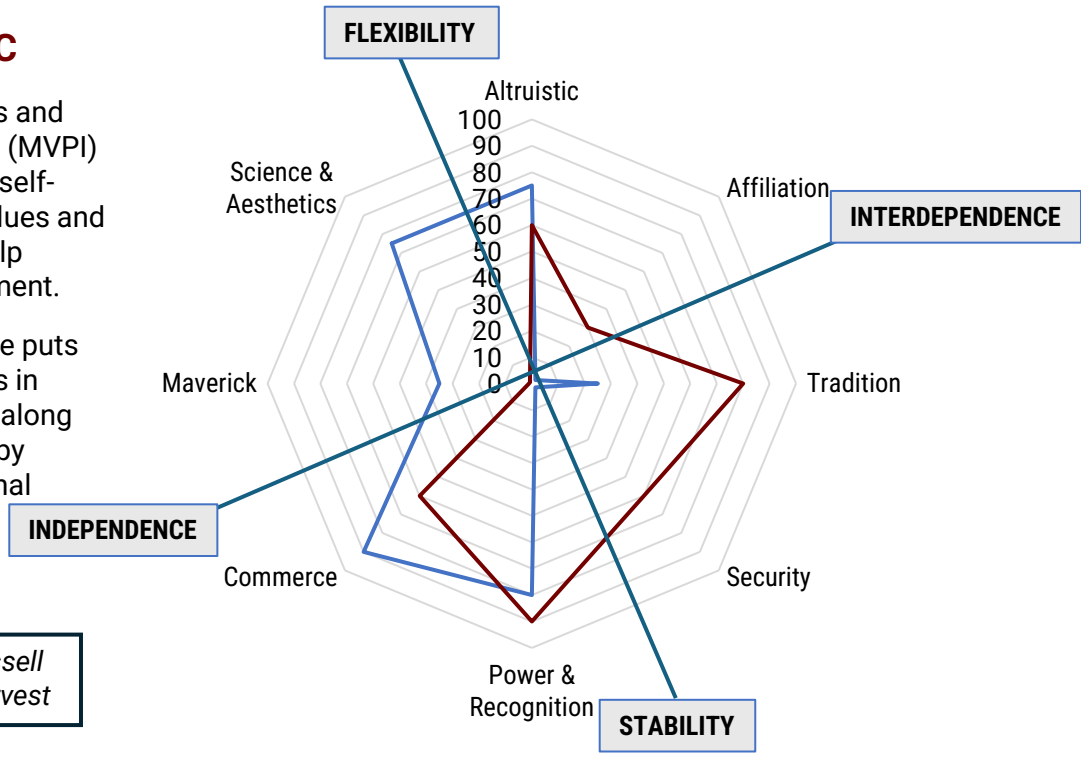
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Culture Contrast & Hogan's MVPI

THE METRIC

Hogan Motives Values and Preferences Inventory (MVPI) measures conscious, self-attributed motives, values and preferences, which help identify cultural alignment.

This specialized profile puts the Hogan dimensions in relation to each other along major axes identified by extensive organizational culture research.



KEY FINDINGS

Jennifer's profile is focused on the left-hand quadrants, or in sum delivering business results personally in ways that impact the market and benefits others. Cardinal Harvest Naturals' profile is focused more on the right quadrants, with an emphasis on being recognized as delivering an excellent product over time, in ways that benefit others.

- *Strongest alignments*:
  - Power & Recognition: both Jennifer and CHN are committed to being recognized and trusted by the general public
  - Altruistic: both Jennifer and CHN value bigger picture thinking, integrity and doing the right thing
  - Commerce: both prioritize delivering commercial results, although Jennifer shows stronger drive in this area, which may indicate her commitment to driving results despite adversity
- *Largest misalignments:*
  - Science & Aesthetics: Jennifer is much stronger in this area, indicating that her capacity to innovate may not be reflected in CHN's culture
  - Security: CHN has a stronger commitment to security, as befits the desire to deliver predictable levels of quality; Jennifer may appreciate, but does not prioritize reliability and structure
  - Tradition: CHN values quality and transparency; Jennifer may use these as tools or goals, but does not prioritize them as a value.

IMPLICATIONS

As a change leader, Jennifer's professed values appear to be at odds with CHN. While she may appreciate reliability and quality, it's not what she describes as her strongest values. CHN's professed values, as observed using a data analysis of publicly available materials, overlap but are not strongly aligned with Jennifer's, likely because of Jennifer's capacity for transformation. This suggests a manageable gap.

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Recommendations

SUPPORTING FUTURE SUCCESS

Internal People Leadership: Jennifer is very good at collaborating with outside stakeholders and leveraging her team members to come up with ideas, but in a larger firm such as CHN, she would benefit from finding ways to rely more on her internal team members to lead in her place, which could multiply her already impressive impact.

Process Improvement: Jennifer already runs a significant operation well, but her focus on innovation rather than efficiency means that she may be overlooking a tool she could be bringing to bear for improved results. Given a choice, she tends to go for the new and different, but this is not always as affordable or practical an option as making incremental internal changes. This would also be an opportunity to involve and empower her staff members, who are likely to be knowledgeable.

Shorter-term Results Focus: Jennifer has excellent Strategic Focus, which enables her to create highly effective long-term plans that will create sustainable and powerful change, but she would benefit from thinking about immediate, short-term actions within her larger plans, which may not have the same scope of impact, but which could buy her more time to implement the bigger plans.

Balancing External and Internal: Jennifer's very public face in the market adds value to the HarvestWay brand, but may also distract somewhat from internal management issues which require her direct attention. Jennifer might need to think about ways to balance her internal and external responsibilities if she moves to a new brand and a larger organization.

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Appendix

Definitions

- Leadership Capability
- Implicit Motivation
- Ascent Culture Framework

Your Assessors

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Definitions: Ascent's Executive Leadership Capabilities (Core)

Capability	Definition
Results Focus	This competency measures a person's desire to deliver results and improvement of results. It progresses from working hard through working to meet or beat a specific goal, through the introduction of improvements to create better results. At the highest levels of the scale, a person changes what the organization or even the industry can do, creating far greater results.
Strategic Focus	This competency measures how deeply a person sees into the marketplace (Market Insight), their ability to make sense of it (Making Sense), and then creating a plan to move forward (Making Plans, Strategies) over time. At higher levels, they develop a strategy that conceptualizes and incorporates complex market issues, providing a clear concept for the future that enables people to move forward.
Leading Groups	This competency is about bringing together individuals as part of a team, guiding and motivating them to act, delegating responsibility, and holding them accountable for performance. It applies to leading virtual teams, not just formal leadership positions. At the highest levels, a person will create empowered leaders to execute efficiently through the layers of the organization and across geographies.
Collaboration & Influence	This competency focuses on the ability to connect with, influence, engage, and partner with others over whom one has no direct control or authority. People working at the highest levels of this scale will create enduring partnerships across barriers. This capability incorporates collaboration, influencing, and networking.
Aligning for Change	This competency is about bringing a message of change and getting people on board with it. It is typically found only in executives who can align not just a team but an organization around a vision or direction. At highest levels, they not only act as change leader themselves, but creates a series of change leaders to support a coordinated effort
Developing People & Organizations	This competency is about the longer-term development of people and organizations. At lower ends, it is about giving feedback and coaching to individuals, then to teams; at higher levels it is about developing the talent of an organization and influencing how development is done in a business.

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Definitions: Ascent's Leadership Capabilities (Additional)

Capability	Definition
Quality Focus	This capability measures maintaining quality, accuracy or precision, having high standards and meeting them in detail. At lower levels, it is a personal focus, with a particular attention to detail and quality. At higher levels, it is a focus on others, then a focus on enabling systems and processes to produce reliably and at a standard of quality. Note: this capability requires an attention to detail that is negatively correlated with working at the level of a Fortune 500 CEO, but manageable at a mid- or smaller level of scale.
Innovation	This competency measures experimentation as a basis for innovation: taking calculated risks with a known likelihood of failure, as long as it is possible to learn from those failures, or prevent future issues. This capability can draw on people leadership that have been proven to enhance or unlock innovation, such as tapping into diverse perspectives and types of expertise. It progresses from being open and accepting of new ideas to experimenting formally and at scale. At the highest level, this scale describes a global sparking of innovation across people and organizations.

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Definitions: Implicit Motivation

Dimension	Definition
Achievement Motive (Efficiency and Innovation)	Energized by meeting and beating goals, personally improving the way things are done, doing and learning new things, doing **better.** Subtypes: • Efficiency focus: analytically reducing uncertainty, improving performance methodically and incrementally • Innovation focus: creating major conceptual improvements, "step-change" performance improvement
Affiliation Motive (Interpersonal)	Energized by getting along with people, belonging to a group, personal relationships, engaging socially, being **friendly.** Subtypes: • Trusting: Belonging, trusting others, giving without expectation of return • Anxious: Worry about damaging relationships, hurting feelings; concern for fairness in relationships • Mistrustful: Anticipates failures of relationships, assumes inconsistency in behavior and intent
Influence Motive (Impact on others)	Energized by having an impact on or influence on individuals, groups, or the world at large, having **impact.** Stages: • Personalized Power: Having an impact on others to make oneself feel strong • Socialized Influence: Having an impact on others for the good of the whole • Empowerment Drive: Power shared as power multiplied; growing the overall power of the group

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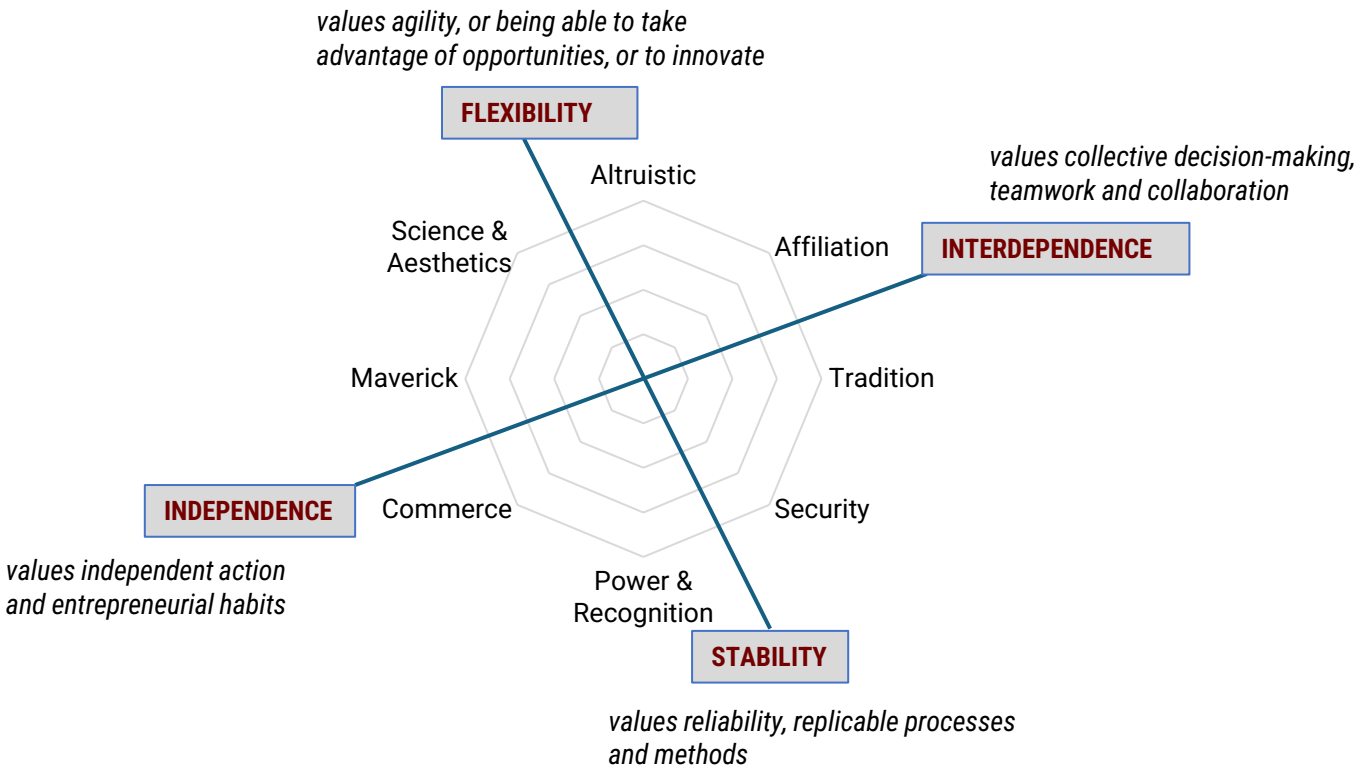
Definitions: Ascent Culture Framework (Culture Contrast)

Building on Shalom Schwartz' work on organizational culture, this analysis maps the ten Hogan MVPI scales onto a two-axis graph. Each dimension is a different expression of values, and none are inherently good or bad, nor do they preclude an organization from developing in other dimensions.

The Axes:

Independence/Interdependence: focused on ***individual focus*** (freedom of action, individual preference) vs ***collective focus*** (collective action, cooperation)

Flexibility/Stability: focused on ***adaptation/openness*** (able to do whatever works, to adapt and change) vs ***prevention/protection*** (reliability, predictability of delivering on goals, reduction of risk)



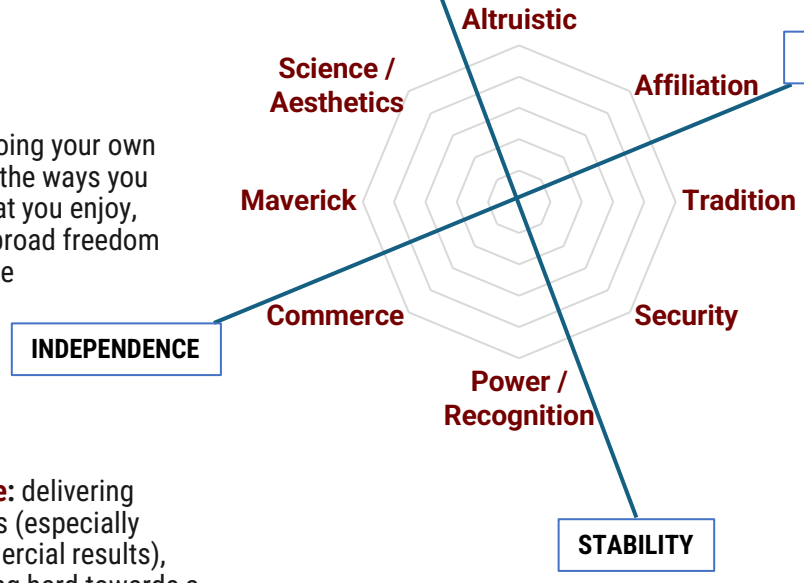
Ascent Culture Framework: Specific Values

In combining MVPI dimensions along the Schwartz model, some of the definitions of the MVPI may appear to shift, as the model emphasizes subtly different aspects of each personality dimension.

Altruism: thinking about the big picture, doing the right thing, helping the less fortunate and society

Science/Aesthetics: valuing independent experimentation, creative self-expression, exploration and learning

Affiliation: concerned with social interaction and inclusion, thinking about others, helping



Maverick: doing your own thing in the ways you like, what you enjoy, having broad freedom of choice

Tradition: working collectively in more predictable ways, valuing quality, alignment

Commerce: delivering results (especially commercial results), working hard towards a goal, being pragmatic, capable and driven

Security: valuing structure and predictability, avoiding risk through planning

Power/Recognition: being seen by others as personally successful, values their reputation, position and ability to be influential