To ensure employees have the learning they need to be successful, choosing the right learning delivery method is essential.

There are many ways to deliver learning. When the goal is top performance, what method learning leaders choose to deliver that learning can be as important as the content.

For instance, the growth of e-learning in the past decade has outpaced estimates from most early adopters and champions — global potential is expected to reach $107 billion by 2015, according to Global Industry Analysts Inc. Fast growth comes thanks to new skill requirements, technological advances, ready access to the Internet and mobile devices, and knowledge management and sharing.

This movement toward online courses is mirrored in academia, fostered by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation with donations and grants, and through massive open online courses, or MOOCs, designed to make content and learning more accessible and affordable. One grant to develop a MOOC at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, offered through nonprofit online education company edX in partnership with community colleges, will experiment with a “flipped” classroom, where instruction is delivered online and homework takes place in the classroom.

Executive education programs also are being influenced by the available range of learning modalities. While lagging behind the online course revolution, corporate executive education programs will migrate toward hybrid online and facilitated programs as improved technologies, with attendant time and cost advantages, make them increasingly attractive.

CLOs can selectively leverage technology to add value to the enterprise. For example, Annette Thompson, senior vice president and chief learning officer for Farmers Insurance Group, emphasizes a continuous learning environment to enable the performance of employees and agents. “All of our learning is blended learning; we incorporate online, face-to-face, performance support and reinforcement of learning through coaching, and in some cases, social,” Thompson said.

ON THE WEB
What are some critical elements for effective outsourcing relationships? Here are three key criteria Qualcomm’s Tamar Elkeles uses to select vendors: CLOmedia.com/articles/view/4226.

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Determining Best Fit

When selecting from an array of existing and emerging modalities, CLOs weigh a number of factors, including cost, time and effectiveness, to determine best-fit approaches. Figure 1 details some of the advantages of instructor-led training, or ILT, online, mobile and social learning.

As each learning modality has inherent strengths and pitfalls, CLOs have to make trade-off decisions to enhance business impact; prioritization is essential (See “How to Prioritize Learning Investments,” page 35). Thomas Spahr, vice president of learning for The Home Depot, has to enable approximately 300,000 associates to understand 40,000 products. To make that happen, he said his team has to provide training in bite-sized chunks.

Financial considerations are part of the learning modality decision-making process, but effectiveness is a threshold requirement. Farmers’ Thompson weighs a number of criteria to determine learning efficacy. For example, if the issue is skill-based, the primary learning approach will be instructor-led. If the issue is a lack of knowledge, learning delivery may focus more on online, performance support or distance learning. She said e-learning can be leveraged to build skill and evaluate learner progress.

Thompson said her overall vision is to move the team away from linear design and toward continuous learning. “We are moving to more usage of simulations to demonstrate learner capability — moving from knowledge to assessment — can the learner actually complete the transaction we are teaching? In that way, the learning itself becomes a level 3 evaluation simultaneously.”

Why Does This Work for the Business?

While CLOs have long understood the importance of making the business case for learning, mul-

![FIGURE 1: A COMPARISON OF BENEFITS FOR LEARNING MODALITIES](source: Deltek and Hudson Research and Consulting Inc., 2013)
tiple learning modalities within a blended learning portfolio add a new twist. Defining learner return on investment and aligning financially to an organization’s net operating profit demonstrate how e-learning and other learning methods maximize results.

FedEx’s Bennett said the learning team meets regularly with the senior executive team to determine business needs or any changes in direction needed to focus training. “After we identify needs, we look at appropriate ways to measure to assess where we will invest by making judgments regarding the anticipated impact to FedEx’s bottom line. We also make sure we are aligned with the FedEx value chain and the company’s people/service/profit philosophy. Our culture is based on the premise that if we take care of our people, they will in turn deliver exceptional service to our customers, which will lead to greater revenue and ultimately, profitability.”

Hilton Worldwide shares the need to determine the link between the business and learning investments. Kippen said because learning is a performance enabler, the learning organization won’t start any initiative unless there is a clear business need. To determine this need, the company uses a defined scoping process, which includes identification of the business challenge, ideation, solutions, implementation and sustainability. “We also work with our business partners early on in the process and ask, ‘How do you know it’s a learning issue?’ to make sure it is in scope,” Kippen said.

He works closely with five executive sponsors of Hilton Worldwide University who represent key business lines to effectively make the necessary trade-off decisions, and he said, “If it’s not on their list, then it’s not on our list.”

This careful allocation of resources will only become more important going forward. Kippen said this will be a big year for the Hilton learning organization to drive greater focus regarding what it will and will not do. “We are focusing on more of a business performance model,” he said. “Our internal learning professionals will play more of a consultative role, and we will get more of our content from third-party providers going forward, weighing buy vs. build decisions at each juncture.”

Making the business case and showing the return on investment often creates a virtuous cycle, where more funds are made available to the learning organization based on demonstrated value. “We have found that by measuring our training results, we obtain better internal customer support and interest. It has changed the way we operate and actually increased the demand for our services, as we demonstrate our value to the business,” said FedEx’s Bennett.

### What’s Next

Promoting use of multiple learning modalities offers new opportunities to add value. At Home Depot, Spahr said mobile learning is going to be the wave of the future. “This will enable us to bring learning to the aisle, when our associates are interacting with customers, helping them with a product or a home improvement project.”

“This is an exciting time to be in learning, with increased focus on social learning and just-in-time, unstructured learning, complemented by reflection and sharing of best practices,” Farmers’ Thompson said. “Across the learning industry, we will continue to innovate and use technology to offer new learning approaches.”

With multiple generations, diverse learning styles and geographically dispersed employees in the workplace today, most learning will be blended going forward. With a rich array of current and emerging learning modalities, effective CLOs will need to leverage a continuum of approaches to propel learning to the next level of organizational performance.

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**HOW TO PRIORITIZE LEARNING INVESTMENTS**

1. Decide which functions have the greatest impact on business success.
2. Prioritize those functions and start with the most important.
3. Determine which roles within that most important function drive growth.
4. Align with the functional business leader to determine key measures of success.
5. Determine what learning offerings are needed to successfully perform within that role.
6. Choose a learning modality. Which will improve performance, change behaviors and reduce costs?
7. Examine learning impact pre- and post-learning event, reinforcement and sustainability of learning over time.
8. Conduct a financial analysis and employ cost comparison methodology for staffing, development, delivery, production, costs of classroom space, multimedia, travel, per diem and record keeping.

— Marjorie Derven and Alan A. Malinchak

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