

The CLO's Role in Business Transformation

BY BRIAN KLAPPER



By exhibiting strong yet flexible leadership, chief learning officers can play a significant and often overlooked role in organizational transformation.

College football coach Ara Parseghian once said, “A good coach will make his players see what they can be rather than what they are.”

Successful organizations intentionally put themselves in a constant state of productive change. While some enable the organization to dramatically improve its competitive footing, the majority tend to be evolutionary and somewhat incremental. While positive, these change initiatives do not provide the deep improvement in performance that some organizations require.

Historically, the architect and leader of organizational transformation has been the CEO. By contrast, the chief learning officer has been viewed mainly as a supporting player. However, the CLO can and should play a pivotal role in the transformation process.

Why Change?

Studies show the most widely cited goals for corporate transformation are migrating from good performance to great performance; reducing overall cost structure; fixing a crisis; completing a merger or acquisition; and expanding geographically. While it is generally the role of the CEO to set and quantify the objectives, the CLO is in the unique position of being able to engage staff and develop programs that provide concrete results throughout the transformation.

Experience shows that the most effective CLOs play a vital role in these areas and that if the CLO does not fulfill this critical position, then a vital gap in the

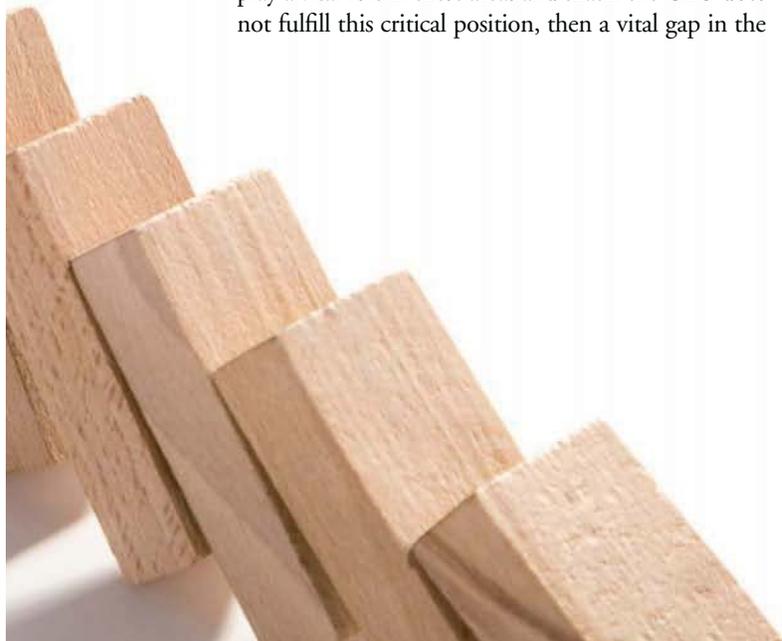
human resources of the organization and the development of its culture will occur. However, in many instances, the CLO is not seen as part of the solution on the talent management and development side of the strategic valuation equation. Since the CLO role differs across organizations, there is no strict recipe for success. The most strategic CLOs carve out an area of the transformation in which they can play a meaningful role.

The following are the basic building blocks common to all successful transformations:

- Strong and visible leadership that is clearly in front of the transformation.
- A clearly defined and effectively communicated aspirational vision.
- A well-defined organization with clear roles and responsibilities.
- A tidal wave of work passion that is initiated in the executive suite but quickly transferred to the front lines.

Where should CLOs start and what areas should they tackle in building a program for organizational transformation? While a proactive CLO can certainly add insight and depth of thought to the first three building blocks, it is the fourth — creating a tidal wave of passion — where the CLO can likely add the greatest value. This management process is called transformational leadership.

To use this approach in the workforce, one must first understand exactly what transformational leader-



ship is. As defined in the book *Transformational Leadership: The Transformation of Managers and Associates* by John Hall, Shannon Johnson, Allen Wysocki and Karl Kepner, it is a process that changes and transforms individuals. In other words, transformational leadership is the ability to get people to want to change, to improve and to be led. It involves assessing associates' motives, satisfying their needs and valuing them. Effective transformational leadership results in performances that exceed organizational expectations.

There are four factors to transformational leadership, also known as the four I's:

The CLO is in the unique position of being able to engage staff and develop programs that provide concrete results.

Idealized influence: This describes managers who serve as exemplary role models for associates. Managers with idealized influence can be trusted and are respected by associates to make good decisions for the organization. CLOs must experience their own programs so they can improve the linkage between personal behavior and overall impact.

Inspirational motivation: This refers to leaders who have a clear vision that they are able to communicate with others, allowing associates to generate the passion and motivation to fulfill these goals.

Intellectual stimulation: This applies to managers who encourage innovation and creativity by challenging the beliefs or views of a group. Managers exhibiting intellectual stimulation encourage associates to explore new ways of solving problems and offer new ways to learn.

Individual consideration: This term applies to managers who act as coaches and advisers to associates. Transformational leaders foster open communication so that associates are comfortable sharing ideas and so that leaders can directly recognize the value-added contributions of associates.

Who better than the CLO to utilize transforma-

tional leadership to help drive major change throughout an organization? Many CLOs seek to develop concrete programs that will enable them to pragmatically apply the principles of transformational leadership in their organization. Successful change management is not only about doing new things; it also implies new ways of looking at things. It requires innovative, transformational leadership programs with strong coaching elements. The best of these programs recognize that there is no final destination to learning — rather, the process of inquiry should be ongoing.

Creating an initial source of passion always starts with one common element: results. It is only through results that employees begin to migrate from faith and hope to proof. This generates a cycle of positivity: Proof comes from results, which come from effort, which in turn generates enthusiasm for additional change. And the cycle repeats.

Generating Results Within 30 Days

Involving organizational heroes from ideation through implementation is the optimal way to get results within 30 days — the time frame that's most likely to generate lasting change. Such an effort requires four elements: a well-designed initiative with tangible objectives; thoughtful, cross-functional team selection; a powerful training experience; and the time and focus to enable the team to immediately apply the learning and achieve a specific improvement opportunity.

- **Design:** It all starts with a quantifiable statement of focus set by the project sponsor that defines success for the team. The ideal statement of focus is centered in the scope of the project but highly ambitious in the amplitude of the change. The more ambitious the mandate, the greater the level of innovation that will occur.

Three of the most important considerations when creating a team of heroes tasked with driving significant change are setting the time limit for the change effort to take place; selecting the team and defining the roles of its members; and developing an ambitious and highly quantifiable mandate. Enterprise-wide transformation is a series of sprints rather than a marathon, and as such, regardless of the overall scope of the initiative, each project should have a 30-day time frame to produce tangible, measurable results. If the effort drags on longer than 30 days, momentum ebbs, conflicts arise and the project's success is compromised.

- **Cross-functional team:** For an ambitious change effort to take place in a short period of time, it is essential to identify and recruit the best team possible. Selecting high-performing people who are already well respected within the company sends a clear signal that management takes the program seriously. Moreover, a credible set of team members will be better able to develop the solutions and influence others to implement the recommendations. Ideally, the team should consist of four to six members who spend a minimum of 15 hours per week on the effort.

As in any organization, each person on the hero team has a specific role. For example, coaches are experts in the process that the team will follow; they keep the team focused on achieving the mandate in the allotted time. The team leader runs the meetings and ensures the rest of the team is engaged and productive. The commitment tracker ensures that all of the commitments made by the team members are fulfilled. The time keeper ensures the agenda is followed according to the allocated time. And the historian documents the key milestones, keeps a paper trail of the analysis and is the liaison between the team and the company's learning library.

- **Powerful learning experience:** It is essential that any change effort is passionately supported by line management. Time and again, change leaders discover that an "80 percent right" solution embraced and implemented by line managers beats the "100 percent right" solution that fails to win their acceptance. This buy-in rate is a critical indicator of success for a change program. As such, line managers need to be actively engaged from the beginning of the change process, and they should participate in problem-solving sessions with change agents, senior managers and other employees. Such sessions encourage openness and the sharing of ideas, allow difficult issues to be raised early on in the change process and build personal connections between line staff and change agents.
- **Time and focus:** Management consulting firm The Klapper Institute attempts to generate front-line passion for change through a two-day event called The Corporate Lab. This event puts 19 cross-functional members of an organization — either an intact leadership team or a mix of senior management and line management — into an actual operating company. The Corporate Lab allows them to take the reins for a period of time. By allowing the participants to initially run and then transform a

real organization, they can experience what it takes to lead a three-year organizational transformation. They develop the requisite leadership skills and begin the behavioral transformation that is critical but often lacking in large-scale change efforts.

After experiencing The Corporate Lab, the participants bring their shared experience, common language and newly acquired analytic toolbox back into the workplace to begin work on a predetermined initiative. The team has 28 calendar days to perform their diagnostic assessment, run enlightened experiments,

Transformational leadership is the ability to get people to want to change, to improve and to be led.

and build and launch rapid operational prototypes. Full implementation immediately follows.

Regardless of the type of training program, it is important that the participants:

- Feel a sense of urgency and responsibility.
- Realize that the danger of clinging to old behavior patterns is more dangerous than embracing new behaviors.
- Recognize that the outcome of the transformation will make the organization not only more competitive, but also a more satisfying place to work.

It is clear that the CLO has the ability to add significant value to organizational transformation. Far too often, however, the CLO's knowledge remains largely untapped. His or her ability to exhibit transformational leadership can help reduce the organization's anxiety about change, which will ultimately lessen the widespread passive resistance that pervades many organizations.

By taking an active role, CLOs will not only accelerate organizational transformation, but also positively transform their own roles. **CLO**

Brian Klapper is the president and founding partner of The Klapper Institute, a management consulting firm that teaches organizations the discipline of strategy implementation and operational excellence. He can be reached at editor@clomedia.com.