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The Chief Learning Officer: who he is and why he is important in eLearning

Among the figures orbiting the e-learning sphere, the Chief Learning Officer is one of the most important. Here is what his role is and how to make it effective.

The development of new technologies in recent decades has completely changed several areas of everyday and working life. These changes have introduced a whole new set of professional figures needed to interface with new technologies and their applications.

With the entry of digital learning, the roles usually associated with training have also changed or evolved. E-learning, in particular, has acquired **new professional figures**. Among these, one of the most important for the management of online learning is the Chief Learning Officer (CLO), who has the responsibility for the training sector of an organisation or company on his or her shoulders.

Who is the Chief Learning Officer?

The **Chief Learning Officer** is the person responsible for managing learning in an organisation or company. This role emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with the intention of delegating to a competent person the construction of an effective learning strategy for the success of an organisation. The first company to include the figure of the CLO in its workforce was the General Electric Company when, in the 1990s, CEO Jack Welch appointed Steve Kerr as Chief Learning Officer.

The CLO's task is to **manage and control all learning programmes** in the company he or she works for. The main objective is to ensure that employees have the appropriate skills and knowledge to perform their functions to the best of their ability. In order to achieve this, CLOs have the task of creating effective learning strategies and ensuring that courses and training programmes are in line with the company's general ideas and objectives.

In general, a Chief Learning Officer has several tasks, including:

- **Evaluate the company's training programme**, to identify any shortcomings and possible changes to be made;
- **Creating new training programmes** if necessary;
- Formulating a **short- and long-term strategy** to fill existing competence gaps;
- Experiment with the use of **training aids and new learning methods**;
- Keeping track of and **evaluating the success and effectiveness** of the strategies implemented;
- **Update training resources**;
- **Determine a budget** to manage for training.

In the training programme, the Chief Learning Officer may include several learning strategies. There are four main ones:

1. **Coaching**, i.e. the process of training an individual or a team to guide them to achieve a certain competence. The objective is to create a coaching network, so that managers can take care of the training aspect of their employees.
2. **Engagement**, which involves emotional and psychological involvement in the learning process. If the user feels involved, he/she is more likely to be more successful in learning.
3. **Tutoring**, which consists of a relationship between a more experienced individual whose task is to assist a less experienced person, leading him/her to acquire new skills or to refine those he/she already possesses.
4. **Management training**, in which the CLO is in charge of verifying skills related to training management.

The competences of a CLO

To be a qualified CLO, one needs to combine several skills and competences, starting with communication and emotional skills, up to analytical and organisational ones. In particular, a good CLO should have:

1. **Interpersonal skills**, to be able to communicate with the various sectors of the company and sell learning strategies.
2. **Organisational skills**, to be able to manage ongoing training projects in the best possible way, respecting established deadlines and planning the steps to be taken from time to time.
3. **Analytical skills**, to understand any gaps in the training processes. Analysing data relating to one's own learning programmes enables one to evaluate and, consequently, to improve results where necessary.
4. **Creative skills**, in order to develop ever new proposals and thus meet the dynamic needs of the training world; creative skills enable one to find ever different and innovative solutions.
5. **Ability to lead a team**, to be able to motivate users to learn. In this context, it is necessary to develop problem-solving skills, make important decisions and delegate tasks.
6. **Strategic planning skills**, which consists of establishing work priorities, allocation of resources and personnel. To do this, it is essential to recognise the company's needs and main objectives.
7. **Knowledge of various learning theories**, in order to know how to implement different models according to needs.
8. **Development of emotional intelligence**, i.e. the ability to recognise and manage one's own emotions and to put oneself in the other person's shoes, in order to be able to create constructive relationships with other workers.

The importance of the CLO in e-learning

The learning manager is an important figure in managing the training of a company's staff and in creating strategies to improve employees' skills, for a more complete development of the organisation. His or her role is fundamental in planning learning programmes and in the management and verification of courses.

In the context of e-learning, therefore, the CLO proves to be a figure of primary importance, not least because of the dynamic nature of the working environment, which requires continuous training to enable employees to keep pace with change and evolution in their sector. In this panorama, the CLO is also able to anticipate and identify the skills that will be needed in the near future, creating training projects dedicated to improving and updating the skills necessary for one's job role.

Today, the Chief Learning Officer is a key figure in training environments, as his or her objective is to create new learning strategies, offering customised paths to the user. The ability to manage the training section of a company, to support the users' present skills and develop future ones, the competence to evaluate and implement the use of tools and strategies that are adapted to the company's needs, make the CLO a leading figure in e-learning.

The 8 steps to be a successful CLO

Becoming a Chief Learning Officer requires a path that combines business, training skills, administrative skills and knowledge of digital learning models. But to be successful as a CLO it is possible to follow 8 steps:

1. Create a **strategic line** to show the plan of action designed for the training part, which must comply with the company's objectives. Once a mission statement has been created, it is essential to think of a roadmap, where the priorities of the learning programme are shown and the deadlines within which these projects will be undertaken. The CLO can also define an organisational model for the supervision of training programmes.
2. Balancing the various **learning methods**, in order to find the right balance to make the training effective. For a long time, traditional methods have imposed face-to-face, one-to-one training. New technologies, on the other hand, have allowed learning to break out of the real environment and into the digital one. A successful CLO should be able to experiment with the various methods and find a mode that meets all needs. Each learning technique has advantages and disadvantages, but together they could constitute an effective means of training.
3. Use the **right tools** and entrust them to competent people. A good CLO must ensure that the tool used has a significant impact on the users.
4. Select the most **appropriate and useful content** for your audience. It is important to always keep in mind that the user is the centre of the training: therefore, the selection of the material and the structure of the programmes must allow the development of unique and customised learning paths.

5. Overcome traditional education, which involved static lectures, to offer the opportunity to reflect on what has been learnt and to experiment with theoretical knowledge. For this, a good CLO should take into account the students' need to explore new content or put into practice what they have already learnt. This could take the form of group discussions, exercises, practical workshops.
6. Look to the **future**, to develop an increasingly effective **learning programme** that can keep up with the times. The CLO has to identify the missing skills in the company's employees and find the right way to fill these gaps and improve their performance. Not only that. A Chief Learning Officer should be able to anticipate future skills requirements and train their users appropriately. Therefore, it is more important to focus training on the development of certain behaviours, which could contribute to the development of long-term capabilities.
7. Respect the **budget**. Although, from a learning perspective, this is a secondary characteristic, the CLO must be able to carefully observe the economic stakes given by the organisation in which he/she operates. If investment management is effective, the confidence to invest in training will be higher and will benefit the learning sector.
8. Measure the **impact of the training programme** by recording and analysing changes in learner progress, engagement and satisfaction. This can also be done by using services on LMS platforms, which give an overview of the situation, with reports published on a regular basis.

These steps are the actions that make a Chief Learning Officer a key figure in e-learning, because they make it possible to build an effective, long-lasting and adaptable training project over time, enabling companies to keep pace with the changes in the world of learning.

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