

The LEAD Forward October Brief

Weather the storm by Centering Culture

Another round of job losses. Hard cost-cutting measures. Mergers on the rise. Growth ambitions which feel out of reach?

Across industries, companies are making tough choices to navigate economic shifts that feel increasingly volatile. While these actions are often necessary for financial stability or future survival, they expose a deeper, often overlooked truth: the strength of your organizational culture is what will ultimately determine how well you weather the storm.

In our traditional paradigm, we separate finances and culture into hard and soft categories—believing financial decisions are the only “necessary” actions to take in tough times, while culture is sometimes seen as “fluffy”. But what many executives are coming to realize, perhaps more urgently than ever, is that culture is far from soft. It’s the backbone of resilience, performance, and adaptability and financial decisions become part of our cultural DNA.

At times of crisis or major shifts or transitions, neglecting culture work can be costly. The erosion of trust, silos forming, disengagement spreading—these are the hidden risks that can cripple a company from within. Proactive, preventative, and post-crisis culture work is not an add-on; it’s a strategic investment that directly impacts your organization’s ability to thrive, even in uncertain times.

What does this look like in reality? A recent example

A global German engineering firm was starting to feel the impact of recent cost-cutting measures and dialing down on their strategic projects. The sense of trust and cohesion was slipping away and performance starting to follow suit. With fewer personnel and higher demand, team members found themselves stretched to their limits. The workload increased, but the support systems didn’t. With less resources, there were fewer chances for spontaneous problem-solving or collaboration. Meetings became rushed and transactional, focused only on the immediate tasks at hand, often avoiding the topics and questions that were really on everyone’s minds. The sense of belonging and shared vision that had been a cornerstone of the company’s culture was fading. Individualism and self-protective behaviors were more prominent. While they had succeeded in cutting costs in the short term, they were seeing the real cost in the long run in their culture and performance.





Strong Culture = Resilient Company

In moments of uncertainty, strong identity and connection is key. Teams that feel connected to each other and to a common purpose or intention will adapt faster, perform better, and remain engaged, even when facing difficult changes. Organizations that intentionally build connected cultures can weather crises, retain top talent, and emerge stronger. Cultural adaptation work that focuses on building shared vision, team cohesion and communities, and interconnectedness is one of the best ways to ensure your company stays resilient and adaptive when crisis and change emerge.

Here's how our clients are getting started with strengthening their culture:

- Thoroughly understanding your cultural “as is”: get support with a proper culture assessment to understand where you stand and what needs to evolve
- Creating intentional cultural strategic roadmaps and interventions with clear impact measures that adapt as the company does
- Equipping executives and managers with the communication and interaction tools and support they need to guide their teams through change
- Developing clear, compelling vision and change stories with a clear ‘why,’ ‘how,’ and ‘what’
- Developing leadership skills and rewarding role models
- Hosting transparent, open conversations between leadership and employees, such as “Ask Me Anything” sessions, to foster trust

By investing in culture—whether it’s re-establishing values, empowering leaders with the right skills, fostering communities, or creating transparent spaces for dialogue—you can lay the groundwork for resilience. This is the work we do. We help organizations not only survive turbulent times but build cultures that will sustain them long after the crisis has passed. Reach out to Maj Seider (Maj.Seider@lead.berlin) for a 15-minute explorative call.

Learn about how we support companies like yours: www.lead.berlin