

# CEMEX Drives Critical Business Outcomes through Capability Academies

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# A Global Construction Materials Company

CEMEX is a global construction materials company comprised of four core businesses: manufacturing cement, producing ready-mix concrete, selling aggregates (an essential component of concrete), and providing urbanization solutions for the construction and maintenance of sustainable and resilient cities. CEMEX was founded in 1906 in Mexico and has grown into one of the largest global building materials conglomerates operating today. With more than 46,000 employees worldwide, CEMEX operates in the Americas, Europe, Middle East, Asia, and Africa, and delivers products and services in 96 countries worldwide.

CEMEX's mission is to create sustainable value by providing industry-leading products and solutions to satisfy the construction needs of global customers. Its global workforce is unified around a shared purpose of building a better future for employees, customers, shareholders, investors, suppliers, and the local communities CEMEX serves. Five strategic priorities drive its mission and purpose (see Figure 1), and these priorities are embedded throughout projects and initiatives and supported and reinforced through company-

Summary
<b>Challenge</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Updating legacy systems to coincide with modern technology.</li> <li>Aligning learning with strategic business priorities.</li> <li>Amplifying the impact of learning programs.</li> </ul>
<b>Solution</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Internal traditional trainings transitioned into capability academy trainings.</li> <li>Business leaders and experts delivered relevant and impactful learning.</li> <li>CEMEX aligned experts, experiences, and assignments to support the learning applications.</li> </ul>
<b>Results</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CEMEX's business leaders successfully codesigned academies with CEMEX University.</li> <li>CEMEX University recorded a 90% learner satisfaction rate and 70% net promotor score.</li> </ul>

Figure 1: CEMEX'S Mission, Vision, and Priorities



Source: CEMEX, 2021

wide processes. Global learning serves as a critical enabler for building the capabilities needed to advance the priorities.

## CEMEX University: A Trusted Advisor and Strategic Enabler

CEMEX University is the company's trusted learning advisor that enables a continuous learning ecosystem for employees and supports the development of business capabilities required to implement the business strategy. To modernize and upskill CEMEX's global workforce, CEMEX University works in concert with functional and regional leaders (who act as executive sponsors) to respond to the multiregion and multibusiness learning needs of employees.

### Advancing Strategy through Capability Academies

*A capability academy is an architected collection of learning programs, content, experiences, assignments, and credentials based on a functional area of a company. It is sponsored and driven by the business with a designated capability leader who helps HR understand and address employee and business needs, areas for improvement, design programs, and experiences. Employees are invited to participate in the academies by their senior leaders and in some cases by the chief executive officer (CEO).*

CEMEX'S capability academies are an important lever that advances the company's strategic priorities. These academies are designed to be flexible between traditional, in-person training and best-in-class, digital-learning platforms. CEMEX University codesigns academies with business leaders and internal and external experts to determine goals, success metrics, instructional content, and business-specific assignments. The academies are directly aligned with one or more of CEMEX's strategic priorities.

Today, CEMEX University's program portfolio comprises seven functional academies and a suite of leadership development programs (see Figure 2 on the next page). To support talent development across regions and enhance global collaboration,

also on offer are a digital library of curated content, which is frequently updated, and online language courses for English, Spanish, Chinese, German, and French, among other languages.

### CEMEX University's Seven Academies and Programs

- **Health & Safety Academy** empowers leaders to understand and assume their responsibilities and duties to transmit a culture of health and safety practices to their teams.
- **Commercial Academy** helps sales managers and executives prepare to hold successful commercial interactions with customers. This is in alignment with CEMEX's commitment to customer centricity and the company's new commercial model<sup>1</sup>.
- **Culture & Values Academy** promotes the integration of ethics and compliance into daily activities by building awareness around confidentiality, unconscious bias, workplace harassment, conflict of interest, anticorruption, and fraud prevention.
- **Supply Chain Academy** trains participants to work together across functional domains of the supply chain in order to align the organization toward the delivery of a superior customer experience.
- **Digital Academy** helps employees understand what factors are driving the company's digital transformation, new ways of working, and underlying technologies that help achieve CEMEX's digital vision, accelerate growth, and deliver customer value.
- **Cement Operations Academy** supports CEMEX's commitment to operational excellence by reinforcing—in all future plant managers—the production, maintenance, quality, and environmental aspects involved in successfully managing their teams and the cement plants.
- **Sustainability Academy** supports the company's sustainability goals by providing a common understanding of climate challenges and CEMEX's agenda to address them.
- **Leadership Development Programs** provide high-potential executives with the business acumen and leadership skills needed to successfully develop in their roles and rely on teamwork to solve specific business challenges.

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1 ["Our Model"](#) CEMEX/Cemex.com, 2022.

Figure 2: CEMEX University's Program Portfolio

Academy	Available Courses	Academy	Available Courses
<b>CXU Commercial Academy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leap 1.0 Sales Program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ 13 Online Learning Modules</li> <li>◦ The LEAP Podcast</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Value before Volume</li> </ul>	<b>CXU Cement Operations Academy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cement Operations—Foundations course</li> <li>• Operational Excellence Essentials course</li> <li>• Cement Quality course</li> <li>• Cement Production course</li> <li>• Cement Plant Maintenance course</li> </ul>
<b>CXU Culture &amp; Values Academy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ETHOS—Do the Right Thing course—Parts 1 and 2</li> <li>• Takeoff—onboarding course for new employees</li> <li>• Understanding Confidentiality course</li> <li>• Unconscious Bias course</li> <li>• Anticorruption Learning Pathway</li> </ul>	<b>CXU Digital Academy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital Foundations course</li> <li>• Emerging Technologies course</li> <li>• Taste of Agile course</li> <li>• Design Thinking course</li> </ul>
<b>CXU Supply Chain Academy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supply Chain Foundations course</li> <li>• Demand Forecasting Essentials course</li> <li>• Demand Forecasting Statistical Methods course</li> </ul>	<b>CXU Sustainability Academy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carbon Neutrality Essentials</li> <li>• Decarbonizing Our Operations</li> <li>• Selling VERTUA Sustainable Products and Solutions (also LEAP Module 13)</li> </ul>
<b>CXU Health &amp; Safety Academy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• M1: H&amp;S Foundations course</li> <li>• M2: H&amp;S Management System course</li> <li>• M2: H&amp;S Management of Pandemics Module</li> <li>• M3: H&amp;S Proficiency course</li> <li>• Foundations Trainer's toolkit</li> <li>• Proficiency Trainer's toolkit</li> </ul>	<b>CXU Leadership Development Programs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Envision Senior Leadership Program</li> <li>• Ignite Leadership Program</li> <li>• THRIVE Leadership Program</li> <li>• Connect Leadership Program</li> </ul>

Source: CEMEX, 2022

## Capability Academy Evolution at CEMEX University

Over the years, capability academies evolved from simply offering traditional training to being strategic enablers. This evolution breaks down into distinct phases (see Figure 3 on the next page) and explains the rationale and impact of capability academies in regard to driving business outcomes.

### The Evolutionary Phases, Explained

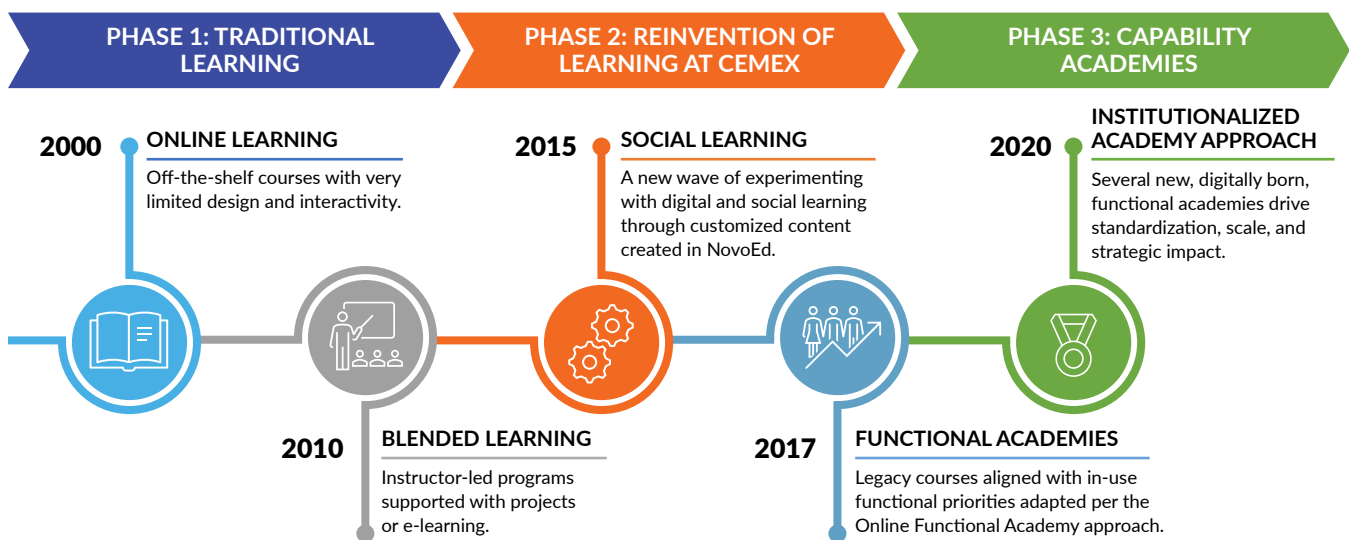
#### Phase 1: Traditional Learning—Online and Self-Directed

In the first decade of its existence, learning and development (L&D) made available a wide array of off-the-shelf, online e-learning courses that offered limited design and

interactivity. The modules and courses served learners well in the early 2000s, however, and represented the type of e-learning that was cutting edge at the time and used mostly for reskilling employees.

During this time, CEMEX used a traditional, legacy-learning-management system (LMS) to deploy content. To support the media included in the courses, some required supplemental CD-ROMs, which were shipped separately. Aside from CEMEX's existing, on-the-job-learning program, its leadership development programs (at the time) relied mostly on senior academic faculty from world-class universities delivering international management best practices. This occurred as the company was undergoing significant-international expansion. These programs, ambitious as they were, were somewhat limited in scope and reach, yet they presented opportunities in their applicability and effectiveness.

Figure 3: The Evolution of CEMEX University—Key Milestones



Source: CEMEX, 2022

## Phase 2: Reinvention of Learning—Blended and Collaborative

The L&D function at CEMEX continued to evolve and mature over its first decade—from a traditional and self-directed learning function focusing on skill building to a strategically integrated learning function focusing on delivering business-aligned, contextualized, tailored leadership skills; The function had transitioned into a capability building approach, supporting the company's transformation efforts.

As technology and the internet became faster and became more accessible, CEMEX started to design more blended learning programs that offered a mix of instructor-led and media-rich e-learning courses while also experimenting with elements of social and collaborative learning.

### Business-Aligned Content and Programs

CEMEX prioritized health and safety as one of its core values in an effort to ensure a safe return home for all employees every day; it aimed for zero fatalities and zero injuries. To support this goal, CEMEX introduced a Health & Safety Leadership course, specifically designed to minimize accidents by focusing on the manager's responsibility to be actively

involved and to lead their teams' safety practices. This course was designed to be facilitated by an instructor, with some supporting digital content. Using similar modules, CEMEX subsequently developed courses on leadership, supply chain, customer centricity, and other topics.

### A Reinvigorated Focus on Optimizing Learning

In 2014, Fernando Gonzalez took the reigns as the CEO of CEMEX. He was a business executive who had been an employee for years and had worked his way up the ranks. Gonzalez immensely valued the importance of learning and leadership development in his own growth as well as the growth of the entire CEMEX workforce. Gonzalez was committed to building ONE CEMEX<sup>2</sup> and standardizing business practices to their peaks. His interests provided a platform to launch a new generation of leadership programs, converting CEMEX University into an enabler of business strategy for CEMEX and a driver of business transformation. "As Fernando focused on building a truly global company, CEMEX University took on a new dimension; it became a lever for transformation and a conduit through which CEMEX's best practices became available to our people through our programs," said Director, Global Social Impact Beatriz Tumoine.

<sup>2</sup> ONE CEMEX refers to one of CEMEX's core values: the idea of sharing ideas globally to maximize individual contributions.

As a strong advocate of learning and leadership, under the stewardship of Gonzalez, L&D embarked on a journey of experimentation and reinvention to transform learning. Several factors served as impetuses for the transformation:

- **A commitment to standardize business practices.** The company had grown significantly over the years through organic expansion and global acquisitions. Some competing practices and learning initiatives surfaced in different regions and an opportunity arose to standardize and align global learning efforts with the right skills, principles, and approaches.
- **A need to scale across regions.** CEMEX needed to scale its former instructor-led programs with a geographically dispersed workforce using various languages. Translating global courses into such languages as English, Spanish, French, German, Polish, Croatian, Czech, Arabic, and Hebrew became a constant challenge.
- **A need to adapt to culture change.** The workforce demographics changed when newer, younger, and more digitally connected workers entered the workforce. They wanted to try new things, collaborate, connect, and be approachable to their teams.
- **An ongoing digital transformation.** Many processes and ways of working in CEMEX were already being transformed and optimized using digital technologies; thus, experimenting with new ways of learning made sense.

### *Exploring New Approaches: Igniting a New Era of Learning*

In 2016, CEMEX University started experimenting with social and collaborative learning with a focus on leadership development for its new generation of leaders. The goal was to design programs that focused on making successful leadership transitions in participants by bringing internal expertise, knowledge, and practice together to train the future leaders of the organization.

“When we decided to create an entirely new set of programs, we started off with ACHIEVE, using our own current set of challenges as cases for study, and our own leaders as teachers. As newer learning technologies became available, ACHIEVE evolved into “Ignite,” a completely new program that took participants through an online and offline collaborative learning journey. It transformed the leadership development experience at CEMEX,” said Global Planning & Development Director Eduardo Santos.

Ignite’s original design included an online phase followed by a week-long residential session in Atlanta, Georgia. After that was a two-month, project-based phase, and finally a wrap up with a week-long residential session in Prague, Germany. While there, projects were presented and participants were evaluated. Ignite brought together internal experts in a highly personalized and interactive online environment, along with facilitated, instructor-led sessions and real-work projects, exposing participants to senior leadership, setting a new gold standard for learning at CEMEX.

### *Partnering with the Right Technological Enabler*

CEMEX explored technological partners who could enable standardization, scale, and social learning and chose NovoEd, a social-and-collaborative e-learning platform that helps organizations design customized, leader-led, self-directed learning experiences. The platform offers cohort-based, facilitated-learning journeys with integrated live events, exercises, leader-led collaboration, mentoring, and assessments.

NovoEd became the central platform for Ignite. “All of a sudden, people were exposed to a platform where they didn’t have to click their way through, but rather get prompted to interact and engage and to respond to learning challenges in new ways, like turning in online team assignments or submitting video responses. They would then get feedback from mentors and senior leaders. It completely transformed the notion of what online learning was at CEMEX. It was a game changer,” said Global Head of CEMEX University Luis F. Gonzalez.

Ignite set a new standard for digital-first, collaborative, and leader-led learning at CEMEX. It ignited a new era of learning and allowed CEMEX’s capability academies to flourish—a model that, until then, had only been applied by CEMEX through traditional instructor led programs.

### **Phase 3: Capability Academies—Business-Driven and Leader-Led**

By 2017, CEMEX had institutionalized the use of capability academies as the approach for enabling leader-led, collaborative, and business-critical skill development connected to CEMEX’s strategic priorities. Simultaneously, it transformed the L&D function, formerly known as CEMEX Learning, into CEMEX University.

CEMEX University leveraged The Commercial Academy and the Supply Chain Academy as starting points to redesign and transform many strategically valuable legacy programs and relaunch them as functional academies while the company continued to adapt older programs to digitally enabled, collaborative, cohort-based formats. Several of the newer academies were launched digitally, including the Digital Academy, Culture and Values Academy, and Sustainability Academy.

As the number of digital programs grew, CEMEX introduced a learning experience platform that served as a discovery and personalization layer to browse and navigate through portfolios of academies and content. Learners could easily find and access relevant content and supporting experiences while an underlying skills-tagging capability allowed them to receive personalized recommendations.

## An Approach Driven by Business and Enabled by L&D

CEMEX's capability academies were strategically architected for business areas that are most critical. The academy programs were fully customized and aligned to the unique context of the business and supplemented with podcasts and videos curated as learning journeys. For other areas that are important but limited in scope or applicability, L&D enabled the teams to create and curate content outside of the academy concept and format; however, the role of the business was crucial as it participated throughout the entire development cycle and it owned the deployment of the programs.

Employees are invited to participate in these academies by their senior leaders and in some cases by the CEO, not only by HR. The programs are a blend of world-class digital and instructor-led programs, managed by the L&D function and driven by leaders. CEMEX's capability academies leverage a facilitated, cohort-based delivery model that integrates peer interaction, practice, and application with learning journeys optimized for different internal audiences. From program to program, interaction with leaders is delivered both offline and online, and the leaders who share their experience reserve time to respond to comments and questions from participants.

CEMEX University served as the central-learning team accountable to respond to the needs of the entire enterprise and a federated, fit-for-purpose governance supports its success. The central and regional functions operate as one integrated unit and set up academies aligned to the strategic priorities of the business. The programs are designed by CEMEX University and provide a global perspective on each topic. In their newest programs, regional L&D teams work with local business unit leaders to add the local perspective in the form of information toolkits, videos, and podcasts, which are embedded within each academy. Endorsement from local leaders and coordination with regional L&D teams bolsters the reception across regions; the programs have parallel versions in nine languages with several recorded videos from internal experts and leaders.

## Measurable Business and Learning Outcomes

"Each capability academy is designed to serve a specific need. For instance, reducing the number of accidents and fatalities, increasing safety awareness, improving customer satisfaction, supporting our digital transformation, and so on," said Luis F.

Gonzalez. Advancement along these specific needs enables measuring success in the form of tangible business outcomes above and beyond utilization and participation metrics. Since the launch of CEMEX's new era of digital and leader-led capability academies, it has seen substantial success in both business and learning outcomes.

### Tangible Business Impact

CEMEX has had several Health & Safety courses over the years, which have served their intended purpose and helped reduce the number of accidents and fatalities. During the early 2010s, CEMEX introduced a new global H&S leadership course with good results, but impact stagnated after a few years.

In 2017, CEMEX University redesigned this program into a safety leadership course, which became the Module I: H&S Foundations course as part of the Health & Safety Academy. In alignment with parallel initiatives, such as enhanced KPI



(key performance indicator) tracking, near-miss tracking and resolution systems, accountability, recognition to safety improvement, and top leaders' engagement, CEMEX was able to upend the stagnation and subsequently reduce the number of lost-time injuries by 78% and the number of fatalities by 82% between 2010 and 2020. Its Health & Safety Academy continues to be a fundamental component of the overall academy strategy.

Another example of tangible business impact is when CEMEX introduced a commercial model in 2020. A program called "Leap" launched through the Commercial Academy. Leap came together with multiple aligned initiatives, which together helped the commercial team achieve a 14% increase in revenue and an 18% growth in EBITDA<sup>3</sup>, CEMEX's highest in over a decade (see Figure 4). Leap was instrumental in helping the salesforce understand and apply the new commercial model and was a critical component for driving alignment and consistency, which contributed to the success of the larger initiative around building commercial capabilities.

## Learning Effectiveness

"We've been a month and a half into our course on carbon neutrality essentials, a part of our Sustainability Academy. The course created awareness about the role of our cement industry in regard to climate change, explains our Future in Action agenda<sup>4</sup>, and suggests what we can do to contribute

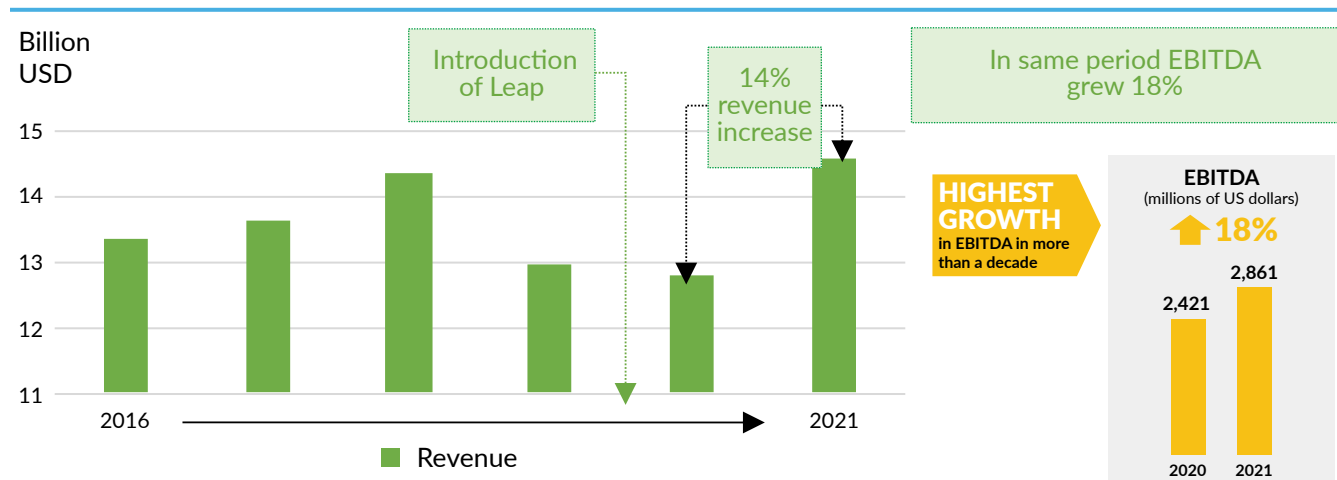
to a sustainable future. Already 12,000 people have completed the program," said Luis F. Gonzalez. Since the launch of CEMEX University, there has been a 5X increase in the number of participants across various academies. Currently, CEMEX University has touched almost 20,000 employees, with a 90% learner satisfaction rate and 70% net promotor score.

## Conclusion

CEMEX University has been a catalyst for helping CEMEX drive business outcomes, create a safe and collaborative workforce experience, and help employees build critical skills that enable them to be successful in their roles. In the future, CEMEX University aims to expand into new academies, as well as expanding the scope of existing academies to reach the extended enterprise such as customers and suppliers.

"One of the fundamental reasons that these programs are effective is our robust collaboration with our global leaders. It's not HR who develops these programs, or who asks learners to go through them. It's their own leader, their commercial leader, country president, or even our CEO. These learning programs are always part of a larger,

Figure 4: Leap and the Commercial Academy: Revenue and Growth



Source: CEMEX, 2021

<sup>3</sup> Earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization

<sup>4</sup> The Future in Action agenda focuses on CEMEX becoming a net-zero carbon dioxide company.



business-driven initiative and are designed to serve specific business needs. They are fundamental to accelerating our strategy,” said Executive Vice President of Digital and Organization Development Luis Hernandez.

## Lessons Learned

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CEMEX’s transition to digital and leader-led capability academies surfaced a few critical strategies that molded its approach and contributed to its success. Along with each strategy came an important lesson.

- **Align learning with business priorities.** Focus capability academies on specific business needs, while seeking support and sponsorship from business leaders.
- **Build effective internal partnerships.** Coordinating with business leaders, teams, and regional L&D teams help drive global adoption.
- **Identify the right technological enabler.** A capability academy needs to be strategically designed and technology enabled. Selecting the right vendor is critical.

## About the Authors



### Josh Bersin

Josh founded Bersin & Associates in 2001 to provide research and advisory services focused on corporate learning. He expanded the company's coverage to encompass HR, talent management, talent acquisition, and leadership and became a recognized expert in the talent market. Josh sold the company to Deloitte in 2012 and was a partner in Bersin by Deloitte up until 2018.

In 2019, Josh founded the Josh Bersin Academy, a professional development academy that has become the “home for HR.” In 2020, he put together a team of analysts and advisors who are now working with him to support and guide HR organizations from around the world under the umbrella of The Josh Bersin Company. He is frequently featured in publications such as *Forbes*, *Harvard Business Review*, *HR Executive*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *CLO Magazine*. He is a popular blogger and has more than 800,000 followers on LinkedIn.



### Nehal Nangia

Nehal is the director of research at The Josh Bersin Company. In this role, Nehal drives empirical research on key workforce-related topics and the development of actionable insights and powerful stories for today's talent executives. Nehal has over 15 years of professional experience in human capital, with a focus on learning and development; performance management; employment value proposition; workforce transformation; and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). She is the research leader for learning and leadership at The Josh Bersin Company. Prior to joining The Josh Bersin Company, Nehal was a global advisor for clients at Deloitte and published several studies on pertinent topics such as DEI, performance management, and bias. Nehal lives and works in India and has a master's degree in psychology. Nehal has also led deployments of benchmarking and diagnostic products at Gartner for clients across EMEA, APAC, and ANZ.

## The Josh Bersin Company Membership

The Josh Bersin Company provides a wide range of research and advisory services to help HR leaders and professionals tackle the ever-evolving challenges and needs of today's workforce. We cover all topics in HR, talent, and L&D. The Josh Bersin Academy—built on our research and powered by Nomadic Learning—helps HR practitioners grow key foundational skills. Our corporate membership program provides HR teams and senior leaders with the skills, strategies, and insights to build cutting-edge HR and people strategies through a combination of research, assessments, professional development, exclusive events, and community. In 2022, The Josh Bersin Company introduced the Global Workforce Intelligence (GWI) Project to guide market-leading businesses and their leaders through the challenges of industry convergence while remaining future-focused.

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