



Nonprofit**HR**

WEBINAR TRANSCRIPT

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

[NONPROFITHR.COM/EVENTS](https://nonprofithr.com/events)

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

Which comes first: organizational culture or learning and development? The answer is both and neither.

Top leaders know that organizational culture is evolving in a complex and ever-changing environment. Therefore, it is critical for leaders to recognize and understand the symbiotic nature of organizational culture and learning and development (L&D). The reality is that just as the culture of an organization directly impacts leadership development/L&D efforts, we also see L&D directly affecting organizational culture. Join us as we explore the interrelationship between organizational culture and L&D!

In this webinar, you'll learn:

- How organizational culture and learning and development influence each other.
- How this influence affects the impact a social impact organization can have in the communities it serves.
- How to build an organizational culture that promotes organizational learning and creates a foundation of leadership development.

CONVERSATION HOSTS



Alexandra Taylor, MPA
Senior Consultant
Strategy & Advisory and
EDIJ



Juliet Jason
Senior Consultant
Strategy & Advisory



When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

Rose Gebken: Hello everyone, and welcome, and thank you for joining us this afternoon for Nonprofit HR's Virtual Learning Educational Event. Today's session is entitled When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development. My name is Rose Gebken. I'm Marketing & Communication Manager for Nonprofit HR and I will be supporting our presenters today.

We have a lot of great content to cover. You're going to walk away knowing how organizational culture and learning and development influence each other, and how to build an organizational culture that promotes organizational learning and creates a foundation of leadership development.

Before we get started, though, I would like to go over a few items, so you know how to participate in today's event.

You have joined the presentation listening using your computer's speaker system by default. If you would prefer to join over the telephone, just select "telephone" in the audio pane of your control panel and the dial-in information will be displayed.

You will have the opportunity to submit questions to today's presenters. By typing your questions into the questions pane of the control panel, you may send in your questions at any time during the presentation. We will collect these and address them during the Q&A session at the end of today's presentation.

Today's event is being recorded, and you will receive a follow-up email within the next few days with a link to view the recording. Along with those assets, live webinar attendees will also receive a code for SHRM and HRCI recertification credit.

Now, just a brief note about Nonprofit HR.

Since 2000, Nonprofit HR remains the country's leading and oldest firm focused exclusively on the talent management needs of the social sector, including nonprofits, associations, social enterprises and other mission-driven organizations. We focus our consulting efforts on the following practice areas: Strategy & Advisory, HR Outsourcing, Total Rewards, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Justice and Search. We were founded with one goal in mind: to strengthen the social impact sector's talent management capacity by strengthening its people.

Today's content will be delivered by Alex Taylor and Juliet Jason.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

Juliet Jason is a Senior Consultant for the firm's Strategy & Advisory practice, partnering with clients to lead complex projects in various human resources disciplines. She provides strategic guidance, thought partnership, training and assessment to nonprofit clients in support of their missions. Prior to joining Nonprofit HR, Juliet served as a Senior Human Capital Consultant with ICF, working on workforce solutions and services primarily for federal clients.

Alex Taylor brings over 20 years of nonprofit experience to our Strategy & Advisory team, focused on strengthening organizations around diversity, equity and inclusion; leadership development and staff training; nonprofit operations and talent management; philanthropy; strategic planning and stakeholder engagement. Prior to joining Nonprofit HR, Alex served as the Vice President of Development and Endowment for the YMCA of Greater Houston, where she spent over 15 years in a variety of roles and philanthropy, social equity, board development and operations.

As a reminder, you will have an opportunity to ask questions throughout the webinar. We will collect your questions and answer as many as we can during the formal Q&A session at the end of the webinar.

And now I'll turn it over to you, Alex, to get us started.

Alexandra Taylor: Thank you so much.

It is a privilege for Juliet and I to be here with you today. And we are going to do our best to make this as interactive, as engaging as possible, so we will definitely be sharing content. We will be leaning into questions. Thank you to all of you who did the work of submitting questions ahead of time. I know that always takes some intention and time and effort, and I want to just acknowledge that, so thank you for doing that. We read those over. We did our best to incorporate those into what we're sharing. There may be some that were maybe a little more specific that we might not get to, but we'll continue to try to plug in those questions as they come in.

So, you're going to see, as we move through, and you're seeing the agenda right now, that we're going to pause at different points and ask you a question. And so, be ready. Be ready to respond in that Q&A panel that Rose just talked about. Have that ready. Hopefully you got that pulled down so you can respond. Juliet and I will share some of our thoughts and perspectives around some of this, before we get a chance to hear from you all to give you a little bit of time to think about it.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

But we really want to lean into what is happening with culture and learning and development. And we're going to start first by a very quick touch on VUCA, which some of you may be familiar with. But we feel like this is really relevant and important as we're coming into this conversation today. But the bulk of our time, we'll really be looking at, as we put here, the symbiotic nature of organizational culture and learning and development.

Then, we're going to close out by asking you some questions around both, how do you—what are some things you can do to build a culture that promotes organizational learning? And, creating that foundation for leadership development. We always want to come back and make sure we're seeing this in the broader context.

So, we're going to start first, like I said, I'm going to quickly move through a definition of VUCA. I'm going to show you here, these are the definitions that go back to when this was — this concept was originally developed. I'm not going to go into the whole history of it, it's something you can look up on your own and read about it, if it's something that interests you.

But I think what's happened, and what we have been experiencing, in particular, the last few years, is that we've moved from periods of time, in organizational culture and in our world, where VUCA shows up — the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous nature of things — into a time when this is maybe the way things are and are going to continue to be. And so, I think it's important to sort of frame this for ourselves as we're thinking about this.

Because the reality is that culture and how we approach leadership development, and learning and development, has never been static. But I think we are being challenged and pushed even into the things that we thought were established or ways of being, to really think about them differently. So ... we can maybe understand this situation, but it's not predictable. The speed, nature, volume [and] magnitude of change is great. We understand impact exists, but we don't always have all the information. We're not able to predict. There's all these interrelated parts.

And so ... one of the points of caution I will offer is some of the questions that we got ahead of time were really asking for, like, very specific things: OK, this, this, this and this is happening. What should we do next? Well ... some of it, yes, you should be planning and strategizing, and we're going to talk about that. But I think the other part of this is that we can't always predict. We don't have all of the information, things are still uncertain and there's a lot of complexity to this. Like, this [is] chaos meets issue management, right? So, we're trying to manage something that we think we understand, and then there's all these other factors that are happening around it.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

And then the ambiguity of it, right? We don't really know what we don't know, and we're going to talk specifically towards the end about how leaders can really lean into this. It requires some vulnerability. It requires trust in your people, but there's an opportunity here. And this hazy reality and mixed meanings are creating some real impact for us.

There are some things that are specific to VUCA right now in our current organizational context. We are adapting to a hybrid model of work. We're trying to create sort of new, meaningful employee experiences, given the fact that maybe most of our workforce is remote or it's this interesting blend. We are trying to work on interaction and recognition and development of employees, but we've got this whole — all these things sort of swirling around us as we're doing that.

We're trying to keep people connected. I think that's one of the biggest things we're hearing from clients as we work with them. That the connection piece is so challenging in this world, given all of these things that we're looking at on our screen right now, as well as being remote and sometimes feeling isolated from each other, and focusing on what is impacting the outcomes that we're trying to have as an organization ...

So, we want to think about this as the context of organizational culture and the learning and development resources that we're applying. And how is this impacting our strategy? And that's what we want to think about.

So, our first question for you all, and then I'm going to let Juliet jump in here too because I want to hear from her and let y'all hear her voice. So this is our first question for you. Juliet and I are both going to kind of tag team and answer a little bit.

But what we want to hear from you, and Rose is going to chime in once we get some responses to this question. What did you do as a leader during (and now since) 2020 to adjust your leadership approach and pivot given this new normal?

So, we want to hear and share some of the insight that you all have. Juliet, what were some things that you experienced as a leader or things that you've heard clients talk about that they did to pivot or adjust?

Juliet Jason: Yes, absolutely, Alex. I am so happy to be sharing some of my insights.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

What is very, very important is connection. When you mentioned connection earlier on, it is so important to connect. And during the time in the pandemic in the last two or three years, what's happening is people panicked, they went home and they were wondering, how are we're going to feel connected? I can't just go into somebody's office and just knock on the door and say, "Hey! What about that report? Can you see this?"

And so, what's happening is, there were so many meetings that were put it on the calendar and the calendar was jam-packed with all of these scheduled meetings. But over time, they realized we really don't need that much connection all the time, because it wasted a lot of time.

And so, what they ended up doing is give people more autonomy on making decisions. Give them autonomy on the work that they're doing, and then, change the schedule of the meetings, maybe once a week to catch up instead of every day. I think people were panicking so much that they would lose that connection, and so that is one of the main strategies that happened, even with the organizations that I previously worked in and also with the clients that we were working with.

Alexandra Taylor: Yeah, I think that it's interesting to think about, and this is why we added in during 2020, when all of this started and we had to make this major pivot, to what we're experiencing now, because I think, some of the questions ... we got, Juliet, really reflect fatigue, continued challenges around engaging staff who are not physically in an office space with us anymore ... One of the things that I've heard from clients is just really trying to listen and ask staff for what they need to be intentional in the ways to connect. So, not just ... and meetings to just work on projects, but what are those other things we can do for leaders to be transparent and authentic about admitting when you don't know, or saying, "This is what we know right now. This is what we're focused on right now. I don't know what it's going to look like in a week or in a month," and being honest about that.

Then, the big need for us to be agile and adaptable, and I think that's kind of what we're talking about. So, Rose, do we have any responses that you want to share with us from our audience?

Rose Gebken: We're still getting some coming in. I'm seeing them come in now.

One person, one listener, right now is saying that they've been using their Slack messaging and something called the Watercolor Channel. Sounds like that's been something helpful for their team in their remote environment.

Alexandra Taylor: Excellent, excellent.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

Juliet Jason: Yeah. I just wanted to say I think with something like Slack, what we're seeing also is having these different groups where they would recognize employees in this—in a different way before they would recognize this in-person, but then there are different ways in which you can use Slack to recognize, and everybody is able to see it. Using Slack not just to communicate, but for other things to connect as well.

Alexandra Taylor: Yeah. I think, really, again, that goes to listening to your staff. So, Rose, any other responses before we move on?

Rose Gebken: It looks like we have some people confused about the panel.

Yes, to answer attendees, you can put your responses in that questions pane, and we will see them on the backend. So, this would be for this question and the other questions during the presentation.

Alexandra Taylor: Yes, and you can message Rose, if you're struggling to find ... I know, it's always like, every time you get on a different format, you got to try to figure out where everything is. So ... This is your moment to kind of find where it is, so that you can put your responses in ...

Yes. Thank you ...

Yes, share your responses in the questions pane, that way Rose can see them, because we're focused on getting through our content and talking with each other. And so, we want to make sure that we can see all those things and Rose is our point person on that. So, thank you for highlighting that, Rose, as we move through.

Rose Gebken: Absolutely. It looks like we have a few more responses coming in, now that we clarified that.

So, it looks like some other people had a similar response. Their team is using on Teams something called a Happy Channel, [which] sounds very similar to what you're saying, Juliet. And then having other people ... OK and they're sharing things like quotes and pictures that bring up their happiness.

Alexandra Taylor: Oh, beautiful. Yeah. I'm really glad that this is part of what's being emphasized. It's not just about communicating information and making sure that folks have all of the task and project related — it's, what is it going to take to build connection?

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

And I think you're going to hear Juliet and I keep touching back to that because, frankly, that is the thing that is going to impact engagement. This is a key piece of strategy around learning and development, and so critical to culture.

So, with that, I think we'll kind of keep going.

So, we wanted to sort of start with the bigger picture, and then Juliet is going to take us into some definition and conversation on organizational culture, which is her area of expertise. But we wanted to just first highlight our model that we use here at Nonprofit HR, which is our talent management lifecycle. And so, this model considers the full lifecycle, and you can see it is a cycle, it's not linear. It's continuing, we're continuing to shift and move through these: attract, grow, value, attract, grow, value.

And at the center, and this is really what we wanted to highlight, is culture. And you can see in there engagement, and values, and diversity, equity, and inclusion. And you're going to hear us touch on these things as we move through the conversation today, but this is what is holding this altogether, right? This is at the center.

And hopefully what you hear from us, loud and clear, as we move through today, is how critical this is to all of these other pieces of your people, of creating space for your people, of growing your people, of bringing your people in and of making them feel valued. So, again, we just wanted again to start here and emphasize that.

All right, Juliet, I'm going to let you take it away.

Juliet Jason: All right, so let's go into organizational culture.

Organizational culture is a very complex, exciting topic. And we're dealing with people. We have to really think about it being the center. And even as you saw in our model, it's at the center, so even as I go through the next few slides, just talking about organizational culture, so many different people have provided perspectives.

I'm going to start with Nonprofit HR's perspective on what culture is. Because we have over 20 years of experience working with so many kinds of nonprofit organizations, social impact organizations, and this definition ... can be used in so many different settings.

So, we have three different sentences here, so I'll kind of just read them out.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

Organizational culture, as we can see, is a collection of values, expectations and practices. And the most important thing is it guides and informs the actions of all team members. That's why it's important, that's why we're here ... all of these things guide and inform the actions of the team members.

The next sentence talks about these attributes that we're just talking about that come together as organizational culture. They work in collaboration with each other and they provide this barometer, if you want to call it a guide, on what an organization looks like, feels like, sounds like. So, I'll talk about this sentence in the next slide and what the nature of that is.

As we go to the next sentence – we can go back to the previous slide, sorry, Alex.

In the previous slide, the last sentence is: When created with intentionality, this positive organizational culture will produce the results for your mission and can increase your bottom line. So, it's about guiding how we're going to act and it's about the mission and increasing the bottom line, so we can go to the next slide now.

In the next slide ... I want to introduce you to Ed Schein or Edgar Schein. Edgar Schein is a thought leader in organizational culture. He is in his nineties right now, and he's still talking about organizational culture. He's written so many different books, but in this particular book, which is organizational culture and leadership, he provides a definition that has been used by so many different people. As you can see, it is very similar to the one that Nonprofit HR also provides.

But, as we go through this particular definition and why it's important for us, it's always, if you know better, you do better, and I hope that is what we're going to do. And that's what Maya Angelou said, but ... we need to learn the foundation.

So, I'll bring up four different aspects of this particular definition, and I'll read through some of it. We can go to the previous slide.

This slide. This is a good slide. Thank you, Alex.

So, it's a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration. This has worked well enough to be considered valid, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel. So, let's break that down into the different components.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

So, shared, taught, learned. And that is sharing and collaboration between people, between the people in the organization and within management and leadership. So, that's one aspect. It's about the people, it's about sharing, it's about teaching, it's about learning.

The second thing is external adaptation and internal integration. So, it's not just the organization itself, but it's also operating in an environment as well.

So, external: How do we adapt to the environment? We just talked about how organizations adapted to the environment that we went through with the pandemic.

The other thing is perceiving, thinking and feeling. And there was a sentence in the previous slide about ... Nonprofit HR. And I wanted to talk about what Ed Schein would say. Organizational culture is like a personality, so if it's like a personality, it's something that has been developed over time and if we are considering changing it or adjusting it, it is not an easy thing. It's complex, not impossible, but we have to be able to see how that, what all those different aspects of the organizational culture will be and how any of this needs to be changed or adapted.

So, we can go to the next slide, and we're still talking about Ed because he is a thought leader in this area, and you always have to have a foundation when you're talking about some of the things. So with organizational culture, Schein presents three different levels of culture. The first thing is artifacts, the second thing is espoused beliefs and values and basic underlying assumptions.

So, with artifacts, Alex, we can bring up the definition for that. When you talk about artifacts ... when you think about organizational culture, what can you visibly see? The dress code? Alex and I, we match or [are] matching today together. It's not necessarily Nonprofit HR's dress code, but it's what we somehow subconsciously dressed in the same color, and then it's the language, and the technology and the structures. Those things that you can see on the surface. It's very easy to see if you go into an office, is it open plan? Do you have small little offices? So those are the artifacts, and that is what a lot of people would say is culture.

The next definition, which is the espoused belief and values, espoused meaning promotive. What is it as an organization [that you are] promoting? And saying, "This is who we are, our goals, our visual and our strategies ideas. This is our philosophy." ... Those are the espoused beliefs and values.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

The next thing is basic underlying assumptions. This is ... the meat of all of organizational culture and that's what makes it very complex. This model, if you search this model, you'll probably find a triangle ... and you would have artifacts at the top and you would have the basic underlying assumptions at the bottom. And that's just because it's the tip of the iceberg, that's what you see, but the foundation is at the bottom. But ... I choose to use a circular motion because it's interrelated, very similar to our Nonprofit HR model.

So, with the basic underlying assumptions, you have the unspoken assumptions, that are invisible, the ones that you can't see. It's about, how do we make decisions? ... How do we relate? How do Alex and I relate in our relationships, when we're working on putting together this presentation? How do we do that? It's all of those things. And so, it is so important for us to define what culture is, so that we have the same language as we think about it when we talk about learning.

I think our next slide I am to complete as well. All right! We have a question on the next slide. And if anybody has any questions, they can always put in the chat, but I can read through this one.

So how does our VUCA world impact organizational culture?

Alex, maybe you can give you a perspective, but I'll give my perspective also afterwards.

Alexandra Taylor: Yeah, I mean, I think we can think of some of the things that are challenging and maybe seen as somewhat negative. I think when I was thinking about this, I actually saw some opportunity.

And again, we'd love to hear from you all when you're thinking about those aspects of culture. And we're going to touch back on ... whenever I hear things around culture, I think about, particularly the unspoken because I think for people coming into an organization, people trying to navigate, and even what we're creating around learning and development, I get this question a lot.

We'll get a topic brought to us, and, can we train on this? Can we teach on this? And, if I don't fully understand what's happening within the culture, and how well the culture may or may not support a shift or a change ... or something that we're trying to really dig into that's maybe a little bit harder, like building trust ... or understanding our leadership style, I can bump up against things that I'm not understanding. And I think this is, this relates directly into some of the VUCA challenges, but I also think that all the uncertainty and complexity and ambiguity, and even some of the volatility that we're experiencing, also creates opportunity.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

And it creates opportunity for very new ways of thinking. And I love it when organizations can start to lean into this. And I know, sometimes for smaller, newer organizations, it might feel, it's maybe a little bit easier to shift or change. For larger, older, established nonprofits and organizations, it can be much more challenging to see this as an opportunity for things to look very different.

And so, I think for, and we're going to get into some of this as we continue, but I want to put this forth as a challenge for those of you who sit in leadership roles to really think about, how can we lean into that? What does it look like to say, "You know what, everything's kind of on the table, in terms of where we're headed, what the community is telling us that they need, the impact that we've had in the past may not align with where we're headed in the future, and it may have to look very different."

It can remove — this is the thing ... as I was thinking about this question — it can remove our reliance on old ways of doing things that might not work anymore. And so, again, there is opportunity baked into this. Anyway, that was my perspective. Juliet, what are some of the things you were thinking about?

Juliet Jason: Yeah, there are a couple of things. And you also talked about training.

What happens is that there could be things that are going on in their environment and you may need to be constantly retraining, constantly retraining, and sometimes it can be a burden. But it's also an opportunity to be able to be ahead of the curve. And, you might be thinking ahead of the curve from a private organization perspective, but I think also with nonprofits and social impact, so many things that are going on. We have crowdsourcing when it comes to funding, and so many different things, so many tools to use out there. But then just trying to figure out, what is it that we can be able to incorporate as an organization and be adaptable and agile?

The second thing I wanted to talk about has to do with decision making. Even consulting, and a lot of my consulting work, is in a lot of the federal government. And when it comes to decision making, sometimes it could be very difficult to move the needle because of all of the bureaucracy, but what happens is, within the little subcultures, you decide to move according to what you can control within the context.

So, for example, if Congress is trying to make a decision about something, and you're waiting and waiting and waiting to make a decision, you can still move. You can be able to build structures around yourself, even if the environment is saying you can't move, you can't move. So just thinking about things that way as well.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

Alexandra Taylor: Yeah, where you have influence. We emphasize this a lot in our training when we're talking about, for example, crucial conversations or giving effective feedback.

And sometimes we're talking to staff that are at the middle level of an organization, and so they're saying, "Well, I can, I know I can have influence here, but I'm frustrated because maybe I'm not going to, we're not going to see that kind of influence above..."

Let's focus where we can have impact. You do have influence, and if you are supervising staff, if you were part of a team, right there, you have the opportunity to influence.

So, Rose, any responses to this question that you want to share with us?

Rose Gebken: Absolutely, they are coming in and what I noticed was a lot of our responses, I wanted to share to the first question, really have to do with culture.

And it sounds like that shift in the face of 2020, a lot of organizations are increasing their intentionality when it comes to meetings, not necessarily the frequency. It looks like many, there's a lot of different frequency in terms of what people are doing, but they're very intentional about whether it's one-on-ones, team meetings. It looks like some people are getting more one-on-ones, some people are doing more team meetings, but a lot of intentionality around that. And then, also, the amplification of communications across organizations and also, the increased aspects of recognition and appreciation. So, it looks like the organizations are really focused on that.

Alexandra Taylor: Beautiful. Anything else? Just ... around culture that you want to raise before we keep going?

Rose Gebken: It looks like we ... some people are talking about the aspect of culture with the shift to virtual, that they are, it looks like one organization, they're reinforcing their DEI values and, at the same time, decreasing the ... physical environment. And so, they have new work culture norms around Slack and phone use and that kind of thing, so messaging and phone.

Alexandra Taylor: Yeah, oh, I'm glad someone raised that because that's a very specific thing.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

And I think that's one of the things we have to think about, is all the different layers of impact, right? And going back to what Juliet talked about, the assumptions that we make about what people understand or don't understand about culture, right? That ... there are aspects of culture that are unspoken and there are things we just assume sometimes as leaders. And the trouble that we can get into when we do that, right? And we are not allowing for people to raise questions about, how, for example ... communication methods might have been used when we were physically in a space.

I can remember an organization I was in years ago, we had very strict rules about our member-facing folks being able to be on their phones or not during their shifts. Some of that's changing, right? I mean, it's just, it doesn't look the same as it did, so I'm really glad to hear that.

I'm also really glad to hear someone raising already, and this is something that came up at our ... around equity and culture, and Juliet and I want to speak to this a little bit, too. We got multiple questions, actually, from everybody, and when you have the opportunity to submit questions ahead of time, asking around, how do we ground our culture in equity and inclusion? What does this look like? We're more focused on it. We're creating intentional space. We're creating intentional language. We're creating intentional policies and processes that get at equity, inclusion, belonging, justice, diversity, all of these things.

And so, there were just a couple of things. So, how can L&D sort of support this? How can L&D support this culture being built around a commitment to equity? And there were a few things that came to mind for me and then, Juliet, I would love to hear from you.

One of the big things is just ensuring equitable access to learning and development for everyone in your organization.

It may not look the same at every layer, particularly if you have a very large organization, because we recognize its time and money being invested, particularly in formal learning opportunities, but what are the things that you can make available, so that everyone has access to learning and development? That is a huge, tangible way, that you demonstrate equity within the culture of the organization.

Grounding your content and topics around equity and inclusion, for example. There's a couple of courses that we do with clients that tie sort of traditional or more management and leadership focused topics with some specific callouts around equity and inclusion, like building trust, addressing bias, leading with transparency and strengthening relationships, or communication and leading diverse teams where we get into authentic and inclusive ways of communicating.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

So, we're talking about topics that have maybe more traditionally lived in the management and leadership realm, and pulling in and grounding in equity and calling things out specifically to pull these things together because they are completely linked, and that foundation is there.

Doing a culture survey where you see, where you ask your staff and find out, what are the real issues around equity and inclusion? And then, create learning opportunities to address those, so you've got to make sure you're hearing from your staff in an authentic way.

Juliet, any other responses to this and then we'll keep going?

Juliet Jason: I just want to expand on that one point. It seems like everything that we're talking about is very connected. I want to talk about the step before you even build anything.

Before you build anything, you always need to ask. Always ask and listen. And then, you can build collaboratively together. And that is ... so important, and I'm talking about that because what we went through during 2020, as a person of color ... Are we creating safe spaces for people to communicate what it is that we are experiencing, or the learning that is required? I think that is so important.

And those spaces ... what are the competence of those spaces? We have different groups, and at Nonprofit HR, we have all these, we have affinity groups. I'm new to the organization, and we have all these different affinity groups, and where I'm coming from, it's very similar. Are you creating spaces that are making it comfortable for people to share? And then, understanding all those people that need to share this information, do you prefer by phone calls? Do you prefer by email? Do you prefer it anonymous, just being able to listen? And when you are able to listen and ask for the right thing, that's when you start building.

So, all of these different topics that Alex mentioned, that's so important. But sometimes what happens is a lot of organizations say, quickly, "Oh, yeah, we need this training." And you get the training and then nothing happens, because you didn't ask me what I wanted. You didn't ask me what I wanted and I'm not going to attend that training at all and my basic behavior is not going to change.

So, I think it's so important to ask, listen and act, because if you don't act, you just ask and listen, and then it sits on the shelf somewhere, it doesn't make a difference in behavior. And behavior — building culture is about changing the behavior and seeing the feedback after bad behavior has been changed.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

So, it's building and seeing, did we change anything? And if we did, is that the behavior that we really wanted?

Alexandra Taylor: Yeah, that's where you're going to see all this work show up, right? There are ways to measure this. I think sometimes we think, Oh, well, this, sort of these... I hate this term, soft skills, I wish we would stop using that.

Juliet Jason: I agree with you.

Alexandra Taylor: It's not. It's foundational, right, to how we show up as people and organizations. It's not a soft skill, it is who we are. And these ways that we behave, can we start to see a shift? Can we come back to folks, measuring things, asking questions, seeing how things are being demonstrated? This is why competencies are really important. We're not going to talk about that today, but I think that's a way, that's another way, I love to see when organizations lean into that, because it is allowing for equity, because we're saying this is what it looks like, and this is how we're going to measure it. And then, I think it aligns perfectly.

We're going to talk in a minute about where L&D fits with culture and with the overall approach, but we want to just preface a little by saying it's a tool, it's a resource, it is not the be-all and end-all. Throwing trainings at a culture that is broken is not going to fix it. And that's something that you hear from us, hopefully loud and clear. We want our trainings that we do internally, or if we bring in external people within an organization, to be part of an overall approach like Juliet was just talking about. But it's not going to just solve things on their own.

So, I think that's a really important piece to raise and kind of takes us, I think, into our next part which is, what defines a learning organization?

So, we kind of have to ... this is the movement, right? We're talking about the context, VUCA, we're talking about, what is culture? All the things that we've laid out, we're talking about how these things interplay. We're talking about equity and ... this is the foundation.

Then, we're stepping back ... and thinking about what does a learning organization actually look like? Because L&D should just be part of what a learning organization looks like. They're not the same thing, so we want to make sure that that's clear.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

Hopefully, again, you're going to hear that from us and see that in some different things we're going to show you here in the next couple of minutes. That ... L&D, learning and development, is a function within an organization that is responsible for empowering employees growth, developing knowledge, skills and capabilities to drive impact.

And initiatives are things like onboarding, new hire, career development, training, leadership development programs, and skills training, and talent strategy, and [required] courses like ... compliance training. Those are all pieces. Those are all initiatives and things that happen within the function of L&D. And it is the function or the resources or the way that people learn and develop. So, it provides that structure, it provides, again, a formalized approach to ensure that things are happening. But overall, we've got to step back and say, what does it actually look like to be a learning organization?

A learning organization is an organization that's skilled at creating, acquiring, transferring knowledge, modifying behavior to reflect new knowledge and insight. I'm going to say that again. When you are a learning organization, you are skilled at creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge, so just let that sit a little bit and let that really kind of sink in about—and we're going to ask you to reflect on this a little bit about—when you think about yourself as an organization, is this how you would define yourself?

Then, we modify our behavior as organizations to reflect that ongoing new knowledge and insight that we're getting. So, this takes us back to where we started, right? All the uncertainty and complexity and ambiguity should be, if we're a learning organization, fueling new insight, new learning and adaptation of behavior.

So, what does this do to move us beyond just learning and development? Just thinking about that, which is a critical piece. What else is here, how do we approach all the opportunities and challenges?

And so, one of the ways that we want to kind of think about this is letting you all look at this model from Jerez-Gomez and several other names that are on here. We've got the attribution down at the bottom.

But this came from a journal of business research on, what are the dimensions of learning in an organization? And again, we want to, some of this directly relates into learning and development. Some of this is much bigger. It is how the organization itself is framing out and creating space, right? That's what I see when I read all of these things. Creating space and doing intentional things within an organization to ensure that we are constantly learning.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

Management commitment. This is developing and enabling support and leadership commitment to create and build knowledge within the organization, so there is a commitment across our management to creating spaces of learning. So, it's there.

We have a system perspective. We're bringing everything within, everyone within, an organization, to a shared vision and a mutual identity. This goes back to culture, right? The aspects of culture, this is where it shows up. And is it, are we a learning culture, right? So, are we creating those things? Are we reinforcing those things?

Building relationships, connecting members with each other. Exchanging knowledge and information. There's an openness and experimentation, which we talked about as critical, right, for being able to encounter the world in which we live now. New ideas and suggestions.

And then, this knowledge transfer and integration. So, knowledge, ideas, innovations can spread internally through different communication challenges and then, also we're integrating that knowledge, right? It's not just, "Oh, here's this new idea," or "This new way of thinking," or "Here's what we're hearing from the community," but we're actually starting to integrate it into our strategy, into our programs, into our projects.

And there's a quote from Jack Welch who we all know from GE (General Electric), "An organization's ability to learn, and translate that learning into action rapidly, is the ultimate advantage as an organization."

And to think about how the impact — we should be working to develop learning processes using dynamic and flexible organizational culture. We can realize successful organizational learning processes within an organizational culture. We can facilitate learning, or we can be a major barrier for it, depending on what values we're holding up.

So, this is where culture is coming in to learning. It's either supporting it, creating space for all the things that we're talking about or these sort of dimensions of learning, or creating barriers. And we're going to talk about that a little bit more here in a moment.

So Juliet's going to take us into what should be the next question for all of us, which is, how do we build a culture that's promoting learning?

Juliet, ready to take it away?

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

Juliet Jason: Yeah, how do you build an organizational culture that promotes learning? This is a very big question, and I think the next slide is where I'm going to start.

So, with the next slide, we've been talking about culture and talking about the individual, talking about the interactions, talking about the environment, and just talking — at the bottom of the screen, you can see the citation. Of course, Schein had to be on the list, and others, as well.

And out of all of the research and the experience that Nonprofit HR has, and Alex has had, and we have these big, different buckets. We have individual development; change; interactions, cooperations and communications; and environment. We'll look at each one of them. And in the research, all of these aspects are addressed in the different ways. So, let's start with individual development.

When it comes to individual development, it's the people. So, a culture that values personal growth and personal growth of the employees, individual learning and their expertise, that is a culture that encourages learning. Because human beings are very curious. They're very curious, and they want to experiment and they want to explore. So, if there's a culture that does not encourage me, I'll be coming to work, and I'm not going to be growing and I'm not going to learn at all.

And we talked a little bit about autonomy as well. A culture that values employee autonomy. It is so important, as I'm working I think, how am I going to grow? And when I grow, that's also going to impact the organization as well.

We'll talk about change. That's the culture ... that has a positive attitude towards change. A positive attitude towards change means that if something comes up, let's not worry about it, but let's address it, and we've addressed different ways of creativity, and innovation and new approaches to addressing our problem. And during the pandemic we've just had all of these different ways in which during that time we were creative and innovative, and that's how Zoom came up ... GoTo Webinar as well enhanced their software, and Teams, as well. I remember when using Teams, it's amazing what they were able to do with Teams in that short time and you could see the progress as a result of that.

So, when it comes to change, are you going to grow? Will Teams, for example, decide, "We'll let Zoom take on the share..." or, "Will you use Zoom instead of us? Are we going to grow as well?"

So, there is just a reasonable risk ... is a culture that organizations ... be able to promote.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

The next thing is interaction, cooperations and communication. When it comes to that, [it's] a culture that elevates learning, contains and values honest and open intent interactions. So, a culture where I can be able to connect with Alex and it's OK, and I'm open with her, and I'm on it. A culture that provides, allows for, open discussions between employees and between managers.

And the other thing is one of the most important things is decision making. If a person is able to make those decisions without having to all the time go to the supervisor, but is able to have that autonomy, that's a culture that encourages one to be able to learn and to continue to grow.

The last thing is the environment. I like to give the example, also, about crowdsourcing. For example, if we're constantly adapting to the change, talk about crowdsourcing when you're funding a nonprofit or you're funding a social impact organization. If you are, if you're not able, if their organization is not able to adopt some of these new technologies, then other organizations will be able to adapt to those and be able to grow and be able to be more efficient.

The other example I can give from the private organizations is something like Blockbuster versus Netflix, for example. What happened to Blockbuster? Did they evolve?

And then, the other example, with Netflix as well, Blackberry versus Apple, if you go and search and see how/what happened with Blackberry and Apple.

So, when it comes to organization culture and just kind of bringing it back in is you have to think about the individual, and what are the needs of the individual? ... Is it positive change, and then interactions as well. Are those interactions encouraged?

The interesting thing about the interactions piece is that you can operate in silos, and when you operate in silos, there's no communication, and there could be competition. While you're trying to work very hard to achieve all these goals, but there's all this competition. Then, of course, we operate in an environment, and when we operate in an environment, we need to be able to be adaptable as well.

Alexandra Taylor: And, one of the things I love about this, I just want to highlight is that, I know we have all different sized nonprofits in our audience today.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

And so, one of the beautiful things about this, and we're going to talk about this when we address some additional questions we got. Multiple questions always come in, I feel like, every time we do one of these webinars, and I totally get it, from folks who are saying, "We're either, we're really small," or, "We have this kind of context," like some very specific context where, "Our parents, staff, team or the staff team at the main nonprofit is this size, but we support all these other nonprofits."

And so, the beautiful thing about this is, and this is what we want to emphasize when we're talking about what kinds of learning and development solutions, approaches, structure, strategy, can you as an organization [ensure] — and we're going to get to this here in just a minute — that you're thinking about your individual development? You're thinking about change. You're thinking about how you communicate with each other. You're thinking about the environment.

All of these things apply to every organization, apply to every nonprofit, so you don't have to get hung up on, "Oh, we need some very large, expensive approach to learning and development that's going to impact all of these things in our culture." If we can keep these fundamentals in mind, as we're building whatever our strategy is, and again, we're going to get to this question here, just on the next slide. Thinking a little bit about this, and we want to hear from you all, about what supports and what creates barriers.

But, again, we don't have to have some huge, elaborate approach. We can really, again, it takes the intentionality, it takes thinking through all these different aspects of culture, so I love that you raised this.

Juliet Jason: Absolutely. Absolutely, thank you so much, Alex, for bringing that context, because I think it is so important to know that this is happening in large organizations, small organizations, organizational culture is across that. But with this particular course, we'll get into it, and I'll provide a little example. I love to tell a few stories here and there because it kind of gives context.

So, I'll give you all a minute to read this quote, but I'll read it as well.

"Organizational learning, development and planned change cannot be understood without considering culture as the primary source of resistance to change." That's an Edgar Schein quote, as well.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

But my example with this is, as the feedback comes in, my example with this is, in the last year or so, I was working on a project where we wanted to introduce some technology for one of our projects. And this particular task, we wanted to streamline the task. And this particular task had been taking forever to complete, and there were so many different departments that were doing this task.

And as we're introducing the software, there were different options and so one department decided to use this particular software, but at the same time, they still had Excel. And they were still updating and doing this task with Excel. And we asked, and we went on the road shows and went and asked all these different questions, and we asked them, why is it that you're still using Excel and we've spent all this money in buying this software?

They said, "Well, we know that. We've known that a lot of the ... We're not quite sure. We like to stay with our old way of doing things." And I think Alex touched on a little bit about that: We like the old way of doing things and because we like the old way of doing things, we're going to stick to it until we're really, really sure that the software really, really works. And not only sticking to the old ways, and also, because anything that was introduced in terms of new solutions took forever, and because it has taken forever, you want to stick to it because you're just not sure.

That's just an example [that] you may want to introduce change, you may want to introduce learning and we've talked about DEI learning as well. You may want to introduce all of those. But you have to think about, where are you coming from? What is the culture of that organization? It could be subcultures as well.

Alexandra Taylor: And I think, one of the things that you highlighted here, Juliet, and then I'm going to go to our next slide so we can start getting some responses to this next question, these next couple of questions, because I think this kind of relates to it. While everyone is thinking about these two questions, we want to get some responses from you all on both of these.

What are the aspects that support, and what are the aspects that create barriers to learning?

I think when going back to your example about change, I think one of the things that I just have heard over and over from nonprofits that I'm working with, and this was certainly my experience when I was in the nonprofit world directly in a large nonprofit organization. It was large, but resources were limited in different places. And so, frequently, what's going on is, we have a very lean staff team, right? And everybody's maybe doing more than one person's job. We're stretched thin.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

And so, then, when something comes that's a new way, whether it's a technological tool or some new approach, there's sometimes the resistance because I just don't feel like I have the bandwidth or the time, right? And we haven't, in our culture, we have not figured out how to carve that time out in a way that gives people permission, right, to lean into new ways of doing and being and thinking.

So, I think we want to think about that.

A couple of things that we got related to this question and then I'll let Rose jump in and share with us, and Juliet, you as well. No matter the size of the organization, it takes strategy and planning to ensure that what you're offering to your staff aligns with their learning needs. And there are so many options out there. So, this gets at, we got multiple questions about, what specifically should we ... be looking at online? Should we be looking at things like LinkedIn Learning or other different kind of on demand ... what you want to do, there's not one answer to this, it is [about]: What is my staff schedule? Availability? Interests? So, whether you do a survey or focus groups, then design an offer in a way that aligns with that. So, again, it's going to look very different.

Some folks were talking about schedules, where not all the staff could be together in one space, even virtually, at the same time because everybody's working different shifts. So, maybe that type of learning isn't going to work right now, but what are some things we can offer that allow us to reinforce some things that we want to make sure are available?

I will just give this one thing: Survey your knowledge base internally as well.

There might be people on your staff who can help, and who love to train and have an expertise, so it's not always about having to tap some external resource. What are some of your internal resources? Particularly, if you are a smaller organization, you're trying to be really creative in what you offer, and hearing from someone within your peer group or within the organization can be deeply powerful.

I will say this about online and virtual learning. I think it can enhance what you offer, but depending solely on self-driven tools, or things that are sort of more low interactivity, will only impact so much of your culture, right? This is where we kind of come back to that, can L&D just solve some of these problems? Can I just offer a training? And that same kind of thing, right? There's a lot of other things where we need to be creating connection, times and places in person, or if your team is remote and you don't have the budget to bring them together, creating virtual time for brainstorming, idea creation and connection, right?

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

So, not just saying, “Oh, well, if we just offer these few online trainings that people can just do on their own time, I'm sure that's going to get at some of the culture we're trying to build,” but recognizing it can be a piece of it, but we've really got to be, again, coming back to that intentionality and structure.

Juliet Jason: Yeah.

Alexandra Taylor: And strategy.

Juliet Jason: I want to say something just with what you said to add. I know we're going to the audience here.

But then learning from each other. Leaning in on the subject matter experts, and the executives, if you're large or small, your CEO. It would be great to have your CEO choose a topic and then teach it to you, I think a lot of organizations are doing that, as well.

Because if we talk about a topic ... bring a special person in, they'll talk about a very general perspective. But then, if you are able to have somebody who is telling you about the concept and then applying those concepts in the context of your organization, I think it's so important.

And then when it comes to things like timing, some organizations, what they did is if they are all having annual meetings or monthly meetings ... the experiences that I have is monthly meetings. You have a meeting for an hour and a half, an hour is the business, and then the other half we're hearing from our experts. That's another way. We already are on the schedule, then sharing knowledge that way. I think that that is something else that has been used before.

Alexandra Taylor: Yeah ... trying to create additional time for things just doesn't work.

So, again, you know your organization. Ask your people, listen to your people, going back to what Juliet said, don't make assumptions that you think you know. Lean in and hear from them.

So, Rose, any responses to these two questions that you want to share with us?

Rose Gebken: Yes, we have some great responses coming in right now. For the first one, one of the support pieces that attendees are noting is that everyone is learning together.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

So, on the support side, some organizations are experiencing that everyone's learning together, and they're having experiences with organization-wide learning.

On the barrier side, that same point. Some organizations are experiencing that their leaders are talking about it, but maybe not engaging in L&D themselves. And so, they're wondering how to move forward, and what's the best approach there.

Other organizations, in terms of their barriers, are seeing that there's a lack of clarity and messaging around the learning opportunities, so they have them, it sounds like, but the employees aren't clear on being able to access them.

Then, another organization was saying that they have a situation where they don't understand their potential barriers, but on the flip side, they understand that as soon as they can get clarity around this, it can allow them to address it.

So, it sounds like there's a combination of some positives that people are seeing and then, also some challenges.

Alexandra Taylor: Yeah, I'll speak to a couple of these and then, Juliet, if you have anything. I think we've got a couple more slides to share and then we'll get into some more audience questions.

But I think going, and Rose, correct me if I missed something, I think one of the things talked about [with] the leadership is talking about how important L&D is, but they're not actually, maybe, participating themselves or demonstrating that it's valued in different ways. And I think this goes back to kind of where Juliet and I started in terms of where you have influence and impact.

So, I want to be, I want to be honest and transparent that if leadership is not committed by being a part of the learning journey, whatever your learning journey looks like, by asking those questions about culture. And how what we do formally in learning and development is going to reinforce and build and change and shift things within the culture that we want to have happen, it is going to be challenging, and you may feel like your impact is limited.

On the other hand, if you sit on a team, if you lead a team, if you manage people, you have an opportunity to have influence. And I know, I have sat in seats and been in situations where I recognized that my influence might just be right here with a group of maybe 10 or 15 people that I was, that were part of a team with me. But I leaned in as much as I could. It didn't completely remove some of the frustration maybe over things not happening across the whole organization the way I wanted to see happen. But, I was able to lean into that.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

I think the other piece about the — I love that that question was raised around, I'm not totally sure what the barriers are. So, I think that goes back to thinking about maybe things that you've tried. What is your current strategy? What does that even look like? And then, asking your people.

We offer, maybe, “We offer these things. We've noticed that only [X] percentage of the staff have leaned into this learning and development opportunity. What is keeping you from being able to do it?” You have to ask your folks, right? You can't, we can't make assumptions here. We've got to ask our people to find out exactly what's going on and what might be keeping them from engaging.

So yeah, Juliet, any other responses?

Juliet Jason: Yeah. I think you said it very well in terms of influence. I think if you are able to influence your group of two or three or your group of 10, then you can be able to change behavior that way.

The other thing when it comes to that is, sometimes, you may ... know other people who are in senior positions who can influence. I think that strategy has been used before, and then share your visions. Share your ideas for that. It doesn't, may not, always go all the way to the top, but that's a strategy a lot of people use.

Then, adding to that is, a lot of times when, and this has happened when I've worked with different organizations, you want to promote a certain change, and not everybody is going to be honest, but what we always say is, “Build it, and then they'll see the impact.” When we've talked about what's the feedback, what is the impact, if you build it, if you are able to change your behavior and you're seeing that you're impacting the bottom line, you're impacting efficiency, you're impacting engagement, then other groups are able to see what has happened. And they always come, and you are more like a best practice. Not necessarily your best practice, but what are you all doing over there? We want to be able to see that that change can be done in our group, as well.

Alexandra Taylor: I think one of the things we haven't talked about maybe directly, but this is what's coming up for me as we're talking about this, is that these things take time.

Juliet Jason: They do. I agree.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

Alexandra Taylor: So, culture took time to build and to get to where it is and to shift it, through all the different things we're talking about, and learning and development is a piece of that. It just takes time to start to see the impact, and so sometimes you're planting seeds. I frequently think about that in my role as someone who delivers a lot of training and coaching, that I am planting seeds, right? My hope, for all of my nonprofits that I serve and that I'm working alongside of, is that some of what we're doing — Yes, it may land, and someone may be ready to hear this today and ready to shift behavior and ready to lean into a new way of being, [but] for some folks, this is going to take longer. And then, if we're talking about this as part of an overall strategy for the organization, yes, absolutely.

So, this is the tension of things are uncertain, things are changing, things are complex, things are ambiguous and at the same time, I have to give some things some time. That is, I think, one of the hardest things in terms of being a leader and figuring out what is the interplay of that, right?

Juliet Jason: Well said, Alex. It's like moving a ship. You want the ship to go in a certain direction, but it's going to take a really long time to get that ship to actually move.

Alexandra Taylor: Yes, absolutely.

All right, let me get my ...

All right, so we're going to end with a couple of slides here looking at characteristics of a learning organization. And then we've got a couple of more questions for y'all, we're making you work today for this webinar. We want to hear from you.

Yes, Juliet and I have some perspective and expertise and some experience, but we recognize that there is a lot of that out there within the organizations and nonprofits that are represented here today on our call. So that's why we're giving you so many opportunities to share what's working and where your frustrations are.

So, I love this. Again, this comes from how we demonstrate value of an organization's learning culture. And you can see the reference on the bottom of the slide. But there's all kinds of things built in here that are, when we look at an organization that values learning, that has embedded learning, it's showing up in all these different characteristics.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

It's designed into work, so that people can learn on the job. If we had more time, we would go into sort of the model of learning. And that, yes, the formalized approach of training of specific formalized, called out, set aside time for training and learning and development is very important. But a huge part of how you're going to have a learning culture is that, in the work itself, in the things that people are doing day-to-day, it's designed into the work so that people can learn as they're moving through their job.

There's inquiry and dialogue.

People can express views, and we have the capacity to listen, and then to ask about views of others. So, it's this very healthy space of being able to ask questions and have dialogue around different perspectives.

Then, we have team learning, so it's not just the kind of continuous learning that's happening, maybe for me as an individual contributor, as someone who's part of the staff, but groups are expected to learn together and work together, and that the collaboration is valued by the culture and rewarded.

So that is a critical piece of this.

We have this kind of thing where we're talking about an embedded system, so there's high and low technology systems, that shared learning that's created. So, it's mobile learning, microlearning, different ... Whatever we can do so that we're getting access and we're maintaining those systems so that people can kind of engage in those spaces of technology, where what is being learned is being shared, and that it's integrated in with our work.

Then, we have empowerment as a piece of this, that we're involved as individual people, as people as part of organizations and nonprofits, in setting, owning and implementing a vision. That responsibility is distributed close to decision making so that everyone is motivated to learn towards what we're held accountable to do.

So, this is where we talked about some of the metrics and the piece of if we're going to embed it, if we're going to be a learning culture then there also has to be a feeling of, "I know what I'm moving towards. I know what's expected of me." I think this is where competencies can come in really well, when it comes from a talent management and culture perspective. Because I know, it's very clear. It's not super subjective. It doesn't feel like I don't understand what I'm doing to move myself towards it.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

The system connection piece, right, where you can see the effect of our work on all, the whole organization, we can look around and use information to adjust, and we're connected in with our communities. For nonprofits, so critical, right? That we understand the impact, and this is part of how we learn, so yes, there's learning happening internally within organizations, but a huge part of this is we're listening to the communities that we serve, and that learning that we're experiencing there is also impacting us and causing us to shift and change. Huge.

Strategic leadership, obviously fundamental to this, that the leadership models, champions and supports learning. I know that goes back to one of our questions we got earlier, and that the leadership is using learning strategically to really deepen and increase the impact that you all as nonprofits are having on the communities that you're serving and the incredible mission work that you're doing.

So, one of our last questions before we get to your questions is around this, because we wanted to land with what creates the foundation for this. And what we're talking about is all of this learning, all of this work, the organizational culture, the characteristics of a learning organization. This is a foundation for leadership development, right?

So, how are we building our leaders through our culture? And what is the role of leadership in making sure that we're creating and building that learning culture? We just saw those characteristics.

So, I'm going to let you all respond. How are we building our leaders through our culture?

Then, for those of us who sit in leadership positions, what can we do to ensure that we create and build that learning culture ourselves? So, this is kind of two parts of the same question.

Juliet, do you have some thoughts about this before we hear from our audience?

Juliet Jason: Yeah, when I think about leadership development, I always think about one of [my projects] and I have to give an example that I worked on years ago where it's more like, is it the chicken or the egg? Is it the leadership? Is it the training, the learning, or is it actually the culture?

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

So, in this organization, they had a very comprehensive leadership development program, and then, it went away. And this leadership development program had promoted leaders, had prepared the leaders. But when that went away, nobody really wanted those leadership positions. And there was so much turnover in those leadership positions, so what they had to do is go out, and what we had to do is go out and ask.

It goes back to ask, listen and implement. You have to go and see, what's the problem? And it meant that a lot of these people who came into these leadership positions were not prepared. They were not prepared to take on those leadership positions. We need to be able to teach these people.

Are we building bench strength? We hear the word bench strength. Are we preparing our people? Are we teaching our leaders that, we're no longer going to be managing – we're not micromanaging. There are other skills that we need to learn in terms of developing others as a leader. You're developing others, you're managing the work of other people.

And so, I always go back to, we have to be able to create a culture, which empowers and trains and prepares and develops leaders, and to be able to be open. It goes back to what I was talking about earlier on. Individual development and change and interactions and an open environment.

So, how we build the, it goes back to the chicken or the egg? Was there training? Was there no training before? And what the influence is.

And so, when, I worked in that project, we're able to develop two leadership development programs where we had those people who are in those particular positions and gave them all of the skills that were necessary. And we had CEO buy-in. And we had these projects where all the participants were able to work on these projects that influenced the culture of the organization, that influenced the bottom line of the organization. And so, when we came to the next cohort, everybody wanted to be part of this leadership program and it became very exciting.

So, I think it's so important to be able to first find out, what is the issue? Why is this not happening anymore? And why are some of these positions not attractive anymore?

And then, it's so important to build. Sometimes it's better to build than to buy. I think a lot of small organizations would say, it's better to build than to buy, because some people may come in, they might have experience, but then they might not have the context of the organization. And the other people who've worked in these organizations for a very long time, they just need the necessary skills to just go to the next level.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

Alexandra Taylor: Yes. And I think one of the things, and I want to hear, Rose, what responses we're getting, but I'll just say ending ... on what Juliet was saying of this key piece of leadership development is, again, around intentionality and preparing your people for that next role.

Many, many organizations, and I ... experience this within the nonprofit sector, was — yes, someone was an outstanding program director and so had a lot of competency and skills, technical skills, in an area. And so, we assume that they're going to now make a great manager or a great leader, moving into a place of supervising staff without preparing them, without giving them any specific expectations, without taking them through. And frequently this is happening because we're short-staffed, we have to move quickly, all those kinds of things.

But usually, it's to our detriment because sometimes folks can get in there, we throw them off the deep end and they are able to just start swimming and doing well. And other times, folks just are struggling and floundering because they didn't have any of the other experiences that really prepared them. And we didn't do enough intentional things to really develop them into that next role.

So, Rose, what responses did we hear back from our folks around these two questions?

Rose Gebken: Yeah, Alex, we're having some great responses from what's working for our audience.

Modeling is a big one, so kind of referring back to that struggle that another audience member was having earlier, that having leadership model their learning and development initiatives is really key.

Engagement and following up with staff on their learning journey. Making sure that staff feel like they can help drive strategic goals and tactics, so whatever that looks like for their organization, it sounds like that is effective. And then, giving them space to share this knowledge with others. And clarifying — some organizations are struggling with having a learning initiative but then staff don't feel like they really have the time and space, so clarifying how they are to incorporate that in their schedules sounds like a key piece as well.

Alexandra Taylor: Yes.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

So, you're going to have to, and I'm hearing this over and over again from nonprofits that I work with, frequently, when we ... set [an] intention when we come into a formal learning space, the big thing that I hear from staff when I'm saying, "What are you bringing in today?" is, "I'm feeling distracted. I'm going to do my best to stay focused for this hour or two hours that I have set aside for this, but it's really hard because I'm thinking about all the other work I get done."

Some of that, we can't just make it go away, but I think, I love that this is being brought up and people are wrestling with this because, again, we have to have conversations at the leadership level about, if we're saying that this is really important, that being a learning culture, that giving our staff space to develop personally and as members of this nonprofit and this organization, so that they can deepen their own growth and the impact we're having in the community, if we're saying that, how does that align with the workloads that our folks have? And the things that we keep saying yes to as nonprofits, which we tend to do?

And then, that's just piling on more action, more work, onto folks so that they feel all this conflict or, "I don't really have time to do this." "Yes, I would love to sit in a training on this," or "I would love to engage in a leadership program where I get to do this, this and this. But I cannot see how this is going to fit within all of the demands that I have."

Well, that individual staff person may only have so much control over that, so this really becomes a question for leadership, about the things that we're doing to create space and time and the ability for someone to be able to engage in this, so excellent question and reflection.

Juliet Jason: I really like that a lot.

One of the things that is so important, that comes up a lot is recognition, and I know we talked about it earlier on. I think recognition is one of the things that leaders need to do more often, especially with those people who feel like they're overwhelmed with all of the work that needs to get done. And it goes back to modeling, you're modeling that behavior and you're recognizing people for what they have done. I think that is so key as well.

Alexandra Taylor: Rose, anything else before we wrap with our last slide and then go to other questions that we may have gotten?

Rose Gebken: I'm just getting a lot of thanks, a lot of people are really appreciating this content. A lot of the questions — and we can go into this more in the Q&A — are looking for help in transferring knowledge into practice.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

Alexandra Taylor: OK, OK. Great. Well—

Rose Gebken: And then, that piece on how to make time and make sure that that actually happens when you have a learning initiative.

Alexandra Taylor: Great. Well, we'll have plenty of time, I think, to get to some questions here in just a moment.

Juliet and I kind of wanted to finish out with some things that we really thought about, the benefits for organizations, and I think we've touched on quite a bit of this already today. But it's encouraging and stimulating impact on the organization and on your community. It impacts employee engagement. So, when you have this culture of learning, and we touched on this. We could spend the whole time just talking about — we could spend the whole hour and a half talking just about this.

But what we're seeing over and over and over again, and I wish I had more time to bring in, there's a lot of studies that have been done out there, creating intentional space for learning. So, culture of learning. So, all the things we talked about: the characteristics of a learning culture, what are those aspects of it, but also the very tangible and formal and specific things that we do around creating space for staff to learn. It's really helping people decide and determine whether or not they're going to stay with an organization, with a nonprofit, or leave.

So, this is going to lead to less attrition and hopefully stronger morale. Because, again, we're saying, "We value you. We want you to be in a space where you can learn and grow. And here's how we're going to do it."

It promotes organizational agility and adapta — I can't speak now — adaptability, there we go, which we've talked about quite a bit throughout today.

Fostering innovation, right? Going back to our VUCA, where we started. That gives that opportunity. If we're a culture of learning, how we're going to respond to all the complexity and ambiguity and uncertainty that comes out a set of volatility is being innovative. And so, we have this culture of learning, we're incredibly well — more prepared, better prepared, well prepared, for the innovation that it's going to require.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

Better and faster decision making. When we're in a learning space, we can move through things and move through stuff that we're learning, and that knowledge that we're gaining, and move to those better decisions and being able to land on a decision hopefully a little more quickly. And it enhances good communication which kind of goes, again, it can go back to our characteristics.

So, these are all the things that, why having this is so important. Juliet, is there anything else you want to add to this before we go to our Q&A?

Juliet Jason: No, I think we got it all, and I think we've touched on a lot of it with all of the things that we presented today.

Alexandra Taylor: All right. Wonderful. Well, now we want to get to your questions, if I can get my cursor to respond here. It's going away.

Oh, technology. All right.

I'm going to stop showing, we're going to go to Q&A and then we have a couple more slides to show you, if we have some time.

So Rose, I'm going to stop my slides.

And there we go.

Rose Gebken: Absolutely. So, our first question today is looking for a resource.

Do you have an example of a staff survey around L&D, and anything you'd like to share around that?

Alexandra Taylor: Yeah. Yeah. We definitely have resources available.

What I'm thinking of are things that we have used. We do a lot of surveys in our assessment process. So, Nonprofit HR obviously does a lot of different types of assessments and we do some specifically around L&D. So ... I'm usually the one that's kind of creating those for clients when we're coming into a learning and development project, I try to build it around learning objectives.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

So, if there's some specific things that we've identified, maybe it's come out of an engagement survey or a culture survey where the staff have called out certain things that they really would love additional training, that they would like an additional development or these are topics that are really important to us. Then ... we will maybe measure some of that and ask some specific questions.

Again, it sort of depends on what you're hoping to gain from what you're doing in L&D. I would say ... shorter is better. Sometimes we have to use assessments that are really long and in depth. But I think if it's very specific to a learning and development approach, if there's some baseline sorts of things you want to understand, then I think you can ask a few questions.

I'm also a big proponent of focus groups.

So, I frequently do focus groups with clients before we start anything, before we finalize topics or talk about what are we going to, how is this all going to play out? And what do we sort of think the cadence is going to be? I want to hear from staff, so a survey can be really helpful, because you can reach more people, particularly if you're a larger organization, but focus groups, sometimes you get people to say things and open up, and the way they interplay with each other, you'll see dynamics that are at play. Or, if someone says something and six people in the group say, "Yes, that's it. That's the thing that we're struggling with as managers," there you go. I mean, you just heard something and there's an energy around that, right? That you don't always get from a survey.

So, I hope I answered what you're looking for. I, again, you can find lots of examples of things out there, but I would say, really think about, what is the information I'm trying to get? How am I ensuring that I'm getting the most voices heard and voices from all levels of the organization? That goes back to our equity grounding.

Juliet Jason: Absolutely. I agree with you, especially with the focus groups. I think that sometimes, with the surveys, you might have five different concepts that might come up, and you might build something the addressing those five concepts.

But if you go into the focus groups, you might have to put all your efforts into one, because everyone in the group says, "This is where the important piece is." So, I just wanted to agree with you on that as well.

Alexandra Taylor: Great. Other questions, Rose?

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

Rose Gebken: Yes. So, my next question is from an organization that sounds like they're just getting started with their journey with L&D, and they're wondering if there [are] any benchmarks on budgets for L&D? Getting started.

Alexandra Taylor: Benchmarks on projects. I'm going to try my best interpret.

Juliet, do you have ... I'm not totally sure.

Juliet Jason: Did you say benchmark on budgets or projects?

Alexandra Taylor: Oh, did you say budgets or projects?

Rose Gebken: Budgets.

Alexandra Taylor: Oh, sorry I misunderstood you. Thank you, Juliet.

I mean, no, I think ... that's the basic answer, no. Again, this kind of goes back to what we were saying. Look at who you are as an organization. Look at the resources you have internally. Think about who your people are and what they're telling you they want, as well as how that aligns with what's happening within your culture and your overall organizational strategy.

And you can even just start with something smaller, so it can be, I mean, you can offer, I would say, the most cost effective are things that are on demand. Probably some of the pre-packaged trainings that are sometimes available through different ... resources. The in-person, the customized, some of the things that we offer through Nonprofit HR, are usually more of a financial and time investment.

So, sometimes just starting with, are there some topics that our staff are identifying that we want to lean in on and create some space? And how does this align, again, with what we're trying to create overall within our culture? And let's start there.

And so, sometimes just even gathering a group of peers who are all kind of maybe at the same level of leadership. Let's have a discussion around a certain topic. We'll present, maybe somebody says, "I'll go with presenting, sharing some content or some ideas and then we can talk." Because what's going to happen from that is you're going to maybe advance some learning. You're going to hopefully offer people the opportunity to lean into their own learning journey, but you're also creating connection because that's a huge part of this, right? We want to build relationship and connection with each other through it.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

So, Juliet, I don't know if you have any other thoughts around kind of getting started.

Juliet Jason: I think that is so important. I think it's important to be able to understand the context and size and what your objectives are. I'm always a proponent for, what do you already have with you?

Before you even, sometimes it's — I understand the restrictions when it comes to budget, you have donations, you have certain funds that come in and you have this static budget that doesn't grow over the years, and so you have to find creative ways in which to share and transfer knowledge.

Rose Gebken: Thank you both. That was really helpful.

Our next question comes from an attendee who was wondering if you can go back for a moment to repeat the definition of a learning organization.

Alexandra Taylor: All right, yes, I can. Give me just a second ... I'll get my slides going.

So, I think when we look back to ... the definition of a learning organization, which is back a few slides, it is ...

Hold on, let me get to this, so I get this right.

“A learning organization is an organization skilled at creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge and it modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insight.”

So, it's the creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge and then modifying behavior to reflect new knowledge and insight. And that came from Garvin and we'll put, we'll have some of this to share in our resources afterwards as well.

I think that's the definition they were looking for ... I hope it was.

Rose Gebken: Thank you so much, Alex. I appreciate you doing that. And, as a reminder to our attendees, we will be sending out all the slides afterwards, as well, so that should answer a lot of those questions.

We are at the moment where we need to wrap up. That was all the time we have for our Q&A session, and I'd like to turn it back over to you, Alex and Juliet, for some final words.

Alexandra Taylor: Yeah, so we just have a quote up here.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

This actually came from a study that was just done, or an article that was just written, put out in March, just a few months ago. But I think the beauty in here is that, L&D does need to be focused on upscaling and rescaling, but to understand that it's so much more than just providing training. It's about building a culture of continuous learning. When I saw this, I was like, "Yes! This is the summing up of all the stuff we've been talking about today!" So, this is coaching, feedback, leadership, ownership, all the things we've been talking about today rolled into this and that really what L&D should be doing again, is that function, that tool, that resource, that builds that culture of continuous learning.

So, Juliet, yeah, any other final words around this, before we wrap up?

Juliet Jason: All I can say is that it never ends. It's continuous. I think the key word there is continuous and we're upscaling and rescaling. There are a lot of skills that might go obsolete, so what else can we learn? What else can we do to be able to be relevant? So, it's something that's continuous. Whatever you learned today may or may not be relevant tomorrow, and then we have to learn some more, but it's continuing to build it.

And then, I think the other thing is that we have to also remember, when we want to be able to learn, there is also after you provide the learning, what is the feedback that we're getting? And has that learning been effective or not? If it hasn't been, go back to the drawing board. I think that is so important.

Alexandra Taylor: Yes, absolutely.

Just a quick reminder — if I can get my slides to advance, there we go — our Strategy & Advisory team that Juliet and I both sit on, we have a lot of different tools and resources that we can offer to organizations. So, if any of these things that you're reading over on the screen are of interest to you, please don't hesitate to reach out to us.

Assessments. We develop strategies. I know someone has asked me about, how do you even get started? We do that work. Competencies, we talked about that. Learning and development tracks, we do a lot of those. We do advisory on demand just to give you insight into what you're doing when it comes to strategy and advisory, 360 assessments and ongoing coaching.

Here is our contact information, if you want to reach out to Juliet or myself.

When Organizational Culture Meets Learning and Development

And Rose, do you have a couple of final words to share with the audience?

Rose Gebken: Yes, thank you so much, Alex. I really appreciate you and Juliet for leading today's dynamic presentation.

And thank you to everyone who attended today's webinar. We hope you found it valuable.

There are several more webinars coming your way in 2022. Be sure to check out our events calendar at nonprofithr.com/events. Also, please be sure to complete the feedback survey that will pop up once the webcast has ended. Your comments help us with our planning and can inform the topics we cover in future webinars as well.

If you'd like more information about available services or support from Nonprofit HR, please email solutions@nonprofithr.com, or visit us on the web at www.nonprofithr.com.

And everyone, have a wonderful rest of your day.

Juliet Jason: Thank you.

Alexandra Taylor: Thanks, everyone.