

THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE CLO

PART ONE: **BIG-UP THE ROLE**

In the first of a three-part series Nigel Paine shines a light on the Chief Learning Officer. We have come a long way in the past five years and this role has become unrecognisable.

I recently started a great discussion with learning leaders which reminded me, yet again, of the commonality of philosophy within organisations around the world. No one is massively ahead, or massively behind. No one really sees the world very differently from anyone else. Like business itself, L&D is global.

The significance of the conversation came rushing back to me when I was asked to write a book, which became *The Learning Challenge*. It shaped the whole publication. It is about the changing role of learning in organisations, and therefore of the person who leads learning in organisations. I wanted real evidence and some detail. I talked to successful learning leaders,

resulting in five interviews which became case studies in the book. One was based in Australia, one in the Czech Republic, one in the US and two in the UK.

Their roles, budgets and staff numbers were different and the nature of the organisations was different. Despite this they faced similar challenges and had dealt with those challenges in a number of different ways. I am drawing on their

insights and sharing three areas upon which they all agree. This three-part series is dedicated to them for their achievements and for their belief in the power that learning unleashes inside organisations.

Part 1 is about standing out inside your organisation AKA *The Fine Art of Bigging-Up*. Part 2 focuses on living with, and managing increasing levels of volatility, uncertainty, and complexity. Part 3 looks at the game changers that will ignite a radical shake up of this role and how learning leaders should anticipate and welcome these changes.

WHY THIS...WHY NOW?

This is the century of people. We will see massive gains in productivity as we begin to develop human potential and build workplaces that people actually want to work in. This, in turn, will unleash individual creativity that in turn will spearhead organisational innovation. If learning and the learning leader are not at the heart of this transformation, it really is time to update the CV and look for another career.

Surely there can be no better time to work in learning. However, according to the laws of physics each and every action has an equal reaction. It is also really tough out there and learning teams have to justify their actions and their existence. Here are some ideas that will make those transitions more straightforward and perhaps even more enjoyable.

THE FINE ART OF BIGGING-UP

The fact that I believe this role is important is really not the point. Your employer has to believe it if you're going to gain any kind of traction. In the rush for a place in the sun there are many elements of the organisation that genuinely believe they own the people and the talent agenda. So, how does learning stop being squeezed out or marginalised? Here's where to start.

1 Stop boring the pants off people when talking about learning

You are interested in the process, the vast majority of people who work in your organisation are interested in the outcomes! This means you must avoid using learning jargon at all costs. When you speak, make it about the contribution of learning to organisational objectives. Try it. I call it *framing the issues from a learning perspective*. This is probably the single most useful change you can make in your approach. It will increase your credibility and that of your team.

2 Start gathering evidence now

There are countless large and small case study examples of how learning has transformed organisations around the world. More and more books make the link between personal development, fulfilment at work and organisational success. Note the following: learning makes its contribution. It is not the be-all and end-all.

This is the century of people. We will see massive gains in productivity as we begin to develop human potential and build workplaces that people actually want to work in.

3 Get the executive team interested

There are lots of techniques for doing this. Pick one that works for you. You will never achieve what you need to achieve with an indifferent (or hostile) executive team. Your hands will always be tied. Here are two very simple suggestions for gaining credibility.

Firstly, build a governance model external to learning or HR. Ask the CLO to chair the Academy board, Corporate University Council or whatever you want to call it. Frame the agenda so it is short and strategic and worthy of a CLO's attention. If that fails, pick people who are interested in L&D from within the business, and try to persuade them to chair a strategic learning board.

Alternatively, invent a prize, something like: 'most improved leader' ... 'best young manager' ... 'most successful graduate of X or Y programme'. It doesn't matter what it is as long as it means something to the organisation. Put together an awards ceremony and invite one of the senior executives to present a bottle of champagne or the plaque or whatever you intend to give the winners. This simple act of celebrating success builds executive engagement. It is effective, highly visible and a great bridge builder.

4 Never take the full credit...however, avoid taking no credit!

If learning is successful, not in terms of enjoyment or immediate learner feedback but in terms of implementation, behaviour change and impact, then the causes of the success will be more complex than simply the learning. It is also true if the impact is negligible; do not simply blame the learning. Any analysis should take into account the reason for success or otherwise. The results need to be shared and owned far more widely than the members of the development team. Modestly claiming some credit for success actually boosts the status of L&D not the opposite.

5 Ask the business what change they want to see

Never assume you know better than the organisation regarding required changes. Not only do you have to ask what change the business wants to see if the programme is successful. Once you have consensus, you need to gather a coalition to ensure success. One of the key components is a relationship

with, and the support from, line managers. The right approach will gain their respect and support the profile of learning.

6 Brand Learning

It is never a waste of money to draw attention to changes in delivery and new learning environments etc. Something that looks different, feels brighter and more engaging attracts attention. You are competing for headspace with all the engaging distractions in the workplace. Any steps you take to maximise attention and generate excitement is usually effort well spent.

7 Create a great internal portal

You need a home! If this is physical, such as a new learning centre, it really raises the profile. If that is out of the question then you can build something online that will have as much impact. Even, if what you offer is fragmented, create location where everything is consolidated. It must look good and feels user friendly. This can really change the general attitude towards learning and therefore the status of those in the learning team. Name it *Talent Portal* or *Career Success* for example, and it will have resonance and traction.

8 Frame all success in business terms

We shouldn't care too much whether people love the learning you have provided. We should almost take that for granted! What we do care about is the business impact. Therefore our conversations should be all about business. Our achievements are business-oriented; our successes are the successes of the business. Become a player not an outsider. Talk about the business knowledgeably, using business language and even the jargon of your company. This will be an indication of your success.

These eight steps will really get the ball rolling and put you in a far better position to deal with the issues covered in Parts 2 and 3.

For more detail read *The Learning Challenge* by Nigel Paine.

<http://www.koganpage.com/editions/the-learning-challenge/9780749471255>

Nigel Paine is the owner of
www.nigelpaine.com
Twitter: @ebase

BAZOOKAS DON'T FIX VUCA



In Part Two of his three part series on 'The Changing Role of the CLO,' Nigel Paine takes stock of the management complexities of that vital job.

Article one *Big-up the Role* was about standing out within your organisation: getting noticed and gaining credibility. Part Two is about managing complexity, as we all have to deal with increasing levels of **volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA)**. Next month I will look at the game changers that will shake up the Chief Learning Officer role even more radically than before.

Learning leaders should anticipate and welcome these changes, as the net effect will be to put learning on the map. Here are three examples from among many that illustrate the impact of volatility in organisations on the learning function.

ONE

The first concerns the role of learning in a local authority in England. A policy change led to shared services across three neighbouring authority areas. A proactive learning leader began programmes that addressed the process and cultural issues of working in teams with people who were not only strangers but had also been working with different cultural perspectives and different value systems.

That person also opened up all of their learning programmes to staff from the three authorities before working out the logistics and the funding. That reaching out to new colleagues had a far bigger impact

than expressing an intention subject to getting the right procedures in place.

Those programmes, and the new online environment built around them to exchange good practice and share issues, helped pull the shared service system together and helped make it work. It also had an impact in helping build a better 'can do' environment.

TWO

A second example involves a huge global manufacturing company that realigned its working practices across all its businesses. Six Sigma was not abandoned but a huge new focus on simplicity and integration

was launched by the CEO. The Learning Team responded by offering to free up space in their leadership centre to act as the base for the initiative and to allow development of the first cadres of experts in this area.

Furthermore, the learning team developed a simple toolkit that became the benchmark for the simplicity project. This focused effort created some serious momentum under the initiative and put the learning team at the heart things; a fact that was publicly recognised by the CEO.

THREE

In the third example, a large European electronics company made a sudden decision to withdraw from the consumer goods market in order to focus exclusively on a B2B role. That meant virtually everything had to change; processes, client groups, day-to-day work patterns. L&D started sharing best practice and built up a performance support library of readily accessible knowledge (which helped the teams adjust fast to its new reality), together with case studies of good practice and early success stories.

What is clear from those three examples is that there are no formulaic responses. It is impossible to lay down clear ways of operating that fit each of the illustrations above. In other words, there is no one-size-fits-all, or a big bazooka that can be fired. Each circumstance has to be looked at and responded to. What links the three cases, however, is the proactivity of the learning team. They were able to engage with what was going on in their organisations, work out a unique response that was then pitched, costed and quickly implemented. And each response was tailored to the specific circumstances. There would seem to be a whole set of new competences at play here.

In my book *The Learning Challenge* I list ten characteristics of the outward signs of a proactive and successful learning team:

1. **Focused on business impact.** In other words, understanding the business, and being able to work out quickly what is necessary to keep it on track in terms of people development people skills.
2. **Can deliver in spite of budget and staff constraints.** This is not a plea for increased budgets or headcount. It is about working out what has to be done and then acquiring resources to deliver. Often budget is targeted, short-term and extracted from other parts of the business. This may be an increasing reality for many learning teams.
3. **Thinking ahead, being proactive.** This

Anticipating change and working out in advance what may be necessary, increases the value of learning can contribute to organisational success exponentially.

ability to think strategically is critical. Learning teams have to live in the present with a clear eye on the immediate and even the distant future. Anticipating change and working out in advance what may be necessary, increases the value learning can contribute to organisational success exponentially.

4. **Optimistic about the future of learning and the impact learning can have.** All of the examples I gave represent strategic decisions and changes in direction for the organisations, but their success relies on large numbers of people adjusting their working practices and their behaviours as well as developing new skill sets. These kinds of changes will accelerate and the responses to them will become more demanding. This is a terrific agenda for the learning team puts it at the heart of organisational success.

5. **Delivering results that are recognised throughout the organisation, not just with the learning team.** There are many ramifications here. Clearly, this is not something the learning team has to do or even should do on its own. This is about multidisciplinary teams drawn from across the organisation working together to solve big, structural organisational issues. Learning has its unique contribution to make but its days of working entirely in isolation are almost gone.

6. **Embracing technology, wherever possible.** Virtually every facet of working life is enabled by technologies and learning should be no exception. Speed of change, the scale necessary to achieve that change often points towards a combination of technology and face-to-face contact. Think solution, think outcome and then work out the means to deliver this.

7. **Willing to cull outmoded programmes to create space and capacity for new ideas.** Many sacred cows will have to be slaughtered in the coming years. When there is a new urgency, old 'nice to have' may have to go. Creating space and capacity to focus on those areas that will make a measurable difference to the organisation in the short and medium term is crucial. It is hard to manage but it has to be done in order to be responsive and proactive.

8. **Builder of strong teams and strong networks that extend outside the organisation.** Isolation breeds

obsolescence. The best kind of learning team is well connected inside the organisation and has deep links outside for support, new ideas and generally keeping abreast of fast moving industry. Networking and link building should be a specific conscious aspect of the learning teams role.

9. **Adept at developing a coaching and mentoring culture.** This does not mean simply focusing on building a small number of coaches and mentors to support, for example, leadership programmes. Rather it is about developing a culture where every leader sees mentoring younger colleagues and coaching subordinates as an integral part of their leadership role. As part of knowledge sharing and support that is crucial for fast response and innovation.

10. **Always looking beyond courses into resources and learning environments that really work and are flexible and fit for purpose.** Increasingly, courses are one part of the learning armoury. But only two courses need broader learning environments around in order to ensure their effectiveness, sometimes the learning solution is much smaller, on demand and targeted at the individual. Team that can't move beyond courses is increasingly obsolete.

What pulls all of this together are a few core competences that are hard to develop, but we know when they are being demonstrated. First is resilience, the second curiosity, and the third a willingness to experiment. Keep these at the front of your head, Judge the learning team on their progress with these competences and let them be guiding lights to the future.

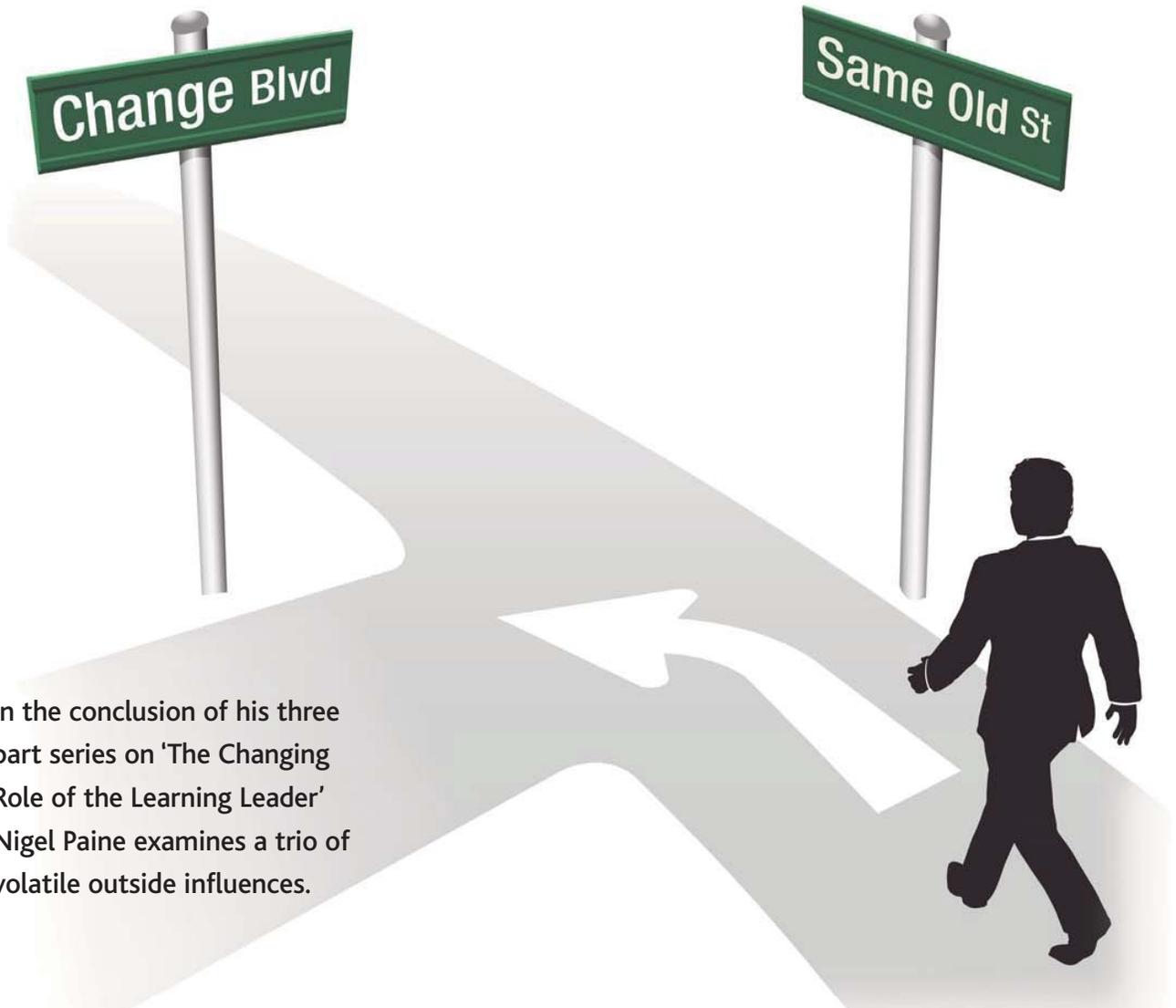
Don't miss Part Three of Nigel's fascinating series, in the January issue of *Inside Learning Technologies & Skills*

For more detail read *The Learning Challenge* by Nigel Paine.

<http://www.koganpage.com/editions/th-e-learning-challenge/9780749471255>.

Use the code TLCAD20 at the checkout to get a 20% discount and free P&P.

Nigel Paine is the owner of www.nigelpaine.com
Twitter: @ebase



In the conclusion of his three part series on 'The Changing Role of the Learning Leader' Nigel Paine examines a trio of volatile outside influences.

GAME CHANGERS SHOULD CHANGE THE GAME!

This series of three articles began over a glass of beer. Meeting with a few friends who run learning in different organisations, we just took stock. Where had we started, what had changed since – and where was it all going?

Article One was about the importance of standing out and getting noticed inside your organisation as a prelude to gaining credibility. The second article was about dealing with complexity, and accepting that we have to deal with increasing levels of volatility and uncertainty in our work and in our lives. And this final piece looks at the game changers that will shake up this role even more radically than many people imagine. These are the significant changes that will put learning on the agenda at the highest level in organisations. Indeed, learning inside organisations might come to be positively correlated with success. An impossible dream? Read on.

THREE BIG WAVES CRASHING IN

In *The Learning Challenge*, the final section is devoted to three game changers for learning: big data and learning analytics; neuroscience; and technology. So why are they important? In what way are they important? And what should you do about them?

The three subjects that I chose as game changers have quite a lot in common. They come from outside the learning function. They are all hugely disruptive and part of the challenge associated with them is that learning staff have to learn to negotiate and understand a new language or reality in order to make sense or make use of what they may provide.

For example, big data and learning analytics is a bi-product of the internet of things and more complex software. Both generate huge amounts of data and there are now cheap

tools that can analyse the results and feed them into strategic analysis and development. But this is not a trivial process; it requires partnership within and outside the learning organisation and possibly your company.

Learning the lessons of neuroscience research requires not just a new understanding of how the brain works and how this impacts on learning, but also establishing dialogues with experts. You need to be able to cut through the popularisation and hype that still pervades this area. A recent survey by the University of Bristol, in the UK, Turkey, Holland, Greece and China, for example, found that 70% of teachers believe the delivery of learning to suit specific learning style significantly improves retention, and a significant proportion of teachers think that their students only use, for the most part, around 10% of their brain.

Technology is ubiquitous and has been powerfully impacting on learning for at least the last 30 years. What is new, now, is the shift from large ubiquitous packages that can do everything to a world of apps and small-scale software that interlinks. Many of the exciting technological developments are not learning specific at all. The number of serious learners using a software app such as Evernote for their note taking and information organisation is completely dwarfed by the millions of people simply using it as an electronic organiser for their lives or the business.

Here are eight suggestions for moving forward in this area. They apply to all three, (or at least two) of my game changers.

ONE: You do not take a view by alighting on one individual or one book (or, even worse, one blog) but by mapping the field and pooling your knowledge to get a sense of direction and an idea of what is appropriate for you and your organisation. The learning team at Southwest Airlines in the US, meet quarterly to plan and strategise. They allocate responsibility for finding out about new developments to the whole team and then pool that knowledge and share it at the next meeting. A simple question such as: "what should we do about..." is a starting point for a great discussion.

TWO: Be sceptical. There are plenty of people who will sell you a magic pill that has a label on it that they think you want to hear about. Everybody is a neuroscience expert, for example, and you should be careful listening to people who deal only with secondary sources, as your sole provider of knowledge. Do this at your peril. For example, the Royal Society's *Brainwaves* report on the neuroscience of learning represents the considered view of an expert panel of neuroscientists assembled by the Royal Society. That is a great place to start investigating primary sources.

ATD produced a book a year ago on *Big Learning Data* that was pulled together by Elliott Masie. It is pragmatic, full of case studies and a great place to get your head around how it might impact the learning function.

John Seely Brown has written a book with Douglas Thomas called: *A New Culture of Learning*. This is a reflection on how our technology rich world demands a completely new frame of reference for learning. It is a great insight into radically new paradigms for learning that are driven by technology as well as being a by-product of technology.

THREE: Check your learning. You do this by discussing your interim conclusions with as

My three main game changers all come from outside the learning function. They are all hugely disruptive and challenging.

many people as you can find who have some sort of insight into the field. They will help you modify your thoughts or perhaps reinforce your judgement. If you want to understand the game changes you cannot do it standing aloof from the process you have to be part of it.

FOUR: Start with baby steps. You will need to pilot your new approaches as this is low-risk and allows a degree of pragmatism. As you begin to work out your strategy based on tested and proven examples you will have a much greater chance of success. I prefer to use the word experimentation rather than 'pilot'. Being an experiment implies that many things will go wrong. However, small experiments allow you to manage this well and learn from the process. If you want to establish a new direction, you need to work out which of the probable options delivers most for you. There are no rules; you simply have to test this by trial and error.

FIVE: Ask good questions. This is simply a way of exploring complexity and potential issues before you launch anything at all. Think about the unintended consequences; test everything with people from the target group. When it is ready to implement, explain what you are doing to interested parties who have got no skill whatsoever in that game and see if they can spot any flaws or help you improve on those processes.

SIX: This is not about the learning department is about the whole business. All of these areas require you to work inside your organisation and build a coherent support group that extends outside your teams. For example, much of the big data that could be invaluable is not learning data. It might come from the marketing department or from customers. Your key frame is your ability to take key learning insights from this that can help improve the company as a whole. You don't start working on big data assuming that every data point that is used has to be generated by you. Much of the interesting data and many of the interesting conclusions will come from outside.

SEVEN: Tell a good story. As soon as you start getting any success indicators, share these as stories with real people and real situations. This anchors the rather abstract areas into fundamentally pragmatic outcomes. This is the best way to get buy in. if you change learning to make it more

brain friendly, for example, share the improvements, not as statistics, but as case studies and statements from the learners. It is their brains after all that are involved!

EIGHT: Just start! This is not a three-year gestation. You can move in each of these three areas in weeks rather than months, providing you pay attention to the points above and that you have an organisation that *gets it*, is prepared to back you and is prepared to give you a small budget to experiment and take ownership. The worst thing you can do is to spend months deliberating. It is all changing too fast, and there is so much happening you need to get into the game now, rather than later, and you need to feel confident as you go forward.

These game changers will have a massive impact on learning. But they will make it exciting; they will make it more engaging for the learner, and they will help transform organisations. This is a pretty good area to be associated with.

The Learning Challenge will be formally launched at lunchtime on Wednesday 28th January during *Learning Technologies Conference 2015* at Olympia. Having read this far in the article, you deserve an unconditional invitation. See you there.

'THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE LEARNING LEADER' SERIES

Part One: *Big-up the role*

Part Two: *Bazookas don't fix VUCA*

Part Three: *Game changers should change the game* (this issue).

- For the detail behind the issues raised in this series, read Nigel's new book *The Learning Challenge* <http://www.koganpage.com/editions/the-learning-challenge/9780749471255>
- Use the code TLCAD20 at the checkout to get a 20% discount and free P&P
- Plus – read the book review by François Lavallée in last month's issue of *Inside Learning Technologies & Skills Magazine*

Nigel Paine is the owner of www.nigelpaine.com
Twitter: @ebase