

Form Following Function

BY MIKE PROKOPEAK

As technology drives a proliferation of learning tools, it's critical that CLOs clearly define their purpose before finding the most appropriate form of delivery.

Form ever follows function. With those few words, Louis Sullivan sparked a movement that reshaped American cities in the 20th century and continues to reverberate into the 21st. It's also a phrase many learning leaders are coming to terms with.

Sullivan was a seminal architect during a particularly exciting time. As the 19th century gave way to the 20th, American cities were undergoing a dramatic boom as waves of European immigrants crashed ashore and rural residents headed to the city in search of work. Faced with growing demand from booming businesses, architects responded with entirely new ways to design and construct buildings.

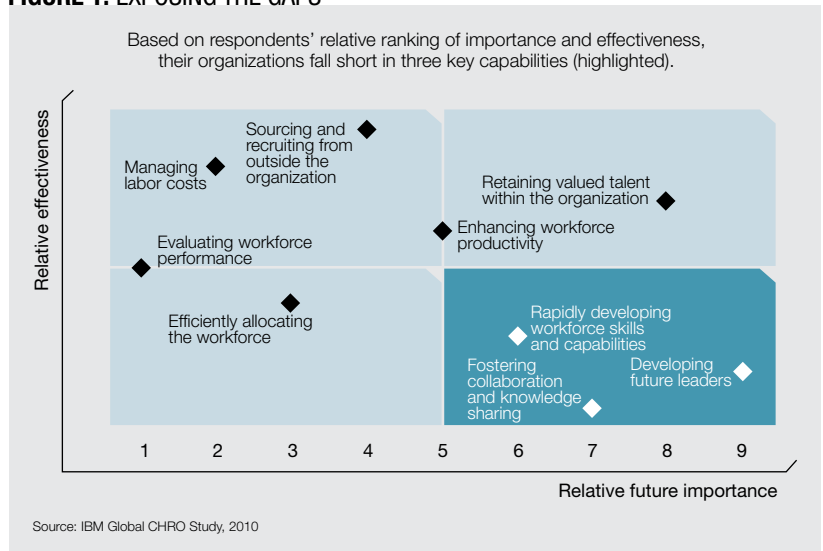
Until the late 1800s, architects' ability to build upward was constrained by the need for massive exterior walls to support the weight of a tall building. That all changed with the completion of William Le Baron Jenney's Home Insurance Building in 1885. The 10-story Chicago building, acknowledged as the world's first skyscraper, soared to more than 182 feet and would be the first of many tall, multi-storey buildings to spring up across

the country.

The breakthrough innovation of Jenney and his contemporaries was to shift the building's load-bearing responsibility away from the walls to a rigid steel skeleton. Sullivan proved to be a master of this new building style with the completion of his Wainwright Building in St. Louis in 1891.

But Sullivan's central idea — the one that made him a transformational figure — was that a building's physi-

FIGURE 1: EXPOSING THE GAPS



cal structure (form) should closely match its purpose (function). Rather than get wrapped up in extravagant possibilities, Sullivan used the new-found architectural techniques to pioneer simple, functional designs.



With the Wainwright Building, Sullivan accentuated the structure's height with massive vertical bands that separated columns of large windows. He opened up the interior with a flood of natural light. Despite its mass, the building was designed on a human scale.

Learning and development professionals find themselves at a similar historical moment to Sullivan and his contemporaries. Traditional classroom learning continues its steady decline as technology-enabled learning rises. New forms of delivery are emerging that allow CLOs to scale development in ways unimaginable just a few years ago. Liberated from the classroom, learning professionals are fusing social networking technology with the power of informal learning and collaboration.

But as different forms of delivery proliferate, it's critical that CLOs define their purpose – the function, to use Sullivan's term — then find the most appropriate form of delivery. Sullivan's words provide a reminder to select methods and techniques that best match the learning environment, learner preference

FIGURE 2: USE OF LEARNING DELIVERY METHODS

| | 2008 N=602 | 2009 N=262 | 2010 N=555 |
|----------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Classroom | 45% | 44% | 41% |
| Asynchronous e-learning | 18% | 20% | 18% |
| Formal on-the-job training | 18% | 16% | 18% |
| Synchronous e-learning | 8% | 10% | 11% |
| Text-based training | 4% | 4% | 4% |
| Satellite video broadcast | 1% | 1% | 4% |
| Portable technology | 4% | 3% | 1% |
| Other | 2% | 1% | 2% |

Source: Chief Learning Officer Business Intelligence Board, 2010.

and the ultimate goal. In today's world, the form learning delivery takes is increasingly driven by the function it is intended to serve.

Complexity and Anxiety, Agility and Opportunity

Organizations of all sizes are grappling with shifting economic conditions, skittish customers and increased competition. These business conditions are a significant challenge to learning professionals but also a prime op-

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LEARNING THAT STICKS

Many organizations have implemented formal learning programs, processes and technologies, but few have fully leveraged the benefits of social learning that provide employees with just-in-time access to tidbits of learning that enable more engaging and immersive learning, chance interactions and collaborative teamwork.

Organizations must expand their view and definition of learning and invest in people, processes and technologies, including all types of learning, from formal to social to serendipitous. To achieve this blended and multifaceted approach to learning, organizations should follow three guidelines:

Everyone learns in different ways. Some people learn best by being guided through topics step by step, some learn by experimentation, and others seek and find information on-demand as needed to perform tasks. This variation in learner styles has been heightened by communication and technology advancements in our consumer lives, such as social software, which can greatly complement learning by facilitating conversations, enabling information sharing, and open lines of communication and foster greater organizational transparency.

Expand methods to encompass the way people really learn. According to authors such as Jay Cross, up to 80 percent of the most valuable employee development occurs informally. That means only about 20 percent of the knowledge employees acquire on the job comes from formal learning programs such as online courses, events and workshops that organizations invest time and energy to create and manage.

That 20 percent is absolutely relevant, as it provides a means to educate teams and customers on topics critical to business goals, such as compliance and certification, and measuring the results. But relying on formal learning does not address everyone's need to experience career growth, and this creates a delta between the learning that organizations need for business initiatives and the learning employees want and need to meet their goals.

According to an industry study by IDC, the difficulty of finding information costs organizations about \$3,300 per employee each year. That is a tangible lost opportunity cost, but it's also an opportunity for learning professionals to impact the bottom line by facilitating knowledge sharing

and putting that information at the fingertips of employees, customers and partners.

Make continuous social learning a reality.

Using social learning, companies can capture knowledge and expertise from all levels of the organization and foster a learning culture by:

- Providing access to new-hire information, training resources and subject-matter expertise from across the company.
- Creating mentoring relationships and enabling peer-to-peer discussion and support.
- Providing a mechanism to submit questions and share ideas, including the ability to comment on content inaccuracies.
- Identifying skill gaps by reviewing and assessing posted content and comments.
- Collecting learner feedback on the training they need most and targeting social and formal learning programs to those areas.

By embracing alternative learning delivery approaches, organizations can move from a model that only allows for one-on-one training — a mass training model where targeted learning is delivered only to targeted groups — to a collaborative, interactive model that leverages many-to-many learning. The many-to-many model benefits from social technologies to expand the flow of communication and allows all participants to contribute content and ideas for others to learn from, such as tutorials, multimedia, questions and answers, documents and virtual collaborative team sessions.

Becoming learner-centric rather than organization-centric uses time and money more efficiently and produces more readily accessible content. In an informal social world, learners become both the teacher and the student. Organizations gain the benefit of having more content produced in a faster time frame and at a lower cost.

By involving a diverse group of employees using today's social technologies along with formal learning techniques, organizations have a better chance of being successful. [CLO](#)

Barry Libert is chairman and CEO of Mzinga, a provider of social software, services and analytics, and author of Social Nation: How to Harness the Power of Social Media to Attract Customers, Motivate Employees, and Grow Your Business. He can be reached at editor@clomedia.com.

2011: A VIRTUAL, MOBILE YEAR

Extraordinary times call for extraordinary skills as CLOs creatively balance the demand for knowledge and information against the realities of rapidly changing content and instructional design, rapidly disappearing content expertise, disruptive technologies, heightened demand for on-the-job proficiency and an increasingly dispersed workforce with less tolerance for formal learning.

Evolution of the Virtual Classroom

The need to reach learners in remote locations continues. Learning professionals need to find solutions that minimize workflow disruption, yet enable connections with experts and fellow learners with more powerful virtual classrooms. Tools such as Adobe Connect Pro and e/pop bring streaming video and social networking functionality to webcasting solutions. Telepresence offers another option. Telepresence sites are equipped with displays that stream video to remote locations, with options ranging from immersive environments such as Cisco's telepresence rooms to homegrown locations with webcams and flat-screen displays.

Virtual worlds are evolving from resource-intensive software downloads to programs that run in a Web browser. These tools minimize download requirements, ease access issues and minimize desktop computing requirements. VenueGen offers virtual space for meetings and training sessions in a prebuilt environment for a fraction of the cost of building a proprietary environment. Other programs, such as Nexus and Unity Jibe, offer whiteboards and document sharing. Virtual environments can be used for a variety of purposes, from online role-plays of consultative skills for a finance firm to on-boarding associates for a consulting firm, with the use of discussion sessions, treasure hunts and teamwork sessions.

Technical training will move from live learning and Web-based courseware to include distance learning labs where the user interacts with software and hardware through a program or immersive environment launched from a personal computer. An example is the configuration of servers through the use of the virtual world Teleplace, in which virtual lab developer MTS links virtual objects with computers and servers in the real world.

Mobile Access to Learning

Most organizations have fairly robust formal learning programs to address competency, performance readiness and mastery. Given the rapid pace of change, more companies are focusing on performance proficiency by ensuring on-the-job access to knowledge objects, experts or peers to enhance knowledge acquired in a classroom or online. For example, an online course explaining the

impact of a recent merger can be coupled with a few short, time-sensitive briefing modules provided to executives via their mobile devices.

Mobile learning also can be used for learners who don't have access to computers, such as retail clerks, pilots, customer service representatives and anyone working on the move. A more sophisticated use of podcasting in blended learning can rapidly deploy messaging that can be heard via iPods, smart phones or other mobile devices.

Vendors such as OnPoint, Intuition, Hot Lava, Chalk and Vistacast are carving out niches in mobile deployment. Technical issues, such as learning object file size, will be mitigated as companies convert to larger mobile enterprise servers. The use of HTML 5 for development and design will allow learning objects to be viewed the same way across devices and operating systems. Mobile URLs are becoming more prevalent, meeting the demand for solutions that can be designed once and deployed on any device, including smart phones and other Internet-accessible devices such as scanner tools that an airline uses for ticket scanning or warehouse personnel use for inventory.

Aside from learning objects, organizations are also rethinking access to knowledge databases and reconfiguring database access and content to HTML 5 to make it accessible via mobile device. E-book readers such as the Kindle and the iPad are prompting even the most traditional organizations to think about replacing a wall of books with online, interactive and searchable manuals for policies and procedures. Access to traditional learning through a mobile LMS is just breaking ground with Blackboard's mobile LMS.

One tool gaining traction in the marketing world that can be applied to learning is mobile tagging using tagging software such as Microsoft's free Tag Reader. Learners download the software and use a mobile device's camera to take a picture of an image or barcode; software recognizes the image and downloads related information. Tags can be used on anything from equipment panels to product boxes and link to in-depth information about the item. Mobile tagging can be used to on-board new hires to an office location. Tags orient the new hire to common rooms as well as introduce the different work groups in various locations. Tags can also serve as downloadable job aids, providing product information to retail workers. **CLO**

Caroline Avey is learning strategist and director of innovative learning solutions for ACS Learning Services, a Xerox company. She can be reached at editor@clomedia.com.

portunity to contribute to bottom-line results.

According to IBM's Global CEO survey of more than 1,500 corporate chiefs in early 2010, volatility and uncertainty are endemic to business today. Six out of 10 CEOs said the post-recession economic environment is significantly more complex and 8 out of 10 expect the level of complexity, to increase in the next five years. A gap has opened between this expected complexity and their organizations' ability to deal with it successfully. Only 5 in 10 CEOs reported they feel prepared to manage the complexity expected in the future environment.

The IBM analysis concluded that CEOs of companies that have navigated complexity successfully embrace change, spur innovation and build operational dexterity to make their organizations flexible and faster. In the post-recession environment, growth will depend on the ability to be creative and agile.

Despite that finding, many organizations proved to be risk-averse over the last two and half years, opting to focus instead on stability and cost containment. With the recession receding into the rearview, more are turning their attention to growth. While

efficiency remains the top priority for chief human resources officers today, according to the 2010 IBM Global CHRO study, 48 percent of the 707 executives surveyed cited the need to focus on developing new products and services over the next three years, and 44 percent are making expanding into new markets or geographies a priority.

According to human resources chiefs, organizations struggle with three significant gaps in their ability to grow: developing future leaders, fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing, and rapidly developing workforce skills and capabilities (Figure 1, p.18). CLOs are thus presented with a significant opportunity: Learning and development hold the key to answering each of those challenges.

The Shifting Learning Blend

This opportunity comes at a time when there is no single, simple learning delivery solution. Surveys show that technology-enabled learning continues to rise as a viable delivery option at the expense of traditional learning methods. Despite that, traditional instructor-led training (ILT) remains the method of learning

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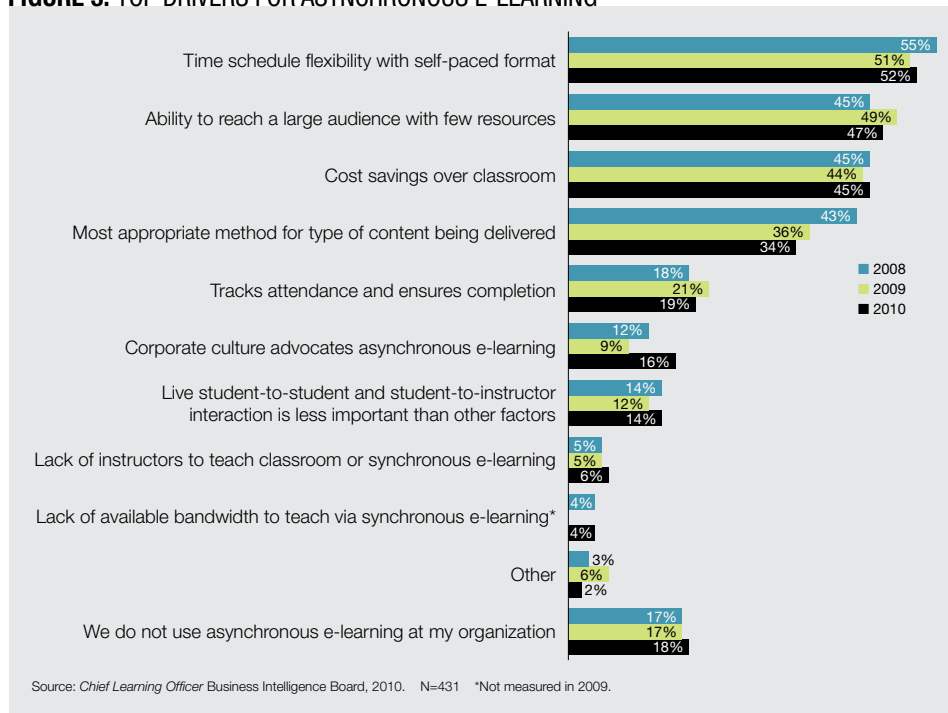
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FIGURE 3: TOP DRIVERS FOR ASYNCHRONOUS E-LEARNING



delivery used most frequently, used by 41 percent of executives surveyed by *Chief Learning Officer* and the HCM Advisory Group (Figure 2, p. 19).

The primary beneficiary of ILT's continued decline has been e-learning. Given the pressures learning organizations faced during the recession, it's no surprise that cost and flexibility drove higher use of asynchronous e-learning (Figure 3). Learners are able to access learning opportunities at their convenience,

The traditional classroom is becoming less prevalent as a delivery method, while the virtual one is emerging.

and CLOs are able to reach a large, widely dispersed audience in a cost effective manner. Cost saving is also an important driver for the use of synchronous e-learning, but it's seen as a way to promote valuable student/teacher interaction. The traditional classroom is becoming less prevalent as a delivery method, while the virtual one is emerging (see sidebar, p. 22).

Looking ahead, learning organizations appear poised to support technology-driven learning, including e-learning, video and mobile learning, and decrease emphasis on in-person learning, such as formal on-the-job training and classroom-based ILT (Figure 4, p. 25). Social learning (see sidebar, p. 20) and enterprise collaboration tools are becoming valuable parts of that learning tool kit, but uptake remains inconsistent as organizations grapple with how best to integrate and align them.

The learning management system (LMS) could play an important role in solving that problem. Long seen as a tool for tracking compliance, the traditional LMS is evolving away from a formal catalog of courseware to a more robust repository of knowledge and collaboration and a portal to a rich set of informal learning opportunities.

"The traditional LMS ... may not be robust enough to support a learner's need to search for specific formal learning support objects and provide ready access to knowledge objects and collaboration sites," said

Caroline Avey, director of innovative learning solutions and learning strategist at ACS Learning, a Xerox company. "Many of the LMS providers are responding by adding their version of wikis, blogs and communities of interest. Some firms are linking the LMS to SharePoint and using it firm-wide as the tool for discussion and collaboration."

As with other aspects of social learning, uptake remains inconsistent. A majority of organizations (53 percent) don't have social collaboration as part of their LMS, according to research conducted by Bersin & Associates for its "Learning Systems 2011" report. A quarter said their LMS is lacking in this area, 17 percent reported it somewhat meets their needs and 6 percent reported it completely meets their needs for social collaboration.

Despite that, David Mallon, Bersin principal analyst, sees the LMS continuing to evolve as the basics of training administration and e-learning delivery become increasingly commoditized and vendors search for ways to differentiate themselves.

"Where these systems are going is in the direction of continuous learning — the integration of both formal and informal — and in the direction of connecting to larger notions of integrated talent management," he said.

Liberated from traditional limitations, CLOs have an abundance of opportunities but also real challenges.

FIGURE 4: ANTICIPATED CHANGE IN DELIVERY METHODS IN THE NEXT 12 TO 18 MONTHS

| | Substantial increase | Some increase | About the same | Some decrease | Substantial decrease |
|------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|----------------------|
| Asynchronous e-learning | 13% | 46% | 38% | 3% | 0% |
| Synchronous e-learning | 9% | 46% | 40% | 4% | 1% |
| Satellite video broadcast | 6% | 33% | 54% | 5% | 2% |
| Portable technology-based learning | 5% | 43% | 50% | 1% | 0% |
| Formal on-the-job training | 5% | 24% | 67% | 5% | 1% |
| Text-based training | 4% | 10% | 72% | 11% | 2% |
| Classroom-based ILT | 3% | 14% | 47% | 32% | 4% |
| Other | 6% | 7% | 83% | 4% | 1% |

Source: Chief Learning Officer Business Intelligence Board, 2010. N=430

With the right approach, their story can turn out better than Louis Sullivan's. Despite his legacy, Sullivan is largely overshadowed by his protégé, star architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Wright went on to fame and fortune; his buildings lovingly preserved. Sullivan died in a Chicago hotel room, bankrupt, alone and largely forgotten, in 1924. [CLO](#)

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