

# Level-up your learning: Increasing the maturity of your organization's learning culture

It's no secret that many organizations across the globe are facing a skills gap that presents both short- and long-term challenges. According to our [“Accelerating Talent for Tomorrow”](#) report, CHROs and talent heads from leading organizations globally identified transforming and upskilling existing talent as one of the key game changers for creating future-ready organizations. CEOs also echo this as a priority, in line with [PWC's 2023 global CEO survey](#), in which over half (52%) of CEOs cited skill shortages as an issue that is most likely to impact their industry's profitability over the next 10 years.

As business needs continue to shift with the accelerated pace of change, leaders are right to be concerned about having workers with the necessary skills and capabilities for the future, especially when talent is becoming increasingly difficult to attain and retain. To remain competitive, companies must innovate and grow at the same accelerated pace, ensuring they have a constant influx of talent with the skills, knowledge and capabilities to drive and sustain such growth. This requires an organization not only to facilitate individual and team learning, but to embed day-to-day learning into the overall organizational culture – in short, they must develop a learning culture.

Organizations that prioritize learning in their culture can expect to reap many benefits, including increases in employee engagement, collaboration and knowledge sharing. Additionally, having a learning culture in place strengthens talent development and increases business longevity by fostering innovation. Lastly, [a study from Josh Bersin Research \(2022\)](#) has shown that learning-focused organizations are 2.6X more likely to outperform financial goals and 20X more likely to successfully develop the skills their employees need. But what does building a learning culture really look like, how can organizations determine where they are on the journey, and more importantly, where they want to be?



## Enrich your culture with a learning focus that is right for your organization

Constant technological innovation provides organizations with many options when it comes to creating different learning experiences for their employees. But strengthening the focus on learning isn't just about ensuring you have the latest learning applications and resources available to your teams. It's about creating positive, differentiated experiences that prioritize and enable continuous learning and growth – and that are aligned to your business strategy.

*When developing a learning culture, it's important to consider the three levers that are critical for propelling your forward in this journey: Leadership, employee experience, and process – all of which are discussed in detail in our recent [“Learning Culture to Go”](#) article.*



Organizations must determine what level of learning maturity makes sense for their strategic priorities and understand where they currently stand in their learning journey, where they ideally want to be and what is required to close the gap.

There are five stages of maturity, ranging from reactive to anticipating:

Reactive	Responsive	Creative	Proactive	Anticipating
<p>Learning is entirely company-driven and assigned to employees on a mandatory basis. There is no explicit learning strategy in place.</p>	<p>Employees participate in training only when there is a clear positive impact on the job they are doing and how they perform. There is a learning strategy to some extent (partially developed), but it is not executed.</p>	<p>Learning is still mostly company-driven, but employees are starting to show interest in driving their own learning based on their interests, preferences and style. There is a clear, consistent and executed learning strategy, but it is not fully connected to the business and People &amp; Organization Development (POD)/HR strategy.</p>	<p>Most employees own and are willing to invest time in their individual learning based on their interests, preferences and style, but there are still learning activities managed by the company and POD/HR. There is a clear, consistent and executed learning strategy that is fully connected to the business and POD/HR strategy.</p>	<p>All employees own their individual learning (self-driven). They use the resources offered by the company to support their goals, in addition to their own resources and tools for development. Learning strategy is fully connected to the business and POD/HR strategy, and is owned and driven not only by POD/HR but also by leadership at all levels.</p>

## Key elements for assessing the maturity of your learning culture

As with any transformation, the journey begins with an initial discovery process to better understand and anchor the need for the learning culture. Organizations must understand to what extent learning is embedded in the current culture as well as how people leverage learning in their day-to-day work.

### 1. Vision & strategy

For a learning culture to succeed, continuous learning must be embedded in the DNA of the organization, starting with a clearly articulated north star. It's important to determine what level/style of training and development is needed to support your business goals and organizational context. With this step completed, you can create a culture that not only drives performance, innovation and engagement, but also aligns to your business strategy.

### 2. Motivation & behaviors reinforcement

To make a culture with a focus on learning stick, the desired behaviors should be reinforced, and employees should be motivated and encouraged. Organizations may provide a wide array of learning and development opportunities for their employees, but their efforts will only go so far if employees are not adopting the right learning mindset and behaviors. Leadership plays a critical role by actively supporting and driving the new culture; motivation and willingness to learn, interest in learning, and inventiveness – at both the individual and organizational level – are key factors that contribute to its success. How are development milestones

acknowledged or celebrated? Are employees provided with any kind of incentive to learn? If not, what incentives can be put in place to motivate employees to integrate learning into their day-to-day work?

### 3. Learning personas

Organizations must also assess the extent to which their learning interventions are tailored for different talent segments. Since a learning culture should be multifaceted, a one-size-fits-all approach will not work across an organization with a broad spectrum of learning and development needs. Different personas will respond to different types of motivations, as they may have different learning interests and styles. A more mature approach considers the different needs and motivations of the various audiences (e.g., strategic vs. executional focus) and prioritizes the groups or segments that will deliver the biggest business impact.

### 4. Content & learning modes

Organizations today need to make learning more accessible and prioritize certain learning interventions over others. Creating content that is relevant and personalized can help better engage your audience and make development more enjoyable for your employees. In many cases, online learning is likely to be more accessible to employees, as it allows them to continue developing at their own pace and in their own environment. Because self-directed learning is highly dependent on the self-discipline and perseverance of the individual, it is essential to emphasize the importance of learning from the top of the organization and to implement a holistic focus on learning throughout the organization.

## 5. Open environment

The organizational environment is a reflection of the existence (or not) of a culture with a focus on learning, in which supporting others, building trust and providing psychological safety are key behaviors. An environment that supports learning will also have an impact on the employee experience, since employees will find not only opportunities to learn and develop themselves, but also note that learning is integrated into the flow of everyday work and is reflected in the patterns of collaboration and communication, as well as how performance is measured within an organization.

### Two allies for a successful learning culture

Both the systems and processes in place within an organization and the leadership style of its leaders can have an impact on the organizational learning culture and how it is experienced by employees. When leveraged correctly, they can enable the creation of the targeted learning culture and help shape the expected mindset and behaviors within the organization.

- **Systems and processes:** A culture oriented to learning should be embedded into the main HR processes (for example, Recruiting and Performance Management) and supported by respective technology and tools. It's important to assess the extent to which existing processes already reflect this as well as any gaps that may exist.
- **Leadership:** Leadership is a key enabler as well as an indispensable element of a culture with a focus on learning. Strong and inspiring learning cultures

require committed and encouraging leaders to support them by making learning part of the organization's mission and business strategy. Without leaders promoting active learning, a successful organizational learning culture won't be sustainable. Senior leaders should role model a culture oriented to learning and empower their teams to learn and develop. This means demonstrating and encouraging behaviors with consistency through the learning transformation and beyond – from fostering creativity and experimentation to celebrating successes and nurturing and developing ideas. How are learning and development currently supported and publicly championed by the top leadership team? Without alignment and a clear definition of key priorities and specific behaviors, the transformation to a learning culture will be unsuccessful.



Since creating a culture with a focus on learning is a big (and complex) initiative for any organization, it is important to treat it as an ongoing journey that requires the right tools, support and environment to make learning continuous. Of course, challenges will arise, but they won't stop an organization with a clear goal of creating a culture of learning.

While becoming a learning organization won't happen overnight, identifying the characteristics of your target learning culture is an essential first step. Next, observe and understand the maturity level of your current learning culture. Once you have clarity around where you are on the journey, you can then identify the gap between where you are and where you want to go and create a roadmap to help you get there. Once the goal is set, it is up to your leaders and employees to grow, learn and ultimately live the change to create a successful organizational learning culture. Finally, keep in mind that embedding learning into an organizational culture is both a business strategy and a competitive advantage. Companies that make continuous learning a priority and integrate it throughout the employee experience are more likely to be successful in a world of constant change.



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