

# A New Wave of Talent

The changing nature of learning requires new roles • BY ELLIOTT MASIE



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If you could add five new people to the learning department, what roles and skills would you hope to enhance?

I suggest asking this question as an organization's learning strategy evolves. As learning technologies, workforce dynamics and content models change, we need to take a fresh, brave look at the talent requirements of our own function.

My conversations with CLOs have uncovered two approaches for adding new talent to the learning department. Many advocate pursuing aspects of both approaches. They are learning competencies 2.0 and business acumen and experience.

**Learning competencies 2.0:** One approach is to look at the changing nature of learning in our organizations and recruit a new set of professionals with very different skill sets to develop the next generation of programs. CLOs have mentioned that the following roles would be on their wish lists:

- **Librarian:** As the amount and format of content created and used in the organization multiplies, a challenge is discoverability. How will learners find the right content? A modern librarian will be able to add value with metadata, search readiness, content taxonomies and federated search models.
- **Learning app developer:** This person can rapidly put together a learning app to run on a device like a tablet or smartphone and align with a single learning offering or one that is focused on a specific role or task. An agile app developer could supercharge the learning department.
- **Community mayor/gardener:** Sites such as SharePoint can be ghost towns when leveraged for a learning program. They need leadership and someone to remove the weeds. Community management is a growing competency as we shift toward communities of practice and distributed collaboration.
- **Video competencies:** You don't need a videographer, but a learning department will benefit greatly from someone with skills and experience in the use of video for storytelling. Editing techniques, framing perspectives, meta-tagging and even the development of video templates will be critical as the organization adds user-created and scripted video to the knowledge mix.
- **Workplace GPS/performance support designer:**

I anticipate we will have fewer traditional instructional designers as we expand our content and context offerings. One role organizations could deeply benefit from is a designer with competencies in building learning-at-the-moment-of-need solutions like performance support or workplace GPS. Assistance should pop up and be available as workers perform new tasks or forget steps. This professional can significantly increase your team's capacity.

**Business acumen and experience:** A second approach to add new talent to the learning function addresses the fact that many CLOs feel the need to beef up internal business knowledge/experience within their learning groups. Thus, they reach out to high performers within key business units and attempt to recruit them for short- to medium-term stints in the learning department. This gives the learning function:

- Greater internal subject matter expertise.
- Business language fluency.
- Tighter alignment with real business requirements and metrics.
- Networking within the learning function.
- A shift in the career path of the learning team — from career learning professionals to developmental roles for rising leaders.

This model has been used successfully in at least two industries: pharmaceutical sales and military organizations. Drug companies have recruited top sales reps or managers who are on their way to their next positions for several-year assignments in the learning department. Likewise, the Air Force has made a stint in the learning and education function a core career step for high potential staff.

Organizations that take this approach often create a boot camp and mentoring process to bring the business-focused staff to readiness on learning projects. Learning leaders are not turning these folks into instructional developers or designers, however. The goal is to use employees' business acumen to drive and focus learning projects on front-line workers' needs.

The learning professional of the future may naturally combine both of the aforementioned approaches, but for now, let's explore how we can add this type of talent to our teams and get ready for the next wave of learning opportunities. **CLO**