



The CLO's Top 11 Successful Practices

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The CLO's role is continuing to evolve, as are learning organizations. Business complexity, company growth and changing organizational and employee needs are driving this evolution. Many CLOs are transforming their learning functions to respond to these challenges. The key is implementing sound practices to achieve extraordinary results.

Ensure All Learning and Development Initiatives are Aligned with a Larger Business Purpose

It's important for all learning leaders to link their initiatives to a key business issue, driver or challenge. Great CLOs focus their learning initiatives on high-level business drivers — what's on the executive agenda? Determine the key business issues and use learning as a solution. For example, if employee retention was identified as a key business issue, directly tie learning and development efforts to employee retention.

What are the key reasons employees stay with the organization? Companies often identify key retention drivers and use employee satisfaction data, as well as exit interview data, to examine employees' "intent to leave." Data often show that growth and development are essential for employee retention, which is a critical issue for many corporations. Learning can be a critical driver of employee retention.

Know the Business You're in and Clearly Articulate Your Competitive Advantage

No person — or learning organization — can be all things to all people. It's critical to clearly state your objectives and know your boundaries. Why are you in business? What differentiates your learning organization? How do you compare with others in terms of investment, initiatives and outcomes? Networking with other companies, as well as attending industry conferences, offers excellent opportunities for learning about your organization and providing comparative benchmarks.

Sharing information about your learning organization with executives, managers and employees strengthens your credibility and provides opportunities for increased alignment. Articulate your focus. Provide comparative data. Good CLOs are exceptional at defining their learning organizations' competitive advantage.

Share the "Right" Benchmark Data with Executive Management

Are learning and development costs in line with other reputable organization in similar industries? Is there widespread utilization of learning and development opportunities across the company

and in all areas in the organization, with a focus on the learning products and services mirroring the employee population? Do employees perceive the learning and development opportunities as being useful for their jobs? What are the specific business results derived from the learning opportunity? These are some of the critical questions CLOs answer as they prepare to meet with the executive teams in their companies.

Unfortunately, many learning leaders spend lots of time focusing on measurement that is not replicable year over year and is erroneous for executives. Focus measurement efforts on the targets that will affect your business and on specific metrics that your business commonly uses. Sharing data often can lead to trouble, but sharing the right data with the right people can enhance your success.

Create and Implement a Learning Strategy for Your Organization

Great CLOs define the overall strategic direction for learning and development in their organizations. They work collaboratively across the organization to understand learning and business needs, as well as corporate culture. The critical partnerships that they create within all organizational functions enable them to identify critical learning priorities and outcomes.

What are the learning function's goals? What is its primary focus? How does the learning strategy link to the company strategy? The learning strategy should mirror the business strategy, and implementation should be managed similarly to other functions or businesses within the company. If your businesses do not have an annual strategic plan, there is no need for you to create one for your learning organization. If they do, you better have one too — thinking and acting like a business enhances the learning organization's credibility and effectiveness.

Create a Strategic Role for Your Learning Organization

Other divisions or functions have a strategic role in the company, so the learning organization should too. Create a learning model. Have a learning plan. Find the niche for the learning function. With the emergence of "learning" instead "training," CLOs and the learning staff are expanding their roles to include talent management, organization development, succession management, organization design, performance consulting, organizational analysis and executive coaching. Facilitating organizational solutions is a comprehensive role for a learning organization. The learning function's focus should not be deliv-



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ering training programs — the learning function exists to increase individual and organizational performance. Determine your organization's needs and how the learning organization adds value. Create a strategic advantage for your company.

Focus on Alternative Delivery Methods

Move beyond the classroom and into the business and embed learning into the work people do every day — learning should not be perceived as something that is done “outside of work.” It occurs on the job, throughout the day and across all careers. Most real learning doesn't occur in the classroom environment. Mobile, online, virtual and on-the-job learning, as well as podcasts and webinars, provide nontraditional experiences for employee development. Today's work world transcends locations and physical boundaries — companies operate globally and need to expand their learning to reach all audiences across all time zones.

Heavily Invest in Leadership Development

Leadership talent is a true differentiator for organizations, and it is a critical element of a company's competitive advantage. Today's organizational structures and complexities require more leadership capacity. Sustained company growth is made possible by having a continuous supply of qualified and ready leaders to take on additional responsibilities and positions as they become available. There is a strategic need for building management strengths and developing a strong pipeline of leadership talent — a significant amount of a company's learning budget should be spent on leadership development. What is the company commitment to building leadership capability? How is leadership evaluated and developed? How are leadership capability gaps addressed? Building great leaders can enhance employee satisfaction, employee retention and overall company performance.

Reinvent Your Learning Organization

How has your learning organization evolved with your business? What is different today about your programs, services or initiatives? How has your learning organization adapted to the company's geographic, market and employee growth? CLOs continually reinvent their learning functions to adapt to business changes, and being both progressive and adaptable is critical. Dynamic changes in the business industry should reflect dynamic changes in the learning organization. Be creative. Benchmark best practices. Stay abreast of learning trends and opportunities. Constantly think about ways to outthink your competition and lead the learning profession.

Always Link Learning to the Business

A great deal has been written about how essential it is to align learning with the business. CLOs are continuously scanning the business for learning opportunities, including organizational, leadership and marketplace changes. Great CLOs capitalize on those opportunities and leverage learning during those critical times. Seek your company's “inflection points,” those when learning can be critical (such as a process, structural or product change). Maximize your learning organization's presence during these times and assist the business in executing its plan.

Expand Your Staff Capabilities

Great CLOs are great developers of people. Most have transitioned their staff members from being operationally focused to being consultative. They have coached their staff members to work with senior management to become savvy consumers of learning. The learning function and CLOs are only as good as their staff, so modeling employee development within the learning function is critical.

External Recognition Drives Internal Recognition of Your Organization's Accomplishments

External recognition for the learning organization can have a positive effect on prospective external candidates, as well as internal employees. Everyone can read about the company, and most of the time, people believe what they read — awards earned, programs cited and recognition achieved from external sources help validate an organization's exceptional work. Prospective candidates also read about companies they want to join, so highlighting your learning successes (i.e., external awards and recognition) can assist in both attracting and retaining talent.

It's a great time to be in the learning profession. Organizational, marketplace and technological changes have created numerous opportunities for learning leaders. The future will continue to provide us with many opportunities to improve organizational and individual performance, and the ability to capitalize on these opportunities is what differentiates successful CLOs from the rest.

More information about these practices and how to add value to your learning organization can be found in the book “The CLO's Role: Adding Value to the Organization Through Learning and Development” by Tamar Elkeles and Jack Phillips. Elkeles can be reached at editor@clomedia.com.