RX for Culture Change:
Microlearning for Healthcare Teams

The challenges to achieving culture transformation in the healthcare workforce and how building a microlearning-based learning culture can help.

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- A strong healthcare network combines clinical excellence, patient-centered care, financial stability, and a commitment to innovation to deliver the best possible healthcare services to the community it serves.

- Cultural change is a vital step for most healthcare organizations, but it's often challenging to implement due to various factors: biases, a scarcity of role models, resistance to change, and a lack of commitment and time.

- These barriers to cultural change can be dismantled by building a supportive learning culture that cultivates a growth mindset among employees.

- Microlearning is a pivotal tool for creating a positive learning culture in the healthcare sector. Its approach revolves around easily digestible, accessible, and continuous learning, making it particularly effective in engaging even the most hard-to-reach and hesitant learners.

What defines success for healthcare organizations?

What defines success for healthcare organizations? While quality of patient care is a crucial factor, success also hinges on profitability, innovation, accessibility, skilled healthcare professionals, and the establishment of a reputable healthcare brand. These key elements collectively stem from the foundation of a robust organizational culture. Organizational culture in healthcare is a composite of shared values, ethical standards, attitudes, and behaviors exhibited by both the healthcare workforce and leadership. It is exemplified through interactions among healthcare staff and management, as well as the perception of the healthcare organization by the public and patients.

However, cultivating and maintaining a positive healthcare organizational culture is a challenging endeavor. This challenge arises due to the need for cultural evolution to align with the ever-changing healthcare landscape. **Changing a healthcare network's culture and moving it in a positive direction is difficult, to put it bluntly.**

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

Today's healthcare leaders face unique challenges when it comes to building a learning culture that leads to lasting change. But the good news is, advancements in professional development content, accessibility, and delivery can help HR and L&D teams lead the charge.

Culture Change in Healthcare:
Why is it necessary, and why is it so hard?

How do you know if your culture is strong, or if it needs reshaping? And if cultural change is necessary, how do you go about it? **Luckily, the skills needed to support a good culture can be learned.** One indicator of a robust healthcare culture is its unwavering commitment to advancing health equity throughout every tier of the health system.

Why Health Equity? Why Now?

COVID-19 brought profound transformations within the healthcare industry. It highlighted a stark reality – the virus disproportionately affected marginalized communities, reigniting the imperative of prioritizing health equity in healthcare. Health equity is the fundamental principle that every individual, regardless of their background or circumstances, should have an equal opportunity to receive the highest possible standard of service and outcomes.

Although the concept of health equity is not new, the post-pandemic era has propelled it into more frequent discussions. This increased attention has spurred new research into emerging trends and how healthcare networks can take proactive measures to address disparities and enhance patient care. The 2023 EY Health Equity Outlook Report analyzed the healthcare landscape and took away some interesting findings.

47% of respondents said a lack of shared understanding about health equity is a top three hindrance to progress.

60% of respondents developed a health equity plan in the last five years.

55% of respondents' organizations deliver learning to employees about health equity.

5 Ways Health Systems are Rapidly Changing

1

Evolving Healthcare Dynamics and Patient Expectations: Healthcare organizations face the ongoing challenge of delivering high-quality patient care efficiently, while also adapting to evolving healthcare landscapes. Success in this environment hinges on optimizing productivity and achieving better healthcare outcomes within resource constraints. Striking a balance between maintaining a fast-paced environment, preventing burnout, and ensuring continued teamwork, engagement, and satisfaction is paramount for delivering exceptional patient care.

2

Disruptive Technologies and Innovation: In healthcare, adapting to emerging technologies is crucial. There has been a significant transformation in the skills healthcare professionals need, expanding from purely physical competencies to include a growing reliance on technology. McKinsey Global Institute estimates that time spent by workers using advanced tech skills will increase by 50% by 2030. The same study anticipates more value placed on skills like creativity, critical thinking, and decision-making too, with growth in that area of 19% by 2030.

3

Culture Clashes Due to Acquisitions and Mergers: In healthcare, as in many other industries, mergers and acquisitions are increasingly common. However, the integration of two distinct healthcare organizations brings its unique challenges, particularly in harmonizing their respective cultures. Often, these organizations have different management styles, norms, and approaches to patient care. The inherent tensions that arise from these differences can lead to conflicts and disengagement among healthcare professionals.

4

A Focus on a More Diverse and Inclusive Talent Pool: To attract top-tier healthcare professionals, earn patients' trust, and gain public confidence, healthcare systems must be on board with a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Empathy, allyship, belonging — these have become much more than buzzwords in healthcare. They must be embedded into the culture. There must also be an understanding of why some will balk at efforts toward a more inclusive culture, and how to address and overcome resistance.

5

New Ways of Working in a Post-Pandemic World: Some remnants of COVID are here to stay. Telehealth and digital health options continue to be effective for many, and some health systems have transitioned non-clinical staff to a hybrid or remote schedule. But it can be difficult to build and maintain a healthy organizational culture under these circumstances. Leaders must find new and different strategies. They need to keep people motivated and engaged while also maintaining productivity and accountability.

Is a Culture Change Needed?

In the healthcare industry, leaders may sometimes be inclined to embrace the status quo or even tolerate a minor downturn in performance rather than acknowledging underlying issues within the organization's culture. However, it's crucial to recognize that addressing cultural concerns is imperative for fostering a safe and thriving environment for employees and the patients they serve.

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

You're missing benchmarks.

Every organization measures performance. Certain metrics can uncover a struggling health system culture. KPIs such as productivity, patient satisfaction, and profits may be stalled or steadily falling.

Innovation is at a standstill.

A poor company culture can snuff out creativity and innovation. The other red flags all feed into this. Not being able to hire and engage the best talent can stand in the way of problem solving and new ideas.

There's conflict and a lack of teamwork.

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

Signs that **Culture Change is Needed**

You can't attract or retain good talent.

High turnover and candidates turning down offers could mean that competing systems are paying more — or they're offering a better company culture. This problem requires digging into what's really sending people elsewhere.

Employees seem disengaged.

Are you making employees feel integral to the team? Is it psychologically safe for them to voice opinions? Are they recognized for their accomplishments? Do they have opportunities to learn and advance?

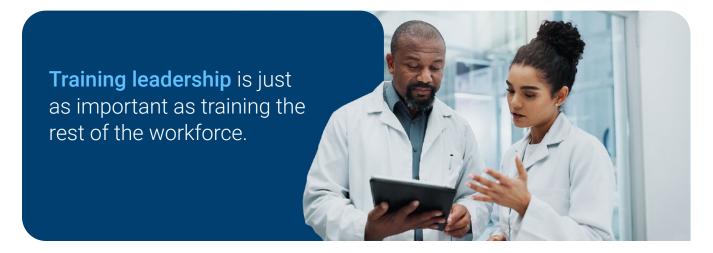# Why is it so Hard to Change Healthcare Culture?

Anyone who has ever tried to change their own habits can relate to the difficulty of changing a health system's culture. **It takes self-awareness on the part of leaders to first admit that change is necessary.** Then, it is a matter of setting goals and finding the tools to implement new practices. None of this is easy, but it can be done and is well worth the effort. One of the steps in tackling the task is to recognize the things that make it so hard.

Unconscious Bias

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

No Alternative Models for Behavior

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

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Resistance to Change

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

Lack of Commitment

Wanting change is not enough on its own. Organizations need to be ready to devote the time and resources to make it happen. And when it becomes challenging — and it probably will — leaders need to resist the temptation to give up. **One of the most impactful ways to change a culture is by making learning and development part of the culture.** An employee education program can address the issues that are holding back teams, and change the culture for the better.

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

Cultural change is difficult for a number of reasons. Unconscious bias, lack of role models, resistance to change, and lack of commitment all can hamper attempts to change organizational culture for the better.

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

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

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What is a Learning Culture and Why is it Important to Have One?

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

Employees in a learning culture are able to:

Develop valuable skills. A learning culture prioritizes ongoing skill development, allowing employees to consistently acquire new knowledge and expertise.

Adapt to change and solve problems. By learning to embrace change and understand new processes, employees are able to navigate uncertainty with confidence.

Collaborate. When learning opportunities are available across the health system, employees are likely to share insights and expertise among teammates.

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

At the same time, a learning culture helps employers:

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

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

Future-proof the health system. As employees learn, adapt, and embrace industry shifts and technologies, they become better prepared to address the needs of patients over time.

Employees Recognize Their Skills Gaps

The relationship between learning culture and growth mindset might sound like a "chicken and egg" situation — a growth mindset requires the right culture, but the right culture requires a growth mindset. How can L&D and HR professionals gain traction?

The reality is that many employees already understand where they have room to improve their skills and are eager to learn. In other words, they are simply waiting for management to meet their needs in this area.

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

With so much research proving that employees don't feel knowledgeable enough in their current positions, organizations must make learning a priority. So why aren't professional development programs meeting these needs?

The reasons are unique for each health system, but the general trends are easy to recognize: the fast pace of change in the healthcare industry, time constraints that make group training difficult to organize, and complex schedules and patient needs that can't be paused for extended training. So how can L&D and HR professionals help foster a learning culture, where knowledge is accessible to everyone, under these kinds of conditions?

The answer may lie in microlearning.

54%
of workers will need upskilling and reskilling by 2025.

85%
of employees know where they have skills gaps.

41%
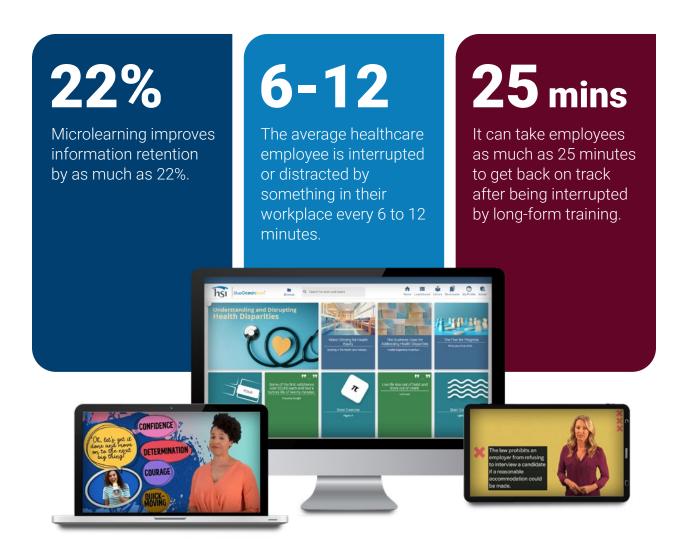believed their managers understood their gaps.

20%
of workers are confident they have the skills needed.

What is Microlearning?

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

22%
Microlearning improves information retention by as much as 22%.

6-12
The average healthcare employee is interrupted or distracted by something in their workplace every 6 to 12 minutes.

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

Microlearning allows people to consume and internalize a 10-minute learning experience without distraction, which is much more doable than absorbing what is taught in an hour-long seminar.

How Microlearning Helps Build a Positive Healthcare Culture

By investing in employees, they feel appreciated.

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

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

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would stay at a company longer if it invested in their career — yet the number one reason those employees felt held back from learning was **because they didn't have enough time.**

Soft skills such as **creativity, effective communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking** can all be cultivated and are integral to the cultivation of a more dynamic healthcare system.

Within the healthcare industry, professional development serves as a catalyst for innovation and sustainable growth. While innovation is a prominent objective for numerous healthcare organizations, nurturing it necessitates a workforce equipped with the requisite skills. Soft skills such as creativity, effective communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking can all be cultivated and are integral to the cultivation of a more dynamic healthcare system.

It is also incumbent upon healthcare organizations to emphasize the value placed on innovation. This entails fostering psychological safety within teams, creating an environment where employees feel confident expressing novel ideas. Additionally, it involves cultivating a culture of inclusion, ensuring that diverse perspectives and treatment options are not only heard but also earnestly considered, promoting a healthcare ecosystem that is innovative and patient-centric.

Employees learn at their own pace, as needed.

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

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

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

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

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

> Everyone processes learning differently, **and microlearning allows these differences to be supported more effectively than traditional training.**
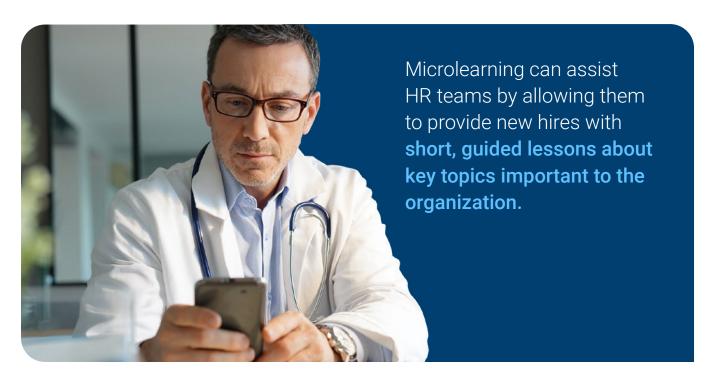
Other Benefits of Microlearning

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

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

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

It Can Save on Company Expenses. Instead of springing for airline tickets, hotel rooms, and conference fees, organizations can minimize spending by offering microlearning. With the money they save, they can invest even more in employee development.

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Getting Started With Microlearning for Culture Change

Of course, microlearning is not the only tool needed for cultural change, but it can be an easy one to implement. **Cultural change has to start somewhere, and building an effective learning culture, starting with microlearning, can be an effective first step.**

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

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

We can help! Contact us today for a consultation.

About HSI

HSI is your single-source partner for EHS, Compliance, and Professional Development solutions. HSI provides integrated e-learning content, training solutions, and cloud-based software designed to enable your business to improve safety, operations, and employee development. Across all industries, HSI helps safety managers, and technical employees, human resources, first responders, and operational leaders train and develop their workforce, keep workers safe, and meet regulatory and operational compliance requirements. HSI's focus is on training, software, and services for safety and compliance, workforce development, industrial skills, and emergency care. HSI is a unique partner that offers a suite of cloud-based software solutions including learning management, safety management, chemical SDS management, and more, integrated with content and training so businesses can not only monitor and manage multiple workflows in one system, but train employees via one partner.

For more information, visit **hsi.com**