

## **The New Corporate University: Global Impact on Learning and Development**

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Increasingly, globalization influences everything around us as the ideas and cultures of others become more integral to day-to-day existence. Companies and learning organizations are revisiting the way they approach customers and markets, how they communicate with one another and the way they structure and manage the workforce to be more effective and successful across boundaries and diverse cultures.

Global learning organizations are being asked to become more agile. They are focusing on creating programs and processes to identify, onboard and prepare specialized talent faster and more effectively. They are more flexible and adaptable in how they provide technical and competency-based learning to their global workforces.

Beyond supporting a heightened need for better communication, performance interventions and virtual collaboration, today's global CLO understands the need to move beyond traditional technical and skills-based training to a more-blended menu of development.

### **Global Learning: The Key to Preserving At-Risk Assets**

Achieving these lofty goals in a global arena is much trickier than it might seem. Many global learning organizations adopt highly sophisticated development models that tightly link performance to formal learning. Others rely on sophisticated technology platforms to deliver, track and manage courses and learners.

But despite the variances, the real goal is to retain, capture and manage their organization's collective human capital expertise and functional knowledge that is at risk as their workforce demographics continue to evolve.

A new model (indeed, a new corporate university) is emerging to meet this challenge. It is multilingual, 24x7 and often integrates elements of formal and informal learning, development, performance management and performance support.

This new model is practical and adaptable to many individual learning styles, and it must be agile enough to meet the demands of diverse audiences quickly and efficiently as critical business issues dictate. This new global model increasingly must address divergent corporate practices and mandates at the regional and local levels, enabling team building and knowledge sharing through the use of virtual learning, collaboration, feedback and mentoring tools.

As these challenges intensify, every global CLO will need to continue to innovate, remain agile and extend capacity to address the collective demand for a highly skilled and committed workforce.

### **Driving Consistent Quality and Client Service**

For many organizations, the design and implementation of a common competency framework — or learning- and performance-based career paths integrally linked to business goals — are critical to support the needs of a broad and diverse global workforce.

Ernst & Young, for example, aims to help its employees make the most of their careers by providing them with a range of formal learning and information development opportunities such as stimulating work experiences, coaching and feedback.

This approach is a holistic one, based on the philosophy that business success on the global stage can be achieved only by building leadership ability in every person at an organization, not just a small select group. By drawing out and leveraging all its people's strengths, Ernst & Young maximizes individual performance and potential.

“Our goal is to build a new generation of Ernst & Young professionals — more flexible, well-rounded, with both world-class technical and commercial/leadership skills,” said Michael Liley, director of people solutions. “By formalizing our learning and development model around the globe, we communicate our commitment to the development of our people to the marketplace. This commitment is recognized by potential recruits and our people alike, improving our ability to attract and keep the best professionals.”

### **Empowering Business Continuity**

The alignment of business strategy, business processes, and learning and performance drivers across all corporate functions can be a powerful organizational tool and a differentiator as global companies address the challenges of recruiting, developing and retaining high performers. These comprehensive learning and development frameworks help corporations execute against mission-critical business goals, as well as keep the talent and senior management pipelines full.

Brenda Wisniewski, chief learning officer for CoreNet Global, a professional association that provides education and training to corporate real estate professionals and departments, said creating innovative learning environments is critical to drive corporate sustainability and financial performance for today's global and highly dispersed organizations.

Wisniewski said the topics that have been leading the most recent discussion among chief learning officers in CoreNet's online learning forums are the lack of qualified specialized talent and the whole area of sustainability.

Additionally, she said much of the sustainability movement is being driven by the European Union and by companies in countries across Asia, such as Singapore, where sustainability is at the top of the list.

“China lacks corporate real estate expertise, which adds a new dimension to the challenge of facilitating and extending today’s corporate learning environments,” Wisniewski said. “Companies have to grow and build that talent, and they have to do it quickly. For now, they’re meeting the need through expatriates and organizations like CoreNet who are delivering learning programs locally across Asia.”

CoreNet’s global learning environment in Asia takes the form of customized classroom learning modules and courses that have been integrated into Asian universities’ business curricula.

Beyond sustainability, the shortage of specialized talent also is creating a real workforce-development challenge for many of CoreNet’s member firms.

“Companies are taking talent from other parts of the business such as finance and HR, where they have individuals who understand the business and strategy, and moving them over to corporate real estate,” Wisniewski said. “CoreNet is fast-tracking what they need to learn for corporate real estate, and most of that training happens on the job.”

### **Creating an Environmental Approach to Drive Performance**

Hans ten Berge, chief learning officer for Holland-based Océ, an international provider of digital document-management technology and services, said his company has worked diligently to create a total-learning-management approach to transition its global workforce from an outmoded corporate university model.

At any time, Océ has about 7,000 people out of a total global workforce of 25,000 actively engaged in its corporate learning environment.

“We had to be able to surface and drive the issues globally,” ten Berge said of the challenge facing the organization when it instituted its first corporate university environment in English in 2003.

He said that today, Océ supports a “total learning environment,” which includes an integrated learning management system (LMS), a learning content management system (LCMS) and a LearnLink distance application to drive individual competency development and management delivered worldwide across five languages: English, German, French, Italian and Spanish.

Given the influence of emerging markets and the company’s growing footprint in the Asia-Pacific region, ten Berge said he expects the platform will soon add both Japanese and Chinese language capabilities to fuel organizational learning across the region.

He also said the company’s learning environment was designed to provide the intelligence needed to increase workforce skills and track performance.

“What we have been doing over the past couple years is rolling out competency-based programs in headquarters, then into the operating divisions in the 34 countries that we are

directly active in,” ten Berge said. “For the top two layers of management, this competency development program serves as our leadership program. These competency-based development plans are updated every year and provide the modeling for all of Océ’s succession planning and executive development programs.

“These plans drive our learning — we don’t support a university model where we have a catalog of courses prescribed for us by others. Instead, we have competency profiles for all 200 critical performance roles across the global operation. We conduct assessments against the required profiles on a regular basis. The resulting individual development plans determine the need and demand for learning — a pull rather than a push method.”

### **Influencing the Bottom Line**

Despite the cultural and qualitative successes of many of these new global models, CLOs continue to receive pressure to deliver and show impact on specific business results.

“The pressure to perform is ratcheting up, and the performance measurements that are being put on people can’t be met if the proper training isn’t there to support it,” Wisniewski said.

One answer to that challenge is formalizing individual performance plans that roll up to team or group performance and directly link to a specific business goal.

“Where I’ve seen this work best is when training and learning is a priority — and it’s always because the CEO recognizes (and vocalizes) his or her point of view that the better trained the company’s people are, the more they understand the business strategy and where they fit into it, and the better they can deliver on it,” Wisniewski said.

One key element to the success of Ernst & Young’s global learning organization is the integration of the performance management process with learning and development plans. These are the foundation for annual reviews and long-term planning that closely aligns people development to business goals.

“This process serves as a baseline for matching individual needs with business needs that build the right competencies for a current role, for roles that the individual aspires to in the future and to the business areas in which they serve,” Liley said. “Alignment with our ‘people first’ culture and our overriding development objective as a global professional services firm is to deliver seamless, high-quality client service worldwide.”

Further, Wisniewski said learning can aid in realizing global goals. “The corporate university can play a strategic role in showing business leaders the importance of linking people performance and business performance on a global basis,” she said. “The new approach to delivering global learning and development is to provide both training to support individual and organizational performance, as well as support of enterprise networking and mentoring.”

The payoff from the new corporate university model is measured in the organization's alignment with the new pace of change in the global economy. Companies benefit directly from getting their people out ahead of the competition.

Today, slow adopters give way to the fastest learners. Wisniewski said environments that support this type of learning and networking will continue to attract and retain people, as well as evolve and increase in importance, especially as globally networked enterprises wrestle with the implications of doing business in a world in which customers and investors value corporate sustainability and social responsibility.

“If your company is going to go down that path, you probably have a fairly high percentage of employees who aren't educated on sustainability,” Wisniewski said. “You can't wait until the CEO asks, ‘What are we doing about sustainability?’ or be proactive in that sense or opportunistic without the corporate university. I can't help but think that the corporate university needs to be out in front of this.”

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