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Building A Learning Culture

“The single biggest driver of business impact is the strength of an organization’s learning culture,” says Josh Bersin, principal and founder of [Bersin by Deloitte](#).

This statement summarizes the results of extensive research done by [Bersin](#) on cultural practices, processes and strategies in hundreds of organizations. They found that **companies who effectively nurture their workforce’s desire to learn are at least 30% more likely to be market leaders in their industries over an extended period of time.**



The role of culture in maintaining a competitive advantage is well-documented, but the concept of culture frequently takes on a sort of “touchy feely” character with little hard evidence to flesh out the idea. [Research from SHRM](#) found that only 10% of organizations have managed to create a learning culture, with just 20% of employees demonstrating effective learning behaviors at work.

Changing an organization’s culture can be like trying to move a mountain, but it can be done. As Bersin aptly points out, “...**culture is**

a real and changeable part of any organization. It can be monitored, measured, and adjusted.”

The first step to adjusting culture is recognizing what it is and how it is influencing an organization. To understand your organization’s culture, [Bersin suggests the following](#):

- **Culture is like the air – it is all around us yet very hard to see.** It is a real thing – you can see actual evidence of culture in almost every process, decision, and interaction in your company.
- **Culture is hard, not soft.** It is not a “touchy feely” thing – but rather an important set of behaviors and processes which impact your organization’s success. What do your leaders do when something fails, for example? How do they treat the people who deliver bad news? How well are decisions delegated to owners of a problem? These are critical questions which deal with culture – and their answers often mean success or failure for many business initiatives.

- **Culture is created by, reinforced by, and often destroyed by leaders.** To change culture, you must work with leaders at all levels – and often help them question what they do and how they work.
- **A learning culture is very business-relevant and not at all academic.** Companies like Toyota, Microsoft, and IBM use a learning culture to identify problems and quickly fix them. Cisco, Google and Apple “out-innovate” their competitors with a strong learning culture. Learning cultures exist wherever companies are growing at rates 10-100X their competitors, and they are lacking in the hundreds of other defunct companies that failed to embrace changes in their markets and subsequently change their culture. The data show very clearly that culture means life or death for many organizations.

The good news is that culture can be transformed and organizations can take very specific steps to create a culture that embraces learning and growing together. Why are we sharing this? Because it's Executive Forum's sweet spot – growing leaders who have the skills to support a learning culture. We're here to help. [Contact us](#) to talk about building your own learning culture.

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