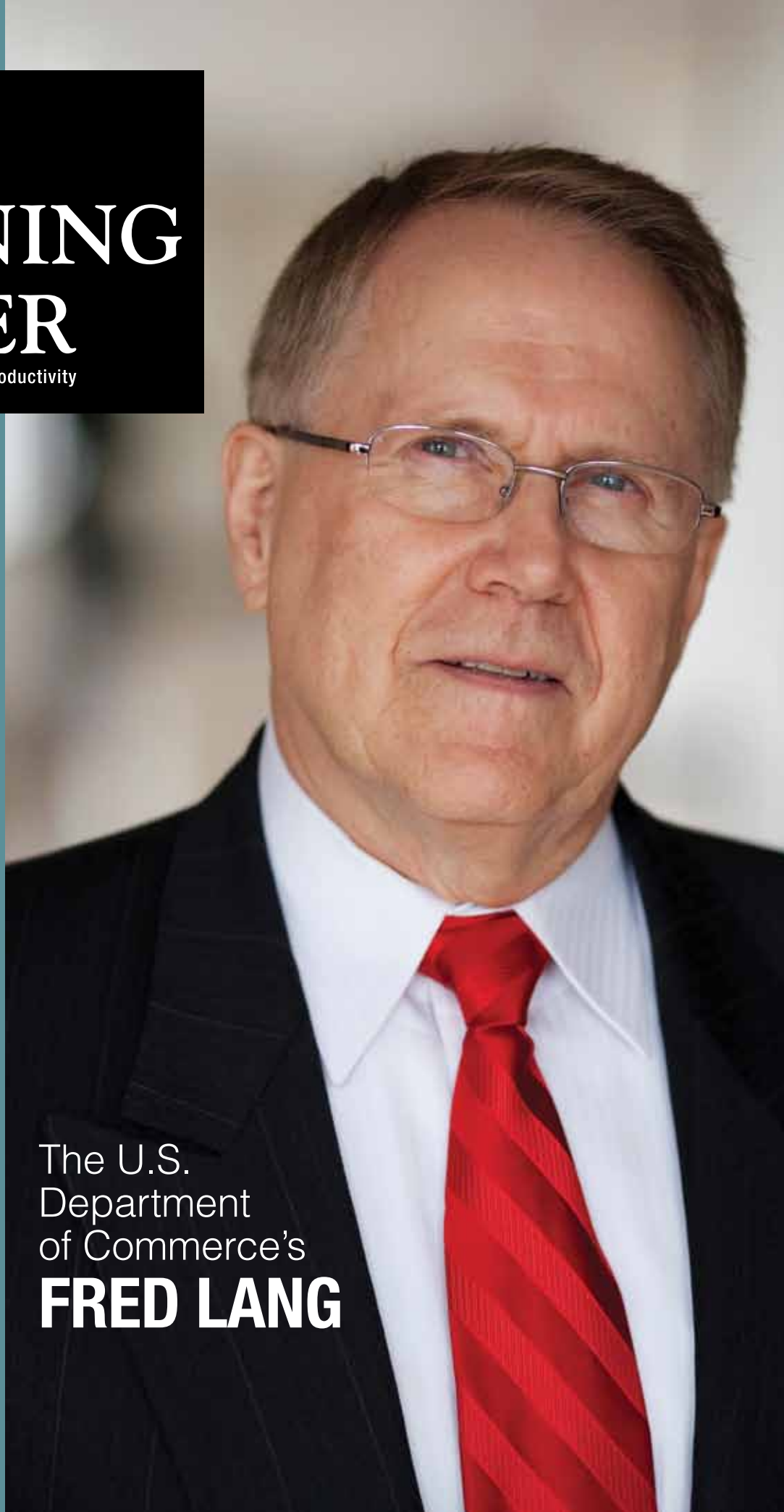


CHIEF LEARNING OFFICER

Solutions for Enterprise Productivity

- It's OK to Be Uncertain
- Why Learning Is Never Enough
- The Four Myths of Strategy
- Social Learning Unleashed
- Governing Governance
- The Verdict on Learning Portals
- Popular Science



The U.S.
Department
of Commerce's
FRED LANG



Strategies for Business Innovation

Create a culture of creativity • BY JOSH BERSIN



Josh Bersin is the principal and founder of Bersin & Associates, with more than 25 years of experience in corporate solutions, training and e-learning. He can be reached at editor@clomedia.com.

As the world economy slowly recovers and business leaders once again see opportunities for growth, new opportunities to refocus and re-energize corporate learning emerge.

Companies are now targeting the following major business goals, according to Bersin & Associates' latest TalentWatch research:

- Improving individual employee engagement and productivity.
- Globalizing operations.
- Developing and launching new products and services.

In fact, during the past six months, we've seen the goal of improving innovation and new product development increase by more than 300 percent.

Consider the changes within the U.S. automobile industry. Despite the fact that two of Detroit's Big Three automakers, GM and Chrysler, declared bankruptcy, these companies are now laser-focused on innovation. At the January 2010 Detroit Auto Show, Ford won awards for U.S. Truck of the Year (Transit Connect) and U.S. Car of the Year (Fusion Hybrid) with brand-new products. The Ford Fusion is a hybrid car that rivals the Toyota Prius in efficiency, and it is one of Ford's first truly globally manufactured automobiles.

Innovation is now driving growth in almost every industry. Cell phone makers have brought to market a broad array of new gadgets; energy companies are introducing wind and alternative energy solutions; computer makers are launching a whole new family of small, pad-based machines; and services companies are launching new global services in almost every segment.

Innovation goes beyond the development of new products. Some of the most important innovations in business occur when those in operations find ways to improve product quality or identify ways for employees do their jobs better and faster.

One of our challenges as learning leaders is to design development strategies that support and create innovation in the workforce. Here are some examples showing how learning directly impacts business innovation.

- To maintain Qualcomm's reputation for being one of the most innovative companies in the telecommunications industry, the company's L&D organization focuses heavily on connecting technical experts to

others. Using an "expert teaching expert" model, the company regularly invites university and other external researchers to conduct lectures and brainstorming sessions for technical and managerial employees. To further drive collaboration and innovation, the L&D team regularly publishes stories of technical and managerial success in a newspaper-like format.

- W.L. Gore and Intel give technical experts broad career paths that encourage employees to change projects and programs every few years. People broaden their technical expertise and deepen conceptual thinking by moving to new design and development teams. Additionally, they bring new thinking and perspectives to their teams. Dynamic career paths, coupled with recognition of technical and project excellence, foster cultures of innovation at these companies.
- Last year, the management team at GM, a company under obvious stress, recognized that its senior engineering team actually had been coached to think inside the box — within defined parameters. To help change this thinking, the L&D leader created a program in which engineers competed with each other to create the most innovative car of the future. These engineers prototyped and modeled radical new designs that were displayed for and demonstrated to top GM engineering leadership. The program encouraged creativity and sent the message that innovation was prized.

Bersin's latest research into high-impact learning organizations shows that strong learning cultures are actually more influential than specific training programs. Companies with strong learning cultures outperform those without such cultures regardless of the dollars spent per employee. In fact, the high-impact learning organizations identified in this research actually spend at or below average when it comes to training.

As 2010 progresses, learning organizations will see an accelerating need to drive innovation and growth. Examine your own L&D investments and make sure that some percentage of your programs and staff are allocated to fostering technical excellence, collaboration and innovation. By doing so, you'll be better preparing your company for the future and setting the stage for better economic times. **CLO**