

Fostering Organizational **Culture Change** with Microlearning

The secret to why cultural change is so hard, and why starting with a learning culture based on microlearning is the answer.



Executive Summary

- Productivity, the ability to attract top talent, employee engagement, customer satisfaction, and positive brand reputation are all outcomes of a good company culture — that is, the combination of values, ethics, attitudes, and behaviors shared by the workforce.
- Cultural change is necessary for most organizations ... but equally hard to implement, for a number of well-known reasons: bias, a lack of role models, resistance to change, and lack of commitment.
- These barriers to cultural change tend to evaporate when there is a positive learning culture that supports and fosters a growth mindset in employees.
- Microlearning is an important tool for getting a positive learning culture off the ground. Its approach is grounded in digestible, accessible, ongoing learning that engages even the hard-to-reach and reluctant learner.

Introduction

What makes a company successful? Profit, of course, is one obvious factor. But so are productivity, the ability to attract top talent, employee engagement, customer satisfaction, and brand reputation. All of these are byproducts of a strong company culture.

Company culture is a combination of values, ethics, attitudes, and behaviors shared by the workforce. It is illustrated in how the employees and management interact with one another, and how the company and its staff are perceived by the public.

Good company cultures are rare — partly because they are hard to maintain, and partly because they often need to change in order to meet the current moment. Changing a culture and moving it in a positive direction is difficult, to put it bluntly.

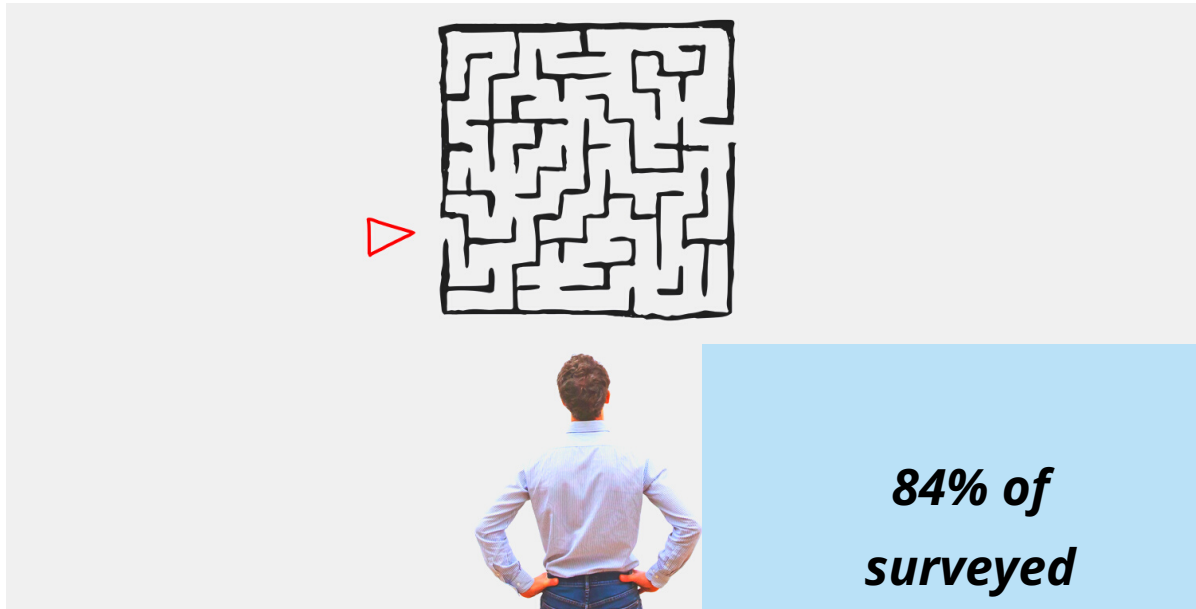
We believe there is ample evidence that changing an organization's culture means tackling those things that make cultural change such a challenge — things like bias, a lack of role models, resistance to change, and lack of commitment. All of these tend to evaporate when employees have access to good training and development, supported by a positive learning culture that fosters a growth mindset.

There is a lot to unpack in that thesis. The intention of this eBook is to do just that — and along the way, to give Learning and Development (L&D) professionals and other HR leaders the arguments they need to get buy-in for their programs, especially when it comes to *microlearning*.



Culture Change in Organizations:

Why is it necessary, and why is it so hard?



How do you know if your culture is strong, or if it needs reshaping? And if cultural change is necessary, how do you go about it? Luckily, the skills needed to support a good company culture can be learned.

Why Company Culture? Why Now?

While the need for a strong company culture is not a new concept, it is more important today than ever before. According to a 2022 article in the [Journal of Financial Economics](#), 92% of executives surveyed believed that improving corporate culture would increase firm value. And 84% believed that the culture in their own company needed improvement! Why is this such a high number? Work environments have been undergoing a transformation recently. Things are changing rapidly on five fronts.

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5 Ways Work Environments Are Rapidly Changing



#1 New market conditions and customer expectations

Companies must constantly push the boundaries of productivity to keep up with their competitors. Success or failure can depend on the ability to make more products or provide better services, often with limited resources. This puts an emphasis on teaching teamwork and effective goal-setting as part of the company culture. The trick is to avoid burnout and maintain employee engagement and satisfaction while also keeping a fast pace.



#2 Disruptive technologies and innovation

Company culture needs to change with the introduction of new technology. For decades there has been a shift occurring in the work demanded of employees, a shift away from physical and manual skills to more technological skills. Automation and AI are speeding up this shift exponentially. [Research by McKinsey Global Institute](#) estimates that time spent by workers using advanced tech skills will increase by 50% by 2030.

The same study anticipates more value placed on higher cognitive skills like creativity, critical thinking, and decision-making too, with growth in that area of 19% by 2030. Learning and Development (L&D) programs that emphasize these skills are essential.



#3: Culture clashes due to acquisitions and mergers

Several industries are undergoing company consolidation through mergers and acquisitions. This presents the challenge of melding two cultures that are often quite different into one seamless one. It's not surprising that the resulting push and pull between management styles and company norms can create conflict and disengagement.

There are countless examples of such "culture clashes" leading to a failed merger: HP and Compaq, Amazon and Whole Foods, Google and Nest, Daimler and Chrysler. In fact, a review article in *Financier Worldwide* estimates, based on current studies, that between 50% and 75% of all post-merger integrations fail to meet their objectives because of cultural clashes.

Thus, any new leadership team needs to recognize the complicated nature of the situation, decide on what the combined culture should be, and create a plan to implement the steps to make that culture happen.



#4: A focus on a more diverse and inclusive talent pool

In order to appeal to high-quality talent, and to the broader public, companies must be on board with a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Empathy, allyship, [belonging](#) — these have become much more than buzzwords in the workplace. They must be embedded into the company culture. There must also be an understanding of why some will balk at efforts toward a more inclusive culture, and how to address and overcome resistance.



#5: New ways of working in a post-pandemic world

Some remnants of COVID lockdowns are here to stay. Remote and hybrid work continue to be effective for many, and some businesses have no need or desire to bring people back to the office full-time. But it can be difficult to build and maintain a healthy company culture under these circumstances.

Leaders must find new and different strategies. They need to keep people motivated and engaged while also maintaining productivity and accountability.

Signs That a Culture Change Is Needed

It's sometimes easy for leaders to accept the status quo — or even a slight decline in business — rather than accept the fact that something is wrong with the company culture. But as mentioned above, 84% of executives know things need to change.

Several elements act as red flags that a cultural change is necessary:



You're missing benchmarks

Every company has ways of measuring performance. Certain metrics can uncover a struggling company culture. Key performance indicators (KPIs) such as productivity, sales, profits, and new client acquisition may be stalled or steadily falling.



You can't attract or retain good talent

High turnover and having candidates turn down job offers could mean that competing companies are paying more — or that they're offering a more favorable company culture. The problem requires some digging into [what's really sending people elsewhere](#).



Employees seem disengaged

When employees lose their enthusiasm for their work, it is often an issue of company culture. Are you making them feel valued as an integral part of the team? Is it [psychologically safe](#) for them to voice their opinions and give honest feedback? Are they recognized for their accomplishments? Do they have opportunities to learn new skills and advance? All of these are part of company culture.



There's conflict and a lack of teamwork

If teams don't communicate, or when they do there is friction and conflict, the company culture could be to blame. Addressing disagreements and resolving conflict are skills that can be taught. That type of training is important for every company.



Innovation is at a standstill

A subpar company culture can snuff out the flame that ignites [creativity and innovation](#). The other red flags all feed into this. Not being able to hire the best talent, employees who are not engaged, and interpersonal turmoil can stand in the way of problem-solving and the sharing of new ideas. Teams will remain stuck, missing opportunities to move the business forward.

Why Is It so Hard to Change Corporate Culture?

Anyone who has ever tried to change their own habits can relate to the difficulty of changing a company's culture. It takes self-awareness on the part of leaders to first admit that change is necessary. Then, it is a matter of setting goals and finding the tools to implement new practices.

None of this is easy, but it can be done and is well worth the effort. One of the steps in tackling the task is to recognize the things that make it so hard.



Unconscious Bias

Every workplace needs to deal with bias, whether it is out in the open or not. It is a very human behavior to make judgments and assumptions about others. Understanding [unconscious bias](#) and learning how to deal with it is essential if the culture is going to change.

No Alternative Models for Behavior

People learn by example. So training leadership is just as important as training the rest of the employees. When managers' and supervisors' actions fit the framework of the cultural ideal that is being created, it is much easier for employees to follow suit.

Why Is It so Hard to Change Corporate Culture?

Resistance to Change

“But we’ve always done it this way” could be the slogan for company cultures in need of change. Sticking to cultural norms, when those norms no longer serve the individual or the company, is a mistake. But people naturally fear change. A well-thought-out learning program will help ease them into what is certain to be a better way of doing things.



Lack of Commitment

Wanting change is not enough on its own. Companies need to be ready to devote the time and resources to make it happen. And when it becomes challenging — and it probably will — leaders need to resist the temptation to give up. Roadblocks might signal the need for a new approach, but they are rarely a sign that you shouldn’t change the culture after all.

One of the most impactful ways to change a culture is by making learning and development part of the culture. An employee education program can address the issues that are holding back teams, and change the culture for the better.

Microlearning: Making L&D Part of the Culture to **Change** the Culture

One of the biggest takeaways from part one of this white paper is that cultural change is difficult, for a number of reasons. Unconscious bias, lack of role models, resistance to change, and lack of commitment all can hamper attempts to change organizational culture for the better.

One of the crucial elements for overcoming such obstacles is a *growth mindset*. A growth mindset is simply the belief that one's abilities can be developed through learning and practice. While talent might be a starting point, people with a growth mindset understand that those talents will need to be developed. Thus, they tend to have a love of learning, an eagerness to practice new skills, and a good dose of resilience.

Having employees with a growth mindset goes hand in hand with cultural change. On the one hand, employees with a growth mindset will be better equipped for healthy cultural change. On the other hand, employees will tend to have a growth mindset when leaders work to instill a positive learning culture upfront. Thus, learning cultures and growth mindsets mutually reinforce each other.



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What Is a Learning Culture, and Why Is It Important to Have One?

A learning culture is an environment that not only allows individuals at all levels of the organization to gain knowledge; it also encourages and facilitates continual learning. Companies with a learning culture provide opportunities to develop skills and reward employees for applying what they've learned to achieve goals. In turn, employees feel valued at work, are more productive, remain loyal to their employer, and are more likely to stick around for the long haul. Employees in a learning culture are able to:

Develop valuable skills. A learning culture prioritizes ongoing skill development, allowing employees to consistently acquire new knowledge and expertise. This keeps the workforce on top of industry trends, best practices, and emerging technologies.

Adapt to change and solve problems. By learning to embrace change and understand new processes, employees are able to navigate uncertainty with confidence. And when they're comfortable experimenting with different approaches, they can more easily solve conflicts.

Collaborate. When learning opportunities are available across the company, employees are likely to share insights and expertise among teammates. This accelerates problem-solving among coworkers.

Be more productive. Continuous development means employees are always gaining new knowledge, which enhances efficiency — ultimately benefiting company success.

At the same time, a learning culture helps employers:

Retain valuable employees. When employees are given opportunities to learn, they see that employers think they are worth the investment. And when they feel supported and valued, they are less likely to leave.

Attract new talent. Potential employees seeking opportunities are drawn to organizations that foster a learning culture. This helps attract high-performing candidates eager for professional growth.

Future-proof the business. As employees learn, adapt, and embrace industry trends and technologies, they become better prepared to address the needs of customers.

Employees Recognize Their Skills Gap

The mutually reinforcing relationship between learning culture and growth mindset might sound like a “chicken and egg” situation — a growth mindset requires the right culture, but the right culture requires a growth mindset. How can a Learning and Development professional get traction?

The reality is that many, if not most, employees already understand where they have room to improve their skills and are eager to learn. In other words, many employees already have a good growth mindset — they are simply waiting for management to meet their needs in this area.

According to a [recent report by Harvard Business Publishing](#), 54% of workers will need upskilling or reskilling by 2025. But while 85% of employees surveyed said they know where they have skills gaps, only 41% believed their managers understood their gaps. And a [Gartner survey revealed](#) that only 20% of workers are confident they have the skills needed for their current role and a future in their career.

With so much research proving that employees don’t feel knowledgeable enough in their current positions, it’s obvious that organizations must make learning a priority. So why aren’t corporate programs stepping up to meet these needs?



The reasons are doubtless unique for each organization, but the general trends are easy to recognize: The fast pace of change in the business world. Employees who often work remotely. Time constraints that make group training sessions impossible to schedule and organize. Complex schedules that are not easily put on pause for extended training.

So how can Learning and Development professionals help foster a learning culture, where knowledge is accessible to everyone, under these kinds of conditions? The answer may lie in *microlearning*.

What is Microlearning?

In the context of employee learning and development, **microlearning** is an approach that emphasizes “bite-sized” content delivered in a variety of formats. The main idea behind microlearning is to break down learning episodes into smaller, more digestible pieces so that they are easier to understand and remember. This short, self-contained format allows employees to learn a single lesson or skill when and wherever it's convenient for them, and is proven to be easier to absorb than traditional lengthy training sessions.

In fact, several studies have found that:

22%

Employees retain information as much as **22%** more when microlearning formats are used.

11

The average employee is interrupted or distracted by something in their workplace **11** times per day.

25

It can take employees as much as **25** minutes to get back on track after being interrupted by long-form training.

Microlearning allows people to consume and internalize a ten-minute learning experience without workplace distraction, which is much more doable than absorbing what is taught in an hour-long seminar.



How Microlearning Helps Build a Positive Company Culture

Microlearning comes with advantages that benefit both employees and their leaders.

By investing in employees, they feel appreciated.

A [LinkedIn Workplace Learning Report](#) found that 94% of employees would stay at a company longer if it invested in their career — yet the number one reason those employees felt held back from learning was because they didn't have enough time. Executives and managers in the survey agreed that getting employees to make time for learning was the biggest challenge for talent development.

When employers offer microlearning opportunities, it shows they care about their employees' future. Bite-sized information is easy to fit into a busy day, and it's filled with quality content that can improve skills and knowledge. The scalable nature of microlearning also allows all employees to access learning opportunities, as opposed to a small pool being selected to attend a training or conference. Knowing upper management cares about their career growth makes everyone in the organization feel important.

By investing in development, companies spark innovation and growth.

"Innovation" is a high priority for many large organizations, but fostering innovation takes a workforce with the right skills. Creativity, effective communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking are all soft skills that can be learned, and they are all essential to creating a more innovative organization.

On top of that, the organization needs to make clear that innovation is valued. This includes [promoting psychological safety in teams](#) so that employees feel comfortable voicing new ideas as well as working toward inclusion so that different viewpoints can be heard and considered.

Employees learn at their own pace, as needed.

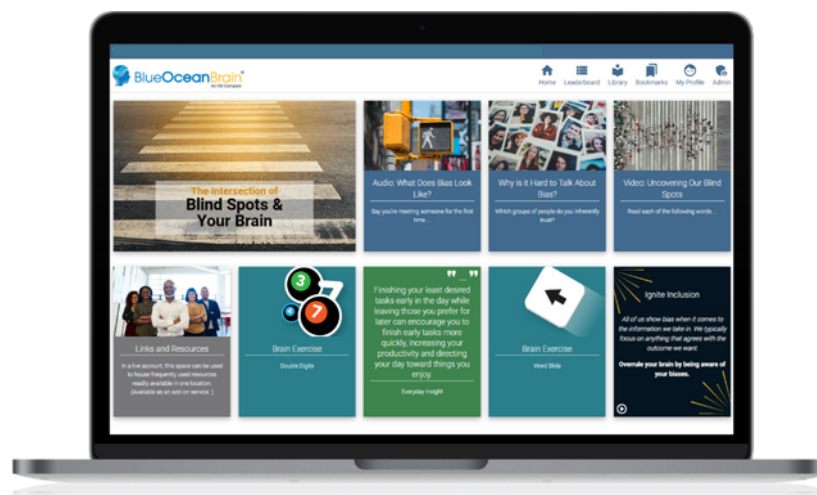
This goes back to research that proves employees don't feel they have time to learn at work. Not only do learning opportunities need to be short, but they also need to be flexible and allow workers to learn at their own pace. Everyone processes learning differently, and microlearning allows these differences to be supported more effectively than traditional training.

When done right, microlearning can help foster communication and teamwork.

Microlearning is a great way for employees to brush up on communication and teamwork skills. It also empowers team members to gain more knowledge on specific topics and subsequently bring that knowledge to the group. Leaders can assign short lessons as they see the need, making them starting points for further discussion — which is also a great way for remote workers to feel like a part of the team.

Once employees are used to "upskilling," it is easy to add important cultural topics.

In addition to professional development, microlearning is an excellent tool for increasing awareness regarding mental health, feedback, and other “cultural” topics. In fact, it can be an incredibly useful tool when tackling diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Having everyone in the organization take short lessons on their own time can maximize engagement and retention rates in a way that day-long training sessions can't and allows employers to roll out DEI training consistently over time, keeping DEI as a common thread throughout the culture.



Other Benefits of Microlearning

In addition to offering valuable, modernized learning opportunities to employees, microlearning has other advantages that benefit organizations.

It Can Make Onboarding Easier

Microlearning can assist HR teams by allowing them to provide new hires with short, guided lessons about key topics important to the success of the company and the role. This can help ease the large information load that comes with starting a new job and get employees started on the right foot.

It Can Minimize Burnout

Adding an element of entertainment to the workday is a great way to keep employees engaged. For example, Blue Ocean Brain offers short brain exercises that can boost mental health and offer a break during a busy day. Companies can even provide prizes to employees who answer the most questions correctly or are the most active with the microlearning, creating a fun competition and making learning feel rewarding.

It Can Save on Company Expenses

Instead of springing for airline tickets, hotel rooms, and conference fees, companies can minimize spending by offering microlearning. With the money they save, they can invest even more in employee development.



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Getting Started With Microlearning for Culture Change

Of course, microlearning is not the only tool needed for cultural change, but it can be an easy one. Our main claim here has been that cultural change has to start somewhere, and building an effective learning culture, starting with microlearning, can be an effective first step.

Building a development program around microlearning is not difficult or complicated, but it does require making some important decisions and getting buy-in from key stakeholders. This is the [main reason why companies find it easier and more effective to bring on a partner](#), like Blue Ocean Brain, to help implement their microlearning initiatives.

The first stage, of course, is simply learning more about what such a program would look like, and seeing if your organization and ours are a good fit. To do that, we recommend [scheduling a consultation](#) with our learning experts, who will listen to your goals and needs and make an objective recommendation for improving your learning culture.

Learn more about how microlearning can help you achieve culture transformation.
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