Best-in-Class Training: How Leading Training Organizations Thrive
Learning leaders that have effectively transformed their training initiatives create more than just business impact—they become global models for change.
Overview

In this paper, we’ll explore:

- The changing role of CLOs
- Key insights from best-in-class learning organizations
- How to apply best practices in your own training transformation
- How to become a best-in-class learning organization

How do you thrive in an era of constant flux? You adapt. For learning leaders in today’s ever-shifting economic climate, this means finding ways to become more relevant, more efficient, and more result focused. And it requires vigilant protection of training investments by showing executives how your organization is indispensable to the business—now and into the future.

It may sound like an ambitious endeavor, but learning organizations are already generating positive results by making the right changes. Some of the most impressive examples of this transformation are products of close partnerships between organizations and external partners such as NIIT. With the strategic guidance and support of external learning experts, organizations can fill needs gaps to create more effective training initiatives that reduce learning expenditures, increase retention and productivity, develop critical competencies, and, in some cases, achieve millions of dollars in time efficiency gains.

In this final paper of our three-part “Executive Insights” series, we will uncover how learning leaders have taken the incremental steps to transform their organizations into well-designed, highly-targeted, results-generating machines—ones that continue to solidify learning’s role within business.

The Evolution of CLOs: Becoming Indispensable Business Leaders

The role of learning within organizations has taken on increased significance—and accountability—over the last few years. Corporate University Xchange (CorpU), a leading provider of corporate university research, suggests that the role of a CLO can be compared with the increasingly visible and important position of a CIO: “The CIO role has evolved from manager of data processing, to director of services, to VP of Information Technology.” With each step forward, status rises alongside demand for greater business acumen.

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Just as with CIOs, one of the greatest assets CLOs can have is a deep understanding of the business. Edward Trolley and David van Adelsberg effectively illustrate this point in their co-authored book, *Running Training Like a Business: Delivering Unmistakable Value*: “In the 1970s and 1980s executives were excited about the potential of emerging computer and telecommunications technologies to serve their business. They were sold on the idea that IT, effectively applied, could drive business success.” Since then, IT organizations have “automated repetitive tasks, dramatically speeded business operations, linked businesses electronically to their customers . . . and created lucrative new categories of products.”

DEFINING THE ROLE OF A CLO

Josh Bersin, president and CEO of Bersin & Associates, asserts that “the definition of what a CLO does is changing.” To that end, Bersin breaks down the fundamental roles CLOs must play in today’s knowledge-driven and results-focused economy in his article, “The New Chief Learning Officer.” These include the following:

1. **Understand key business strategies and work to address challenges.** “The CLO should feel no fear of outsourcing,” Bersin notes, as this enables CLOs to focus on “high value initiatives.”

2. **Key in on learning styles of workers from all demographics.** In the first part of this “Executive Insights” series, we touched on the emergence of Gen Y in the workplace and the importance of developing programs that resonate with them as well as previous generations. Bersin points out these differences in the following chart, noting that CLOs need to have a “clear understanding of the changing demographics of the workforce”:

3. **Focus on the human aspect.** Rather than creating and delivering training programs, CLOs should create connections among employees that help increase knowledge. New technologies have given us ways to share ideas, search for materials, and join communities—savvy CLOs will take note of this trend and determine how it can improve their organizations.

By grasping organizational needs and building solutions around them, CIOs have risen in prominence. When looking at the salaries of CIOs today—which near $138,000 on average—it is clear the role has become indispensable. Today, CLOs have the same opportunity and can achieve it by following the same principles as CIOs: achieve business alignment, determine how initiatives create a competitive advantage, manage resources, and provide the best ROI.
Best-in-Class Learning Organizations

While there are many examples of learning organizations that have transformed from training-centric functions to results-driving initiatives, we’ve selected some of the most impressive ones and showcased them in the next few pages. These not only exemplify the integral role of a CLO across a range of industries but also show how learning initiatives have enabled businesses to build employee retention, boost customer satisfaction and loyalty, and deliver bottom-line value. Each of the following examples includes best practices you can leverage in designing and deploying your own training transformation.

PHILIPS: REDUCING LEARNING EXPENDITURES BY 20%–25%

Since 1891, the Philips brand has been recognized for trailblazing new designs in healthcare, lifestyle, and technology systems. From bringing light bulbs to the masses to launching the world’s first CD, the company continues to drive home its brand promise, “sense and simplicity,” by continually creating sophisticated products for consumers and organizations. The wide-reaching success of the organization stems from its commitment to streamlining processes and ensuring its global workforce receives the training it needs to develop and produce valuable, innovative products. And in this era of fierce competition—one in which progress hinges on knowledge—Philips decided to apply this spirit to its learning initiatives. The company partnered with NIIT to help transform its training organization.

This transpired as the “One Philips” learning development program, which gives employees a “multilingual, personalized environment with a customizable interface.” It helps to strengthen the sense of community across borders, build critical skills, and deepen knowledge within workers, while also providing a clear ROI to the organization. As a result of these initiatives, which relied on NIIT’s Global Training Administration System and Back Office Support Desk, Philips achieved a 30% reduction in training overlap and a 20%–25% reduction in learning expenditures. The NIIT solution also received CLO recognition and a Bersin & Associates Excellence Award.

The following illustrates the process support services provided by NIIT:

“AS A RESULT OF THESE INITIATIVES, WHICH RELIED ON NIIT’S GLOBAL TRAINING ADMINISTRATION SYSTEM AND BACK OFFICE SUPPORT DESK, PHILIPS ACHIEVED A 30% REDUCTION IN TRAINING OVERLAP AND A 20%–25% REDUCTION IN LEARNING EXPENDITURES.”

Figure 2: NIIT Training Administration Support Services
BEST BUY: BUILDING KNOWLEDGE AND A SENSE OF COMMUNITY WITH TWITTER

A multinational retailer of technology and entertainment products, Best Buy generates more than $45 billion in annual revenue by providing innovative technology and entertainment products to consumers.9 As part of its commitment to customer-centric service, the company opted to leverage web 2.0 technologies, namely Twitter, to create the Best Buy “Twelp Force” in 2009.

As of May 2010, the Twelp Force has responded to more than nearly 28,000 customers via Twitter and “paid for itself many times over.”10 The Twelp Force is the brainchild of John Bernier, Best Buy’s Social Media Steward, who saw the initiative as a way to enable cross-team knowledge sharing and enable employees to address consumer questions—all from an easily accessible and popular medium.

“When we say our employees at the center of our strategy, we prove it with an initiative like this,” says Bernier in a Q&A with Marketing Leadership Council contributor Anna Bird.11 Worldwide, 75 million people use Twitter,12 and companies are increasingly turning to Web 2.0 tools to promote products and engage with a wider audience. Bernier indicates that this widespread use of Twitter, especially among employees, sparked the idea for this initiative.

BEST PRACTICE: LEAVING NON-CORE COMPETENCIES TO AN EXPERT PARTNER

“We don’t see the transactional, administrative and logistic activities associated with deploying learning initiatives as our core skill,” remarks Jef Pauwels in an NIIT case study. “Therefore, the Global Learning Services team [of Philips] has outsourced this activity solely to NIIT.”

As the Philips case demonstrates, knowing your strengths is a critical first step in deciding where outside support can help you create, deploy, and manage the most effective learning initiative for your organization. While Philips took the reins in determining what its employees needed to develop their competencies, it turned to NIIT to develop a unified services framework at the global level.

This solution consists of:

1 **Training Administration.** To manage catalogs, schedule management, evaluations, and financial data related to training, NIIT applied its expertise in back-end support to provide options to deliver e-learning content with assessment capabilities.

2 **Technology System Integrated with Multiple HRIS** Philips needed an interface that integrated employee data from two disparate systems without compromising security. NIIT developed this capability by enabling these systems to “talk to each other.”

3 **Global Service Desk.** Philips employees receive 24-hour support, five days a week, thanks to the NIIT dedicated service center. Because employees are located in different regions of the world, NIIT ensures that end-users receive this support in their local language. The Service Desk adheres to regulatory compliance requirements to keep communications secure.

This partnership shows one of the ways you can work with professional learning partners to create a best-in-class learning organization. As Jenni Radtke, senior director of Philips Global Learning Organization, puts it, the NIIT partnership approach, supported by their technical solutions, “has been a key element in the success of deploying our learning offering.”

You can learn more about the NIIT–Philips partnership by accessing and reading this white paper or this case study.
To measure the program’s success, Bernier states that his team measured the cost displacement, quality and speed of service, revenue influenced, and positive press generated. According to *Fast Company* writer Drew Neisser, “Customer satisfaction among users of Twelp Force is actually higher than c-sat ratings of Best Buy amongst the general population. These higher ratings translate into increased purchase intent as well as the likelihood to spend more per purchase.”

This campaign has given the company new ways to engage with its customers as well as industry-wide recognition. Earlier this year, Best Buy was awarded with the Interactive Gold for Innovative Technology Use at the 2010 Clio Awards.

**BEST PRACTICE: USING TWITTER IN YOUR LEARNING INITIATIVES—AND BEYOND**

Many organizations are tapping on social media technologies such as Twitter to radically change the way they market products, share information, and engage both consumers and employees. Blogger Chris Brogan presents some ways organizations can use Twitter for their businesses, many of which are applicable to training specifically. Some of these tips are repurposed below:

1. **Twitter brings great minds together and gives you daily opportunities to learn.** Take advantage of this forum to build knowledge among employees. In Best Buy’s case, a visit to the Twelp Force site will show you how employees and the community are sharing information and building upon it. For example, a consumer might ask about a return policy, and employees can chip in with information on how to return an item and even recommend alternative products that the consumer might be interested in.

2. **Pay attention to critics— they can give you insight on what’s not working and how you can improve.** In the case of training, employees can express how they feel about certain aspects of the program, and you can spur an in-depth conversation between learners to find out how adjustments can create a stronger program.

3. **Use Twitter to organize instant meet-ups and opinion polls.** You can post information about upcoming webinars, workshops, or meetings to help direct attention to these events and engage with employees well in advance. You may even poll employees after these events to create stronger and more effective ones in the future.

4. **Build a sense of community.** Comment on others’ tweets and retweet what others have posted. This keeps the conversation going and encourages active participation.

5. **Make Tweets useful— give advice, post pictures, comment about emerging trends.** Remember, Twitter is a medium for you to focus on building relationships—both within and outside of your organization. Employees can grow their knowledge base and create stronger connections with each other as well as consumers.
KFC: CREATING WORKFORCE LEADERS TO MINIMIZE MISTAKES AND DRIVE IMPACT

Headquartered in Louisville, Kentucky, KFC serves more than 12 million consumers across 109 countries each day. Its parent organization, YUM! Brands, Inc., generated more than $11B in 2008 and is the world’s largest restaurant company in terms of system restaurants. To address loss prevention concerns in its U.S. locations, KFC tapped on NIIT for a “real-world, scenario-based curriculum design.”

NIIT scripted a series of engaging real-world scenarios, including common mistakes made, to help KFC employees adopt the right behaviors and engage in active decision making. These virtual-world training sessions, which included 20 prescriptive e-learning modules with coaching and feedback throughout, appealed to the heavily-dominate Gen Y audience. Both team employees and shift supervisors received this training, which aimed to move trainees from an employee mentality to one of leadership. In addition, this training earned the 2010 Chief Learning Officer in Practice Award for Best Learning Content.

“We wanted to work with a partner that had the same vision we did, and the great ideas to move them forward,” says Lieske Renz, director of KFC Training Design and HR Readiness. As a result of this NIIT-custom designed solution, KFC was able to address critical and costly mistakes—and provided learners with a “rich level of experience that would otherwise take years to accumulate.”

BEST PRACTICE: LEVERAGING SCENARIO-BASED TRAINING

The article “The Benefits of Scenario Based Training” suggests that looking at military-based training offers key insights for corporate training initiatives: “The scenario based training of the military is much more reflective of how we learn in life.”

KFC recognized this principle and applied it in the following ways:

1. **Tailor Training to Your Audience.** Because a large percentage of KFC’s employees are Gen Y, the company wanted to ensure that its training initiatives were relevant to them. With the help of NIIT, the training team developed “intervention scenarios” with believable characters with whom they could relate.

2. **Integrate Virtual with Traditional Training.** In addition to the virtual scenarios, KFC provided learners with a guide they could download and review. Learners could read this guide on their personal computers (PCs) or print it and reference it at any time.

3. **Encourage Active Participation.** For KFC, keeping learners involved was a key component of the training’s success. Because participants were encouraged to play the role of investigator to track down signs of theft in their virtual environment—and share their findings with mentors—they were able to better recognize common behaviors associated with theft, take the appropriate measures to investigate theft, and escalate issues at the right time to the right person.
Allstate Insurance Company is the nation’s largest publicly held personal lines insurer, with $133B in total assets and more than 70,000 employees. Due to a sweeping change in its automobile quoting process in 2005, the company wanted to ensure that its independent agents could create the most accurate quotes possible.

With the help of NIIT, Allstate deployed a blend of e-Learning and performance support, based on the NIIT Critical Mistake Analysis methodology. This scenario-based approach includes custom content designed to eliminate opportunities for mistakes. Real-world scenarios, such as common mistakes made during the quoting process, enabled agents to grasp these errors and learn how to effectively avert them.

This Auto-Quoting learning solution dramatically increased the accuracy of agents’ ability to correctly provide auto quotes to clients—during their first interaction. As a result of this initiative, the Society of Insurers Education bestowed upon Allstate its Innovation Award for the outstanding training developed by NIIT. “The learning developed was particularly innovative, robust in blend, accessible across 39 states and included market personalization,” says Karen Scott, Allstate’s senior manager for learning and organizational effectiveness. “We required an aggressive timeline and NIIT delivered.”

BEST PRACTICE: ACHIEVING BUSINESS DRIVERS THROUGH EFFECTIVE TRAINING

The NIIT blended training solution developed for Allstate addressed the issues of speed to market, customization, efficiency, and effectiveness. Here’s how:

1. Knowledge Transfer: Improving Accuracy Allstate’s agents face as many as 50 filed entries to create customer quotes—and just one error could result in a financial loss or liability for the company. The NIIT-developed Auto-Quoting learning solution increased the learners’ ability to accurately provide customer quotes. Just fewer than 200 participants were invited to take the training, and once completed, quoting errors decreased by 73 percent.

2. Speed to Market: Deploying Across 39 States in 9 Months Allstate wanted to ensure its employees across several states could receive training applicable to them, bearing in mind the variances in state laws, premiums, etc. After a prototype e-Learning project was rolled out—and proven successful—in Texas, NIIT and Allstate worked on deploying the solution across 39 states. By developing the learning solution synchronously, NIIT and Allstate were able to deploy within nine months.

3. Customization: Ensuring Compliance and Market Specificity across Multiple Regions NIIT wanted to ensure Allstate’s regions could incorporate local- and state-specific rules and regulations so that each state branch could select and deploy a customized “package” of change. To achieve this, it designed training programs specific to each market, and agents could run through practice simulation while receiving real-time support and education that supported their specific needs.
There are, of course, more success stories that highlight the remarkable transformation learning leaders have made to their organizations. Stories such as Pfizer, the world’s largest pharmaceutical company, which created “Pfizerpedia” to enable its employees to exchange and build upon their expertise through a site modeled after Wikipedia, 23 or that of EMC, a world leader in information infrastructure solutions that tapped on NIIT’s expertise to develop advanced training and certification on storage technologies. 24

In all cases, these commitments to creating a strategic advantage through learning have resulted in significant business impact. The key for many lies in close collaboration with partners who understand and address challenges, integrate solutions with business processes and goals, and tailor programs to organizational needs and learning styles.

Become a Best-in-Class Learning Organization

This is an era of increased opportunity for learning organizations to redefine themselves and drive long-term business results. There are many steps involved, some of which may prove daunting, complex, and challenging. You can gain support in crucial areas by reaching out to an expert provider—one that has a tangible history of success. Contact NIIT to discover how you can transform your organization and become a model for learning organizations across the globe.

Get involved in this ongoing discussion now by joining our LinkedIn discussion group, subscribing to our blog, and ordering your free copy of Edward Trolley and David van Adelsberg’s book Running Training Like a Business: Delivering Unmistakable Value. You may also reserve your copy of the soon-to-be-released NIIT research report “Running Training Like a Business: The 2010 Research Update and Framework Revealed.”
About NIIT’s Enterprise Learning Solutions Business

NIIT’s Enterprise Learning Solutions business delivers innovative strategies that help clients accelerate business impact. NIIT Managed Training Services are a suite of best-in-class training processes that enable customers to reduce costs, sharpen their business focus, and drive quantifiable results. Our Managed Training Services deliver more relevant training to organizations, bring proven best practices into business processes, and redirect surplus training capital into core business functions.

Known worldwide as a leader in learning outsourcing, with presence in more than 44 countries, NIIT’s Enterprise Learning Solutions business offers products and services, including curriculum design and custom content development, learning administration and operations, learning delivery and management, learning technology development and administration, learning management systems, virtual labs, student retention services, and strategic assessments. Together with its organization, Cognitive Arts, NIIT’s global talent development programs help clients achieve real-world skills to better compete in today’s market.

Established in 1981, NIIT is known globally as the number-one choice for strategic learning solutions. NIIT has earned more than 50 awards, including 13 Brandon Hall awards.

For more information about NIIT’s Learning Solutions Business for Enterprises, please visit niit.com or facebook.com/niitels. You may also contact Kimberley Kelly, Director of Marketing, at Kimberley.Kelly@niit.com
SOURCES

7. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.