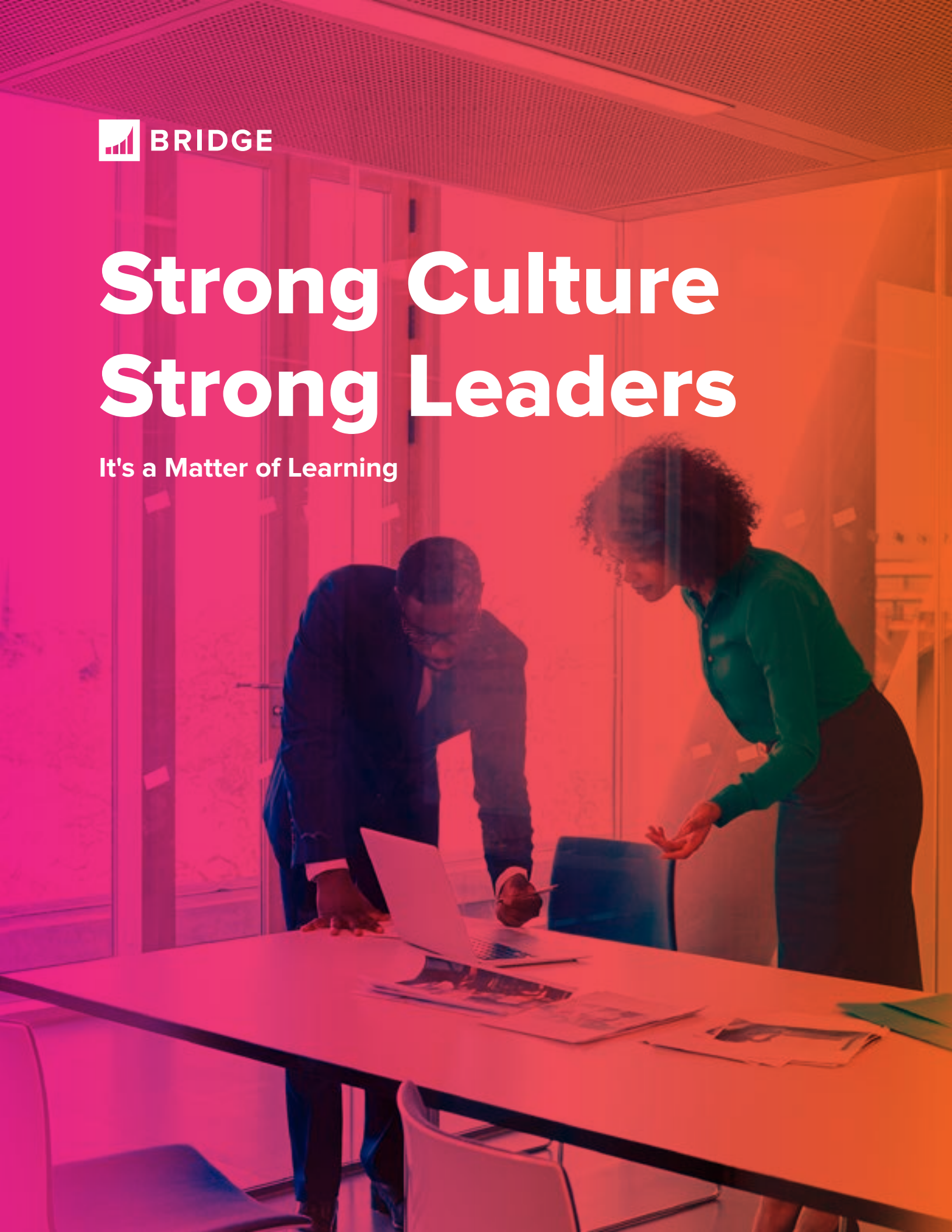# Strong Culture Strong Leaders

It's a Matter of Learning

About This E-Book

WHAT?

An informative overview of how company culture and values relate to loyalty, employee engagement, leadership skills, and professional development. Our research explored workplace cultures that do and do not focus on learning. Our analysis focused on the relationships, trends, and group differences stemming from cultures of learning and value for good leadership. We included only the most significant findings in this e-book.

WHY?

We found in past research that although most employees expressed satisfaction with their company's training and development, significant differences surfaced when it came to employees' opinions on whether or not their company valued learning.[1] We now understand that company culture is a factor in attracting top talent but we wanted to find out what kind of culture works best and which values have the greatest impact.

WHO IS IT FOR?

HR managers, learning and development (L&D) professionals, training managers, and others who want to have an impact on their organisations. Understanding the importance of a culture of learning is important for everyone from partners and employees to customers and users.

WHO IS IT FROM?

The makers of Bridge, a modern learning platform for businesses. Bridge was built on the idea that employees who are trained properly and given support will drive company-wide success. It helps ensure that employees understand company goals, have access to resources, and can master best practices, whether they're handling customers or operating forklifts.

Visit our website at **www.getbridge.com**

Table of Contents

Learning Is Culture

The values and beliefs held by a company and its people contribute to that organisation's culture and unique environment.[2] Company culture predates any employee's hire date.[3] You can sense it when you walk in the door.[4]

Good company culture benefits both the company and its employees. Case in point, research by Glassdoor.com showed that companies named in their "Best Places to Work" outperformed the S&P 500 Index five years in a row.[5] But good company culture doesn't mean free meals and a generous benefits package; it means having a strong culture of learning.

WE ASKED EMPLOYEES: WHAT'S YOUR COMPANY CULTURE LIKE?

In 2016, we surveyed more than 2,000 people at companies across the United States to find out if companies with cultures focused on learning had any impact on company health.

ELEMENTS OF COMPANY CULTURE

Percentage of People Who Said Their Company Has These Elements:

Formal ways to measure/track employee goals, performance, and progress
54.4%

Work/life balance
43.8%

Generous benefits
42.3%

An emphasis on integrating new employees into the company's culture
37.3%

A strong culture of learning
23.2%

Regular free meals
13.3%

EMPLOYEES SAID THEY WANT MORE THAN A CULTURE OF FREE FOOD (THEY WANT FREE LEARNING TOO)

While catered meals and fully-stocked fridges don't hurt company culture, our survey found they don't do much to help either. Among the elements of company culture we studied, free meals had the smallest impact on employee engagement and loyalty.

> **Having a culture of learning had the greatest impact on engagement and loyalty.**
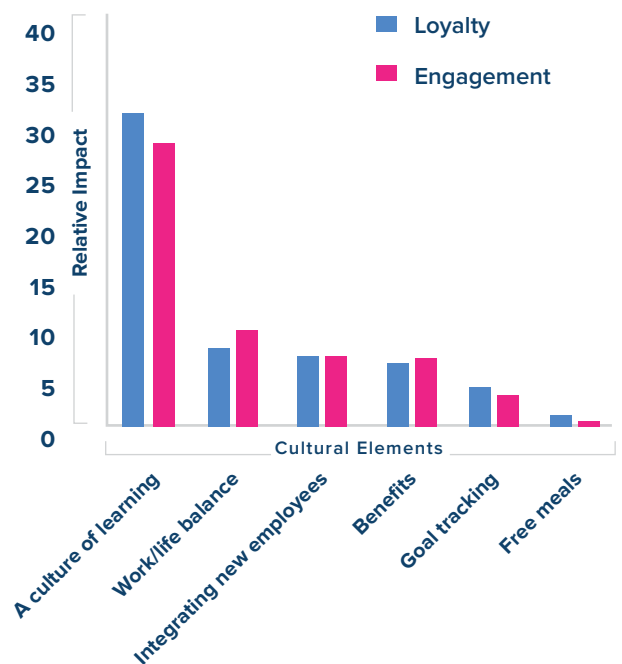
A CULTURE OF LEARNING ISN'T A CULTURE OF SPENDING

If you think time and money are barriers to learning, think again.

Employees in companies with a strong culture of learning reported spending only .02 to 1.1 percent more of their time and departmental budgets on professional development.

Average amount of departmental budget allocated to professional development

28.6%

In companies with a strong culture of learning

28.8%
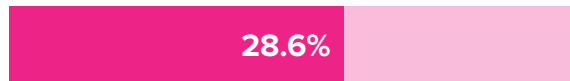
Average amount of manager's time devoted to employee professional development

32.8%

In companies with a strong culture of learning

33.7%

Average amount of employees' time devoted to their own professional development
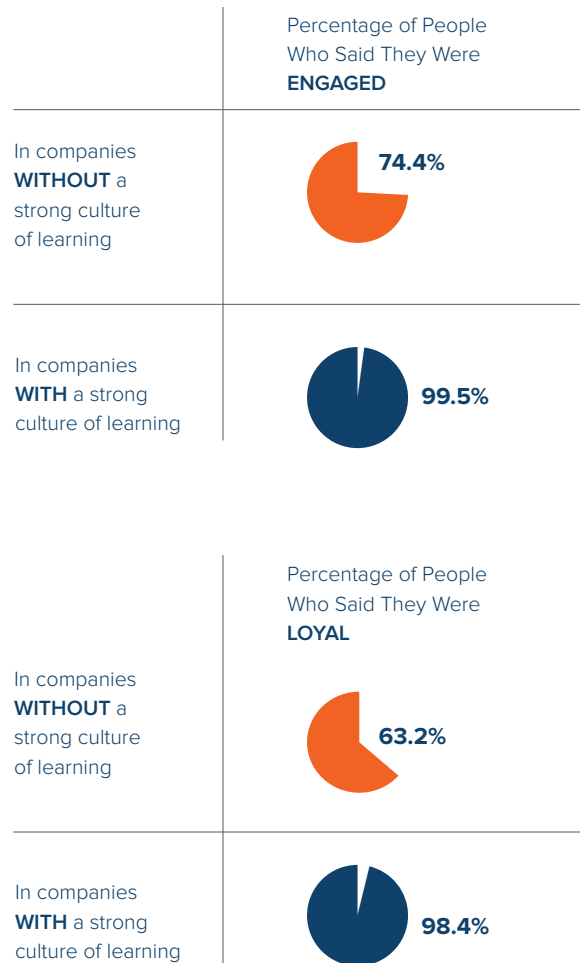
35.3%

In companies with a strong culture of learning

36.4%

IT'S A MORE ENGAGED & LOYAL CULTURE[a]

If you're still not convinced that an emphasis on learning is good for your company culture, consider this: companies that valued learning—and communicated this value to employees—had a 33.7 percent increase in engaged employees and a 55.7 percent increase in loyal employees.

Percentage of People Who Said They Were **ENGAGED**

In companies **WITHOUT** a strong culture of learning — **74.4%**

In companies **WITH** a strong culture of learning — **99.5%**

Percentage of People Who Said They Were **LOYAL**

In companies **WITHOUT** a strong culture of learning — **63.2%**

In companies **WITH** a strong culture of learning — **98.4%**

THE BOTTOM LINE:

Almost 100 percent of employees at companies with a strong culture of learning reported feeling engaged at work and loyal to their company.

[a] Differences were statistically significant: Employee Engagement, chi-square (2, N = 314) = 51.201, p < .001, Employee Loyalty, chi-square (2, N = 339) = 72.426, p < .001

What Does a Culture of Learning Look Like?

Corporate trainers and L&D gurus agree: a strong culture of learning has five critical elements.[6,7,8] Yet, when we surveyed employees and managers, we found that most companies emphasised only a few elements.

Facilitate performance feedback from managers to employees.

53.7%

Promote managers from within more often than hire from outside the company.

52.3%

Make knowledge and information sharing a part of company culture.

48.9%

Formalise training and development processes.

39.0%

Recognise or compensate employees for their learning.

34.9%

INDUSTRIES WITH STRONG LEARNING CULTURES

When we compared culture by industry, we found that people in finance (31.6 percent) and healthcare (28.3 percent) reported the highest rates of working for a company with a strong culture of learning, while retail and sales (21.8 percent) and SaaS/tech (20.9 percent) were on par with the average.

DEFINE YOUR CULTURE'S STRENGTH

The smallest percentage (less than one-quarter) of the people we surveyed said their companies' culture contained four or all five of the elements required for a culture of learning. More than one-third said none or only one of these elements were present in their company's culture. In grouping and comparing company culture by weak, moderate, and strong we were able to see if stronger was better.

WEAK 0-1 elements are present in their company's culture — 35.3%

STRONG 4-5 elements are present in their company's culture — 23.2%

MODERATE 2-3 elements are present in their company's culture — 41.5%
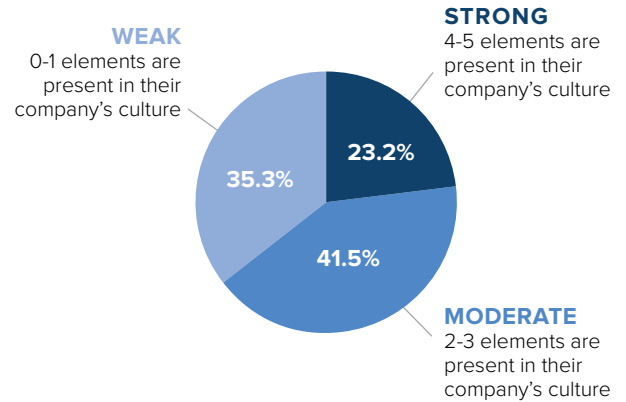
STRONGER *IS* BETTER

In companies with a strong culture of learning, we found that opportunities for face-to-face, hands-on, on-demand, mobile-friendly, self-directed, and audio/video learning were all significantly more available.[b] A majority of the people we surveyed said that both traditional and digital learning tools are important—and important to them.

TYPE OF TRAINING

The Percentage of People Who Said These Types of Training Are "Important to Them and Their Department"

Face-to-face formal training/courses

80.1%

Hands-on, active, real-world, on the job instruction

86.2%

On-demand, self-paced, online courses

63.6%

Self-directed/informal learning from others or on your own

77.6%

Mobile-friendly learning

45.5%

Audio/video courses, lectures, tutorials, or demonstrations

66.8%

[b] Face-to-Face, chi-square (2, N = 2264) = 218.608, p < .001 Hands-on, chi-square (2, N = 2264) = 148.233, p < .001 On-Demand, chi-square (2, N = 2264) = 86.790, p < .001 Self-Directed, chi-square (2, N = 2264) = 114.336, p < .001 Mobile-Friendly, chi-square (2, N = 2264) = 38.879, p < .001 Audio/Video, chi-square (2, N = 2264) = 130.512, p < .001

A STRONG CULTURE OF LEARNING MEANS …
### More Opportunities for Growth[c]

97.8% of companies with a strong culture of learning offered opportunities for growth

vs. **86.8%** of average companies

More people attending more training[d]

Employees in companies with a strong culture of learning attended an average of **4.5** company-provided training sessions during the past year

vs. **3.5** in average companies

Legend:
- Average Companies
- Companies with a Strong Culture of Learning

# of Trainings Attended
0-1 2-3 4-5 6-7 8-9 10+
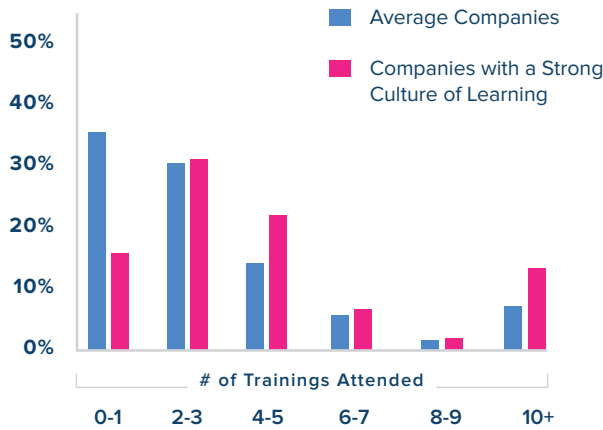
YOUR TRAINING MENU (LIKE YOUR CATERING MENU) NEEDS VARIETY

Giving people the training they want is only half the equation; effective training design is the other half. Companies need to think about, among other things, a training environment that provides materials relevant to employees' jobs and learning aids geared toward recalling content.[9]

> **Workplaces with a strong culture of learning excelled at providing their people with a more effective learning experience, which was also tied to employee engagement.[e]**

6 EFFECTIVE TRAINING DESIGNS TO ADOPT

- Use e-learning technology to help employees organise and recall content.
- Make training programs simple and effective.
- Use e-learning technology to engage employees.
- Give managers data on employee learning.
- Offer training in smaller, time saving units.
- Create training content that is intuitive with examples and exercises that are relevant to the job.

GET YOUR CULTURE IN GEAR

Many industry analysts say that company culture directly impacts financial performance, and they turn to sites like Glassdoor.com to understand employee sentiment.[10] Our findings support their conclusions—a strong culture of learning, productivity, and company growth are all significantly related.

Company Loyalty — Culture of Learning — Employee Engagement

[c] Differences were statistically significant, chi-square (3, N = 2000) = 166.439, $p < .001$

[d] Differences were statistically significant, $F(2, 2255) = 49.727$, $p < .001$, eta-squared = .042

> **A strong culture of learning can impact more than employee outcomes.**

We understand that top talent demands good culture.[11] While we don't know which came first, the culture or the opportunities to grow, we now know that the right mixture makes a difference. By adopting a culture of learning, you can lay the groundwork for a workforce that's ready and willing to contribute to your company's success.

If you don't, your competitors will.

Design for Loyalty

PEOPLE USED TO SPEND THEIR ENTIRE CAREERS WORKING FOR ONE COMPANY, BUT NOW …

> "If you love your company and want to spend your career there, you are essentially a unicorn in the job market, but you're still not as rare as the company you work for, provided they deserve your devotion."[12]
>
> —Jen Hubley Luckwaldt,
> "What Inspires Us to Be Loyal Employees"

Is this perception real? We set out to challenge conventional wisdom that company loyalty is a thing of the past. We discovered that loyalty today is different and that those rare companies investing in their employees do in fact get a return on their investments.

FOCUS ON ALIGNMENT OVER LONGEVITY

Company commitment or loyalty can take many forms. People can commit to the cause without committing to a single company. Likewise, people can commit to their company without committing to their current job. Our survey examined the latter and we asked people about their feelings toward their current workplace.[13]

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[e] Design Aspects were used significantly more in workplaces with a Strong culture of learning: 1. $F(2, 2263) = 82.246$, $p < .001$, eta-squared $= .068$ 2. $F(2, 2263) = 102.581$, $p < .001$, eta-squared $= .083$ 3. $F(2, 2263) = 85.098$, $p < .001$, eta-squared $= .070$ 4. $F(2, 2263) = 116.802$, $p < .001$, eta-squared $= .094$ 5. $F(2, 2263) = 88.341$, $p < .001$, eta-squared $= .072$

> **In focusing on alignment, we saw that a majority of people considered themselves loyal.**

FACTORS OF LOYALTY THAT HR CAN ESTABLISH

This company's values and culture provide a good fit with the things that I value in life.
72.9%

I would be happy to spend the rest of my career with this company.
72.5%

I feel a sense of belonging in my company.
72.4%

My personal values mach my organization's values and culture.
72.2%

I feel like I am "part of the family" at this company.
69.8%

This company has personal meaning to me.
69.2.%

**I feel as if this company's problems are also mine.**
59.4%

LOYALTY NO LONGER MEANS YEARS OF SERVICE

During the past 15 years, employers have seen a decline in the number of people who stayed at one company for 20 years or more; it dropped from 3 in 10 people in 1996 to just over 2 in 10 by 2012.[14]

But longevity in your workforce doesn't necessarily mean employees align with your company's values and goals. It also has nothing to do with productivity.

We looked at the number of years employees worked for a company and found a very weak association with company loyalty. It was nearly the same whether someone worked for the company just a few years or more than 30 years.[f]

> **Employees' sense of loyalty to your company doesn't predict how long they'll work for you, and that's a good thing.**
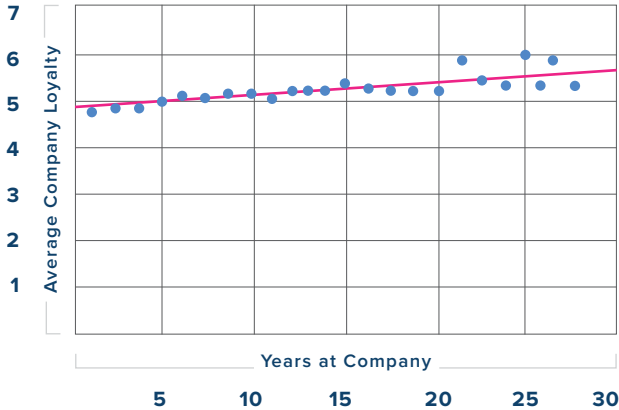
WHEN ALIGNMENT IS THE FOCUS, GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES DISAPPEAR

Research by Deloitte suggests that if given the choice, 25 percent of millennials would quit their current jobs in one year; 44 percent would quit in two years; and only 16 percent would plan to stay with their current employers for 10 years.[15] Much of Deloitte's research points to a mismatch between millennials' personal values and organizational goals.[16]

LOYALTY AMONG THE GENERATIONS

Baby Boomers = 85.4%

Gen Xers = 87.8%

Millennials = 87.4%

[f] Years of Service and Loyalty, r (2264) = .119, p < .001 Years of Service and Productivity, r (2264) = -.010, p = .623
[g] Differences were non-significant, F(2, 2224) = 1.170, p = .310

Our work focused on alignment; when organizational values matched personal values, millennials were no more or less loyal to their company than baby boomers or Gen Xers.[g]

INVEST IN YOUR PEOPLE, YOUR PEOPLE INVEST IN YOU

Loyalty now represents how strongly you and your people share organisational goals—and how passionately they'll work to accomplish those goals. Because loyalty is tied to engagement and both are tied to culture, companies can invest in learning and organise employees' viewpoints around shared goals.
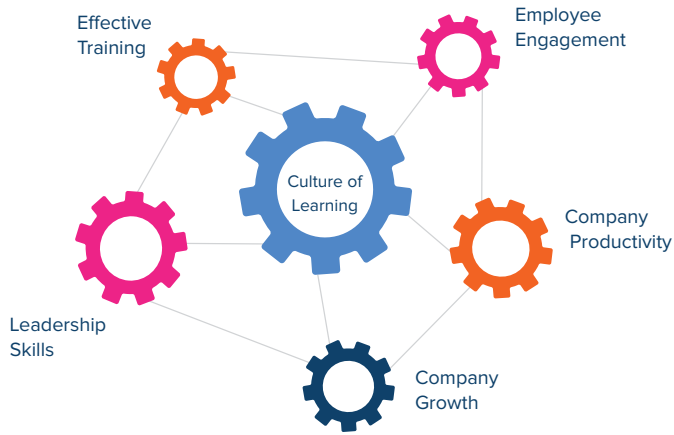

Well-Rounded Culture, Well-Rounded Company

We've offered plenty of reasons why a stronger culture of learning is better and why companies should adopt effective training designs. Looking even deeper into your company's challenges, we see both of these as part of the organisation.

Growth, whether it's measured by increased revenue or increased productivity, improves the health of your company. One of the most impactful factors on productivity is retaining your best employees—the ones who are agile, continuous learners, and innovators.[17] Without high-performing employees, you lose productivity, and without great leadership, even great employees can't do what they do best.[18]

Our findings also draw connections among company culture, productivity, good leadership, engagement, effective training, and loyalty to the company. While we don't know what comes first, we do know that all of these facets of a company are related.

Recognising Your Culture's Place

	Culture of Learning	Effective Training	Employee Engagement	Leadership Skills	Company Loyalty	Company Growth
Effective Training	.369					
Employee Engagement	.394	.535				
Leadership Skills	.344	.466	.606			
Company Loyalty	.372	.465	.722	.559		
Company Growth	.158	.250	.227	.213	.243	
Company Productivity	.257	.435	.354	.323	.329	.357

Correlation Strength

Low (r = .15 - .29)   Strong (r = .50)

Moderate (r = .30 - .49)
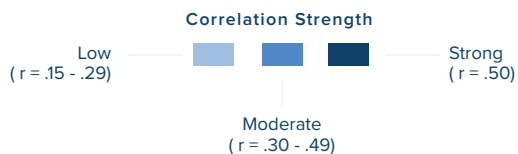
ALIGN YOUR CULTURE

Loyalty isn't the same as longevity. Working at a company longer doesn't amount to more loyalty or productivity. When you think about loyalty, you should think about developing your employees whose values and goals are aligned with those of your company. It's a collaboration where everyone and every part matters—to the company, to your leaders, and to your bottom line.

Align Your Values

LEADERS RATE THEIR OWN SKILLS HIGHER THAN EMPLOYEES.

Leaders rate themselves: 4.17

Employees rate their leaders: 3.39[h]

IN COMPANIES THAT DON'T VALUE LEADERSHIP, THE DIVIDE IS EVEN WIDER.

Leaders rate themselves: 4.09

Employees rate their leaders: 2.58[i]
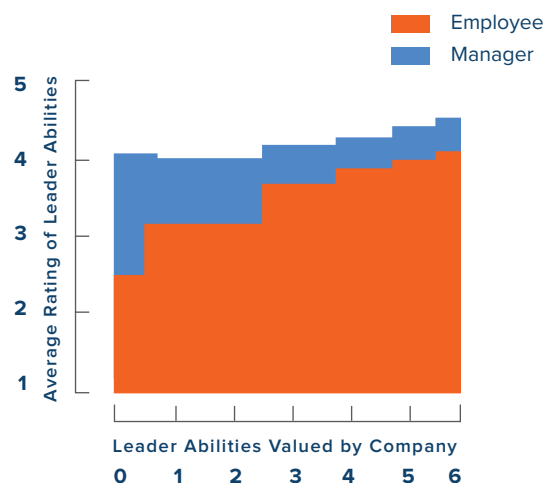
IN COMPANIES THAT VALUE LEADERSHIP, THE GAP IS CLOSED.

Leaders rate themselves: 4.45

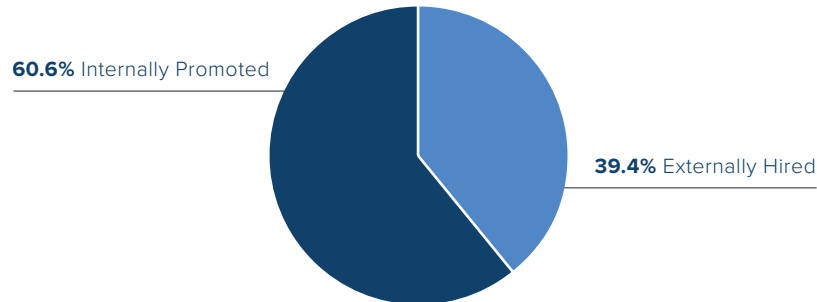**Employees rate their leaders: 4.20[j]**

It's About Alignment & Improvement

Legend: Employee, Manager

Y-axis: Average Rating of Leader Abilities (1–5)
X-axis: Leader Abilities Valued by Company (0 1 2 3 4 5 6)

[h] t (2264) = 22.6473, p < .001
[i] t (336) = 16.084, p < .001
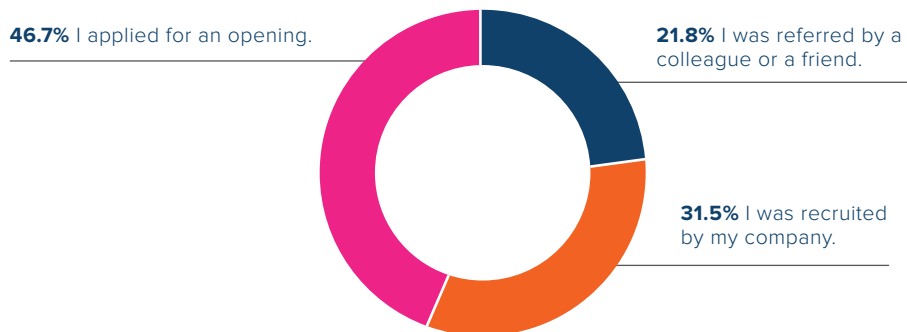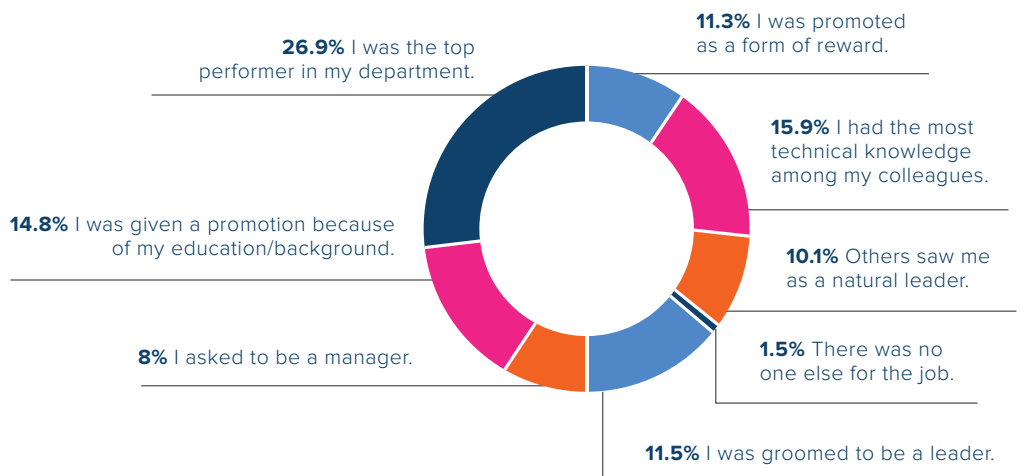[j] t (146) = 1.9225, p > .05

Develop Your Leaders

WHILE MOST LEADERS ARE PROMOTED FROM WITHIN, IT'S GOOD TO HAVE A MIX OF INTERNALLY-PROMOTED AND EXTERNALLY-HIRED LEADERS.

60.6% Internally Promoted

39.4% Externally Hired

MOST EXTERNAL HIRES APPLY FOR AN OPENING

46.7% I applied for an opening.

21.8% I was referred by a colleague or a friend.

31.5% I was recruited by my company.

MOST INTERNAL PROMOTIONS GO TO TOP PERFORMERS

26.9% I was the top performer in my department.

11.3% I was promoted as a form of reward.

15.9% I had the most technical knowledge among my colleagues.

14.8% I was given a promotion because of my education/background.

10.1% Others saw me as a natural leader.

1.5% There was no one else for the job.

8% I asked to be a manager.

11.5% I was groomed to be a leader.

JUST HALF OF CURRENT LEADERS ENTERED THEIR ROLES PREPARED.

39.4% had previous experience

+ 11.5% were groomed to be leaders

50.9% were prepared to lead

Leadership in Crisis

Most employees said leaders are promoted from within, but less than half (44.4 percent) of employees are actively being developed for future leadership positions. No matter how you do the math, many leaders are not getting the learning opportunities they need.

79.2% of departments promote from within

- 44.4%

34.8%

78.0% of companies promote from within

- 44.4%

33.6%

76.5% of leaders were internally promoted

- 44.4%

32.1%

> **Between 32.1% and 34.8% of future leaders may not develop the skills they need to succeed.**

The 6 Essential Skills Every Company Should Value

HR and L&D departments are facing two big challenges as baby boomers begin to retire: companies are losing some of their best leaders and struggling to find people with hard skills.[20] But filling the soft skills gap may be more challenging than we thought.

A leader's soft skills can help to create agile and innovative organisations, and make a company one of the best places to work.[21] Research from DDI World, an international human resources consulting firm, identified critical competencies for leaders that overlap with these skills.[22] According to the people we surveyed, their companies rarely valued them.

THE SKILLS YOUR LEADERS NEED

Decision Making, Delegating, Problem Solving (evaluating alternatives, making timely decisions, and assigning tasks and responsibilities to individuals or teams)

53%

Communicating (clarifying purpose, developing ideas, and agreeing on next steps)

48.6%

Technical Knowledge & Expertise (applying skills to improve processes, procedures, and operations)

47.1%

Planning & Organising (setting priorities, establishing timelines, and leveraging resources)

37.1%

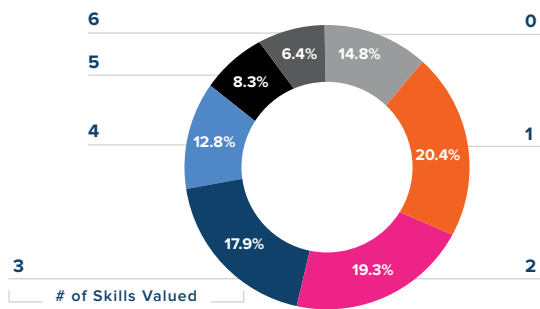**Coaching/Mentoring** (preparing employees to excel in new challenges and addressing performance problems)

30.5%

Gaining Commitment (building trust, encouraging two-way communication, and strengthening relationships)

27.8%

FEW COMPANIES VALUE ALL 6 SKILLS

| # of Skills Valued	Percentage
0	14.8%
1	20.4%
2	19.3%
3	17.9%
4	12.8%
5	8.3%
6	6.4%

THE CASE FOR DEVELOPING YOUR LEADERS

Your leaders can positively or negatively impact the health of your company.[23] With great leadership in place, company culture is developed, not forced, because leaders can influence their teams' engagement and loyalty.[24] Valuing all five essential leadership skills can cultivate great leaders and, in turn, more engaged employees.

Well-Designed Training

Employee Evals of Leaders

Variety of Training Support

Good Leadership Valued
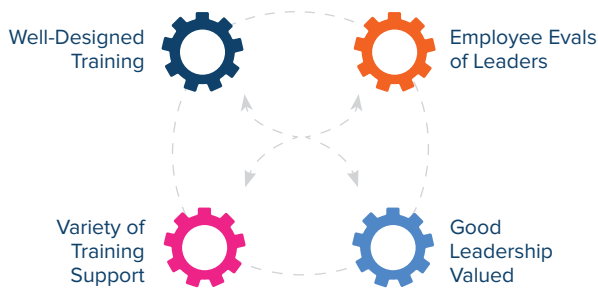
A slight majority (54.5 percent) of the people we surveyed said that their company valued at most two of these essential leadership skills. The importance of these skills cannot be overstated. We found that companies who valued these skills also placed greater value on internal development. In these companies, employees appreciated their leaders more and productivity was higher.

VIEW LEADER DEVELOPMENT AS THE SOLUTION

	Effective Training	Variety of Training Support	Value for Leadership Skills	Employee Evals of Leaders
Variety of Training Support	.431			
Value for Good Leadership	.368	.293		
Employee Evals of Leaders	.466	.312	.416	
Company Productivity	.435	.370	.321	.323

Correlation Strength

Low (r = .15 - .29) — Strong (r = .50 +)

Moderate (r = .30 - .49)
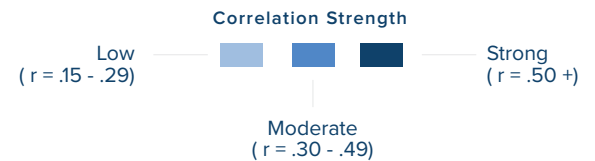
Employees' perceptions of how much their companies value these skills varied widely. It may be difficult for companies to show that they value these skills or hard for employees to recognise that their companies value them.

And while we don't know if the support or the good leaders came first, we do know that effective training and company support for a variety of trainings were positively related to company value for good leadership.

CULTURE OF LEARNING = CULTURE OF LEADERSHIP

If your company wants to stay competitive, you can't afford to have poor leadership. Simply trusting that good leadership will happen isn't enough. HR and L&D managers may feel that basic skills training satisfies the desire for leaders to learn more. Educating your current and future leaders on these soft skills is essential to your company's culture and health.

Make culture and development priorities instead of afterthoughts.

The Impact of Leadership Developed

## DO YOUR EMPLOYEES HAVE A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR LEADER?[25]

Do they…

• Like their leader as a person?
• Think their leader is the kind of person that they would like to have as a friend?
• Know that their leader would defend their work if needed?
• Do work for their leader that goes beyond what is expected?
• Apply extra effort, or go beyond what is specified in their job description?
• Feel impressed with their leader's knowledge and competence?
• Admire their leader's professional skills?

A MAJORITY OF EMPLOYEES SAID THEY LIKE THEIR BOSSES (WEIRD, HUH?!)

Seven Signs		Percentage of People Who Agreed
Like Leader		80.2%
Good Friend		66.1%
Defend My Work		79.6%
Beyond Expectations		81.4%
Extra Effort		89.2%
Leader Knowledge		73.6%
Professional Skills		73.2%

EMPLOYEES WHO RATED THEIR LEADERS' SKILLS HIGHER ALSO HAD A BETTER WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH THEM.[k]
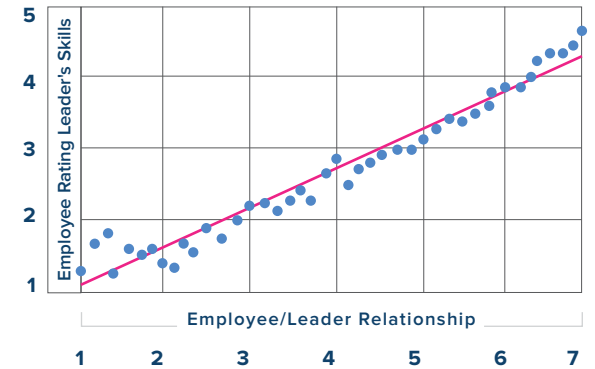
YOUR LEADERS ARE THE LIFEFORCE OF YOUR CULTURE

Strong culture—it's what attracts top talent. Strong leadership—it's a matter of your company's longevity.

By valuing crucial skills, you can improve the quality of your leadership and inspire engaged employees who align with your company's mission.

Your company needs the right kind of culture and the right kind of leadership. We've shown you what they are and how your company can benefit.

The rest is up to you.

[k] $r (2264) = .776$, $p = .0001$

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APPENDIX: ABOUT THE RESEARCH

This research for Bridge by Instructure, with the help of Qualtrics, was a follow-up to previous work. In the spring of 2016 we surveyed 2,246 people all over the United States.

Men and women were equally represented as were the generations: 39 percent were baby boomers, 31 percent were Gen Xers, and 30 percent were millennials. Our sample also represented managers and employees equally (49.9 percent and 50.1 percent, respectively). And our participants came from a wide range of industries:

Industry	N	Valid Percent
Arts, Entertainment, or Recreation	64	2.8%
Construction, Utilities	108	4.8%
Educational Services	192	8.5%
Finance or Insurance	272	12%
Government	236	10.4%
Healthcare or Social Services	276	12.2%
Hospitality or Food Services	92	4.1%
SaaS, Technology	215	9.5%
Management of Companies	49	2.2%
Manufacturing or Wholesale	207	9.1%
Real Estate or Rental and Leasing	47	2.1%
Retail or Sales	271	12%
Transportation	106	4.7%
Other	129	5.7%
Total	2,264	100%

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