



To Empower Learning Over a Lifetime

How academia and businesses can instill a culture of learning for organizational success

Introduction

If you're a talent professional, you've probably been tasked with creating a culture of lifelong learning at your organization. Your CEO says it is among the highest organizational priorities—critical for success in a rapidly changing environment. Lifelong learning benefits employees by keeping their skills relevant in the face of disruption, which will contribute to organizational success.

At the same time, you experience a tension that makes fostering lifelong learning especially challenging for talent managers. Skill development benefits the organization by ensuring that employees' capabilities remain relevant in the face of disruption—as long as the employee is with the organization. Investing in employees' lifelong learning may help with retention, but ultimately that investment is just as portable as the employee—and may help the employee attract broader opportunities. So, what is the role of the employee and talent leader, and the balance between individual benefit and organizational need?

Considering this tension, what are talent professionals doing to encourage lifelong learning at their organizations? How do talent managers empower employees to learn, rather than direct or manage their development? How are views about the sources and models for learning and development changing—and what could this mean for educational providers? To answer these questions and more, the Human Capital Media Research and Advisory Group—the research arm of *Chief Learning Officer*—partnered with AACSB International, the world's largest business education alliance, for the *2018 CLO Lifelong Learning* survey. We asked learning professionals for their opinions on the challenges that exist in instituting a culture of learning at their organizations, and how they'll meet those challenges to reap the benefits of employee lifelong learning.

Key findings

Lifelong learning is important for business3

- Lifelong learning supports employee agility and increases employee satisfaction, engagement, and retention.
- Nurturing a culture of lifelong learning enables organizations to better respond to disrupted market environments.

Talent managers are pivoting to strategies that enable and empower learners.....7

- These strategies yield benefits to the organization as well as to the individual.
- Strategies will often involve reliance on external partners and platforms.

Companies support a variety of approaches to lifelong learning, valued for different reasons10

- Different credentials offer greater perceived benefit on dimensions such as credibility and transferability (degrees) and accessibility and affordability (certificates/badges).
- A majority of talent managers see shifts in learning methodologies, including heavier reliance on technology, personalization, and social learning.

Effective approaches frequently involve the active engagement and input of managers.....14

- Among the top ways managers help foster lifelong learning are through mentoring, feedback mechanisms, and toolkits.



424
respondents participated in the *2018 CLO Lifelong Learning* survey. For more comprehensive demographics information, see appendix.

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Nurturing a culture of lifelong learning enables organizations to better respond to disrupted market environments.

Higher education professionals have known for many years that employee tenures are getting shorter. In the U.S., the median tenure with current employers is now just 5.2 years among employees with at least a college degree, according to research.¹ Even if employers could hire people with the skills their company needs, keeping that talent is getting harder. Turnover can be costly for organizations, especially when they are constantly replacing high-performing employees.

Employee turnover is far from the only contributor to the disruption and unpredictability that challenge the talent development leader. As organizations strive to retain their workers, they'll need to be aware of their workers' skills and how those skills fit current and future business needs. The automation of whole industries, together with digital disruption and fierce competition, has led to the need for constant reskilling. Skills need to be relevant, and the knowledge gained from past experiences and prior educational programs may no longer be sufficient for carrying an organization forward.

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics News Release, "Employee Tenure in 2016."

According to survey respondents, organizations recognize that lifelong learning is critical to long-term business success. Most talent management professionals (82 percent) have been tasked by their organizations to foster lifelong learning among their employees. In addition, 73 percent of talent management professionals say that lifelong learning is an important or critical part of their organization's talent strategy.

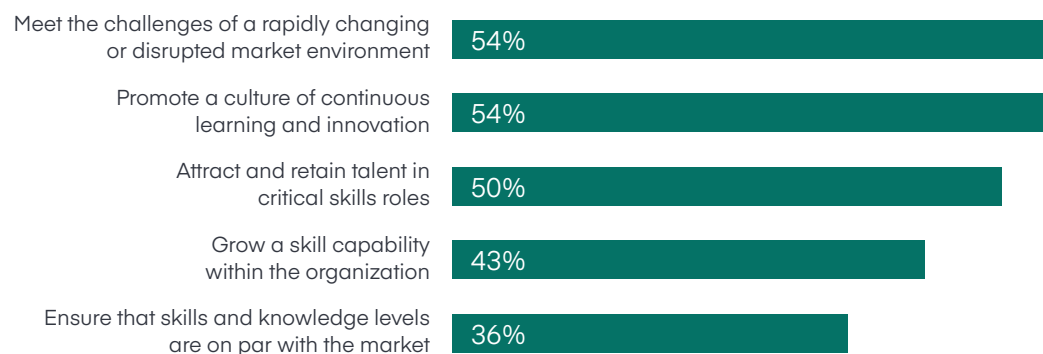
82%

of survey respondents say their learning function has been tasked with fostering lifelong learning among their employees.

Why is there an intense need for lifelong learning? Interestingly, the top organizational concerns position lifelong learning as a response to broader industry challenges rather than a way to achieve specific strategic plans (Figure 1). Survey respondents indicate that top motivations for a focus on lifelong learning are the disruptive market environment and objectives related to company culture and employee retention.

Organizations understand all too well the current nature of the workforce, where talent is a key differentiator between businesses and digital disruption affects nearly every industry. By encouraging a culture of continuous learning, organizations ensure they're more agile, able to face disruption head-on, and remain relevant in the market.

Figure 1: Top organizational motivations for fostering lifelong learning among employees

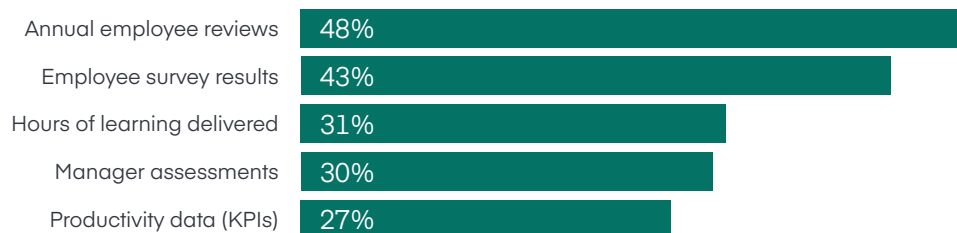


Less cited but still common motivations relate to general company competitiveness (36 percent) and growing a specific skill capability within the organization (43 percent). Overall, these motivations stress the general importance of employees and their development over specific business initiatives. Indeed, less than 20 percent said that lifelong learning is motivated by a specific challenge in the organization.

Similarly, when tracking lifelong learning activities and impact, companies most commonly use methods that reflect how learning is impacting the development of employees and their perceptions about the organization and its culture. Nearly half of organizations incorporate their tracking of lifelong learning into annual evaluations of individual employee performance. Nearly 50 percent use employee survey results. Almost a third of organizations (30 percent) use manager assessments to track lifelong learning (Figure 2).

All of these practices suggest an imperative role for managerial-level employees in the implementation of a lifelong learning strategy. Having defined metrics and measurement tools both enables managers to be better facilitators of lifelong learning for their teams and gives talent management professionals a big-picture view of where their learning efforts have been successful. Other common metrics focus on hours of learning and productivity, as stated by 31 percent and 27 percent of respondents, respectively. Survey respondents report examining metrics such as KPIs or hours of learning delivered to track lifelong learning.

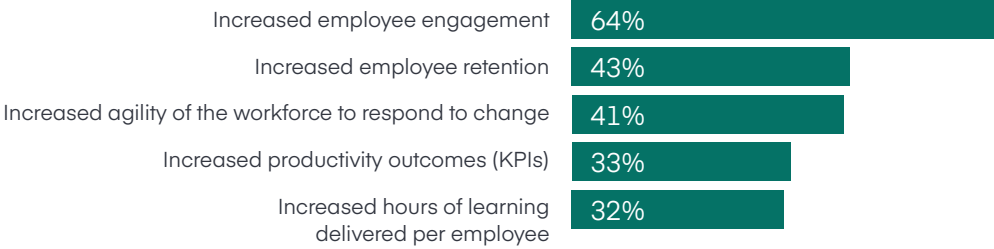
Figure 2: Measurement/metrics used to track lifelong learning



Organizations that have worked to instill a culture of lifelong learning have seen improvements in employee engagement and retention (Figure 3). By working with employees to determine how their current and future skills best fit the needs of the business, organizations demonstrate commitment to their employees' long-term career goals, which will in turn foster loyalty to the organization. By showing that they care about learning, organizations also show that they care about employees as more than just assets.

They also report an increase in employee agility, suggesting that the practice of lifelong learning helps facilitate a mindset that is open to continued learning opportunities. An agile, learning-hungry culture can help mitigate organizational disruption and better positions the organization for proactive adaptation and evolution toward new business opportunities.

Figure 3: Outcomes experienced from efforts to foster lifelong learning



Talent managers are pivoting to strategies that enable and empower learners, often through partnerships.



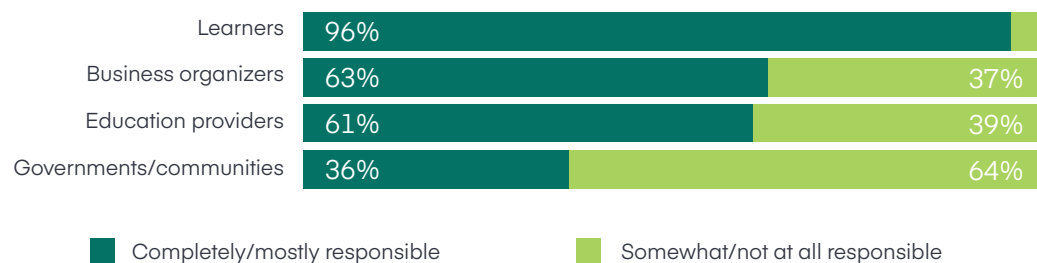
These strategies yield benefits to the organization as well as to the individual.

Strategies will often involve reliance on external partners and platforms.

It's one thing to recognize that an organization needs to instill a culture of learning; it's another to connect lifelong learning to the business strategy. Even if organizations recognize how beneficial it will be to their business, it is more difficult to see lifelong learning as essential to their strategic focus. And, as pointed out earlier, it is easy for businesses to believe that their investment in the skills of employees would enable them to leave. How are organizations adapting to these realities?

The answer reveals itself in the contrast between what organizations think is important and who should be responsible. While lifelong learning is important to organizations, most talent leaders believe that employees should be responsible for their own lifelong learning (96 percent saying mostly or completely responsible, with 61 percent saying completely so) (Figure 4). This outlook signals the rise of a strategy of enabling and empowering employees to learn.

Figure 4: Where responsibility lies for fostering lifelong learning

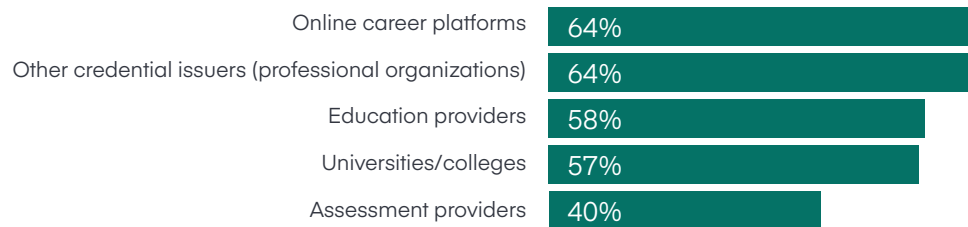


Enabling and empowering learners is about providing the access to learning opportunities, including guidance about which opportunities to pursue and the right time to pursue them. It also means making tools and content readily available to employees—either directly through the company or through financial support for external learning opportunities. This need for access is why new approaches, including digital learning, micro-learning, and personalized learning, are on the rise (as shown later in this report).

That business organizations and education providers are seen as having high levels of responsibility suggests that both entities can have strong roles in complementing the learner’s own initiative. Findings also suggest strong roles for business organizations and education providers to partner with one another to identify, create, and deliver the learning opportunities that are needed.

A majority of businesses point to professional organizations that issue credentials, to universities and colleges, and to other types of education providers as being important or critically important partners in supporting their future lifelong learning strategies (Figure 5). Such entities can help organizations achieve desired results by providing insights drawn from connections across industries, and by offering the learning formats that appeal to modern adult learners.

Figure 5: Anticipated important partnerships in efforts to foster lifelong learning



The context of lifelong learning suggests that the relationships between education providers and companies will center as much, if not more, on developing current employees as on training future ones. Both the placement/career services offices and executive education arms of business schools are cited by just over half of companies as entities they work with at least occasionally. Currently, the frequency of engagements is higher with the placement/career services offices, with 28 percent of organizations working with them usually or frequently (versus executive education units, where only 22 percent report more than occasional engagements).

But 48 percent of respondents indicate that, in the future, their organizations will want universities to play a stronger role in creating non-degree credentials (e.g., certificates and digital badges). This desire points to more potential areas of collaboration than ever before, especially related to developing and expanding experiential learning centers and executive education programming.

Companies support a variety of approaches to lifelong learning, valued for different reasons.



Different credentials offer greater perceived benefit on dimensions such as credibility and transferability (degrees) and accessibility and affordability (certificates/badges).

A majority of talent managers see shifts in learning methodologies, including heavier reliance on technology, personalization, and social learning.

The variety of partnerships envisioned by learning leaders as critical to their organizations' lifelong learning culture success highlights the range of educational and signaling (credential) models that contribute to those strategies. Modern learning pathways will likely include a mix of traditional degree-based learning and a variety of modular or micro-learning programs, customized for the individual learner and organizational needs.

For organizations and talent managers, one of the critical components of managing lifelong learning involves tracking whether a skill or competency has been achieved. Credentials can serve that function, as well as other purposes, such as providing a set of tangible benchmarks that motivate current or future employees to learn. A wide selection of credentials² exists for signaling educational outcomes, and survey respondents demonstrate a savvy ability to distinguish between the characteristics and potential organizational benefits of different credential alternatives (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Respondent agreement that their organization has the following benefits from different types of learning credentials

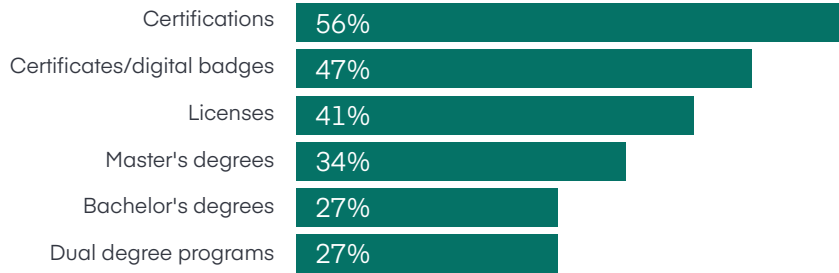
	Degrees	Certifications	Licenses	Certificates/ Badges
Transparency about what competencies have been achieved	80%	93%	93%	79%
Learners have applied and practiced skills that are part of the credential	73%	93%	90%	74%
Ability to utilize/fit the credential into workplace career frameworks/pathways	79%	91%	90%	79%
Confidence in the integrity of the credential, including trust in existing endorsers (accreditations)	92%	93%	93%	68%
Transferability/portability	90%	89%	87%	65%
Employee satisfaction with experience	83%	90%	86%	84%
Affordability	49%	77%	75%	87%
Accessibility for employees (separate from affordability)	73%	89%	85%	90%

² See appendix for glossary of terms and how credentials are defined in this paper.

Certifications and licenses were rated highly across nearly all dimensions. Talent leaders think they are transparent in signaling the competencies achieved and are confident that learners have applied the skills that are part of the credential. They trust the integrity of certifications and licenses and can envision how they fit into career pathways. Not surprisingly, degrees were highly rated for transferability/portability and for credibility, but earned the lowest scores for affordability and accessibility. Certificates/badges were rated highest for accessibility, but lowest on confidence/credibility and transferability/portability.

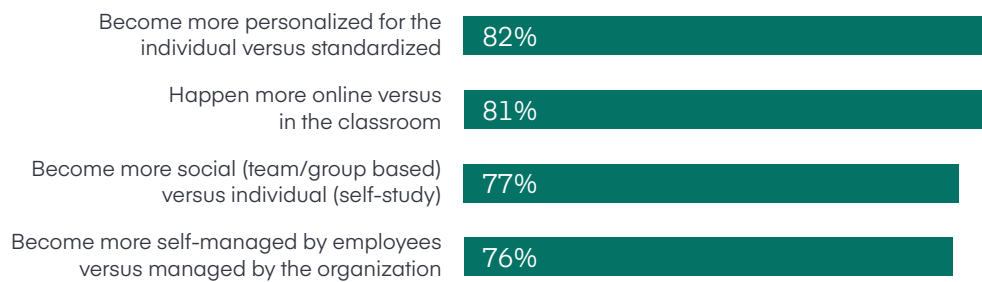
In the coming years, some types of credentials will be gaining more importance to organizational hiring and promotion practices. Survey respondents believe the credentials that will see the greatest gains in importance are certifications, digital badges, and licenses (Figure 7). This increase in acceptance could be accelerated through the emergence of frameworks for providing greater transparency about skills by these credential holders. This shift may also represent frustration with affordability and accessibility of degrees.

Figure 7: Credentials that will be more important to organizational hiring practices in the coming years



Other shifts in lifelong learning pathways will occur in the methods for educational delivery and consumption. Survey respondents strongly agree that in the future, learning at their organizations will become more personalized, online, and social, versus standardized and classroom-based (Figure 8). To a lesser but still significant extent (approximately 56 percent), respondents believe that new learning technologies, such as gamification, virtual and augmented reality, and artificial intelligence, will play a role in organizational learning. This view ties in with organizational beliefs that learning should be managed by the learners, rather than by the organization, but also reinforces the opportunities created for managers and organizational resources to help guide and facilitate access to the right opportunities.

Figure 8: Survey respondents agree that in the future formal learning at their organization will ...



Effective approaches frequently involve the active engagement and input of managers.

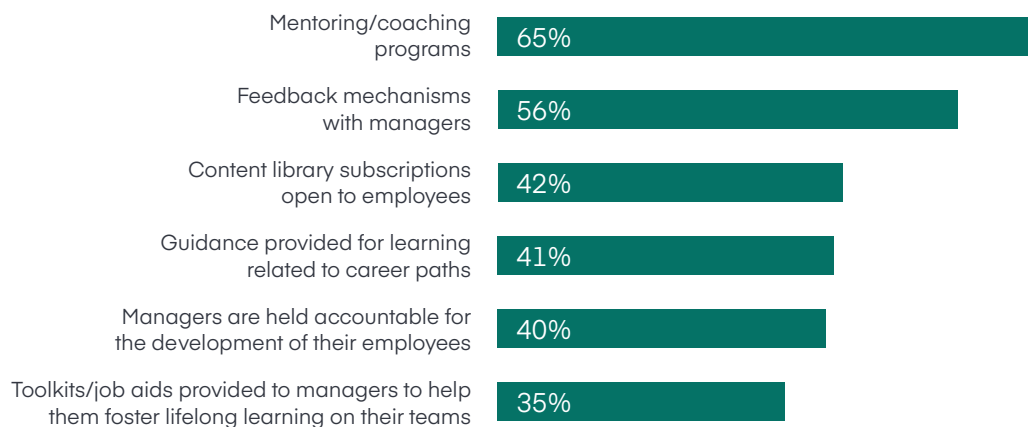
Among the top ways managers help foster lifelong learning are through mentoring, feedback mechanisms, and toolkits.

Designing and navigating learning pathways with so many options to choose from, especially in ways that create gains for both the individual and organization, benefits highly from the active engagement and input of managers. The role of managers, and the degree of influence they hold, is reinforced across studies.³

Managers are a key link to instilling a culture of learning at any organization. Without a framework in place to pinpoint relevant learning opportunities and apply newly acquired knowledge on the job, individual investments in lifelong learning go unrewarded, thus discouraging future efforts.

The top ways managers help foster lifelong learning at their organization are through mentoring, feedback mechanisms, and toolkits (Figure 9). If managers are held accountable for the learning on their teams, they'll be more likely to work with the employees they manage to instill a culture of lifelong learning. Having a manager who mentors employees and encourages their growth both within and beyond the organization is a key element in fostering organizational loyalty, which in turn is a way lifelong learning encourages retention.

Figure 9: How organizations foster lifelong learning throughout the enterprise



³ See also *LinkedIn 2018 Workplace Learning and Development Report*.

Also common are resources and platforms that provide access to content, guide education activities, and connect skills to jobs. These are helpful to both managers and employees, especially in making education and training most relevant and valuable to learners.

Conclusion

Talent professionals face an uncertain future. Disruption affects nearly every industry, and employee tenure isn't what it once was. As part of an overall learning strategy, talent professionals have been tasked with fostering lifelong learning among their employees. Such learning gives employees the skills they need to remain relevant while building organizational loyalty, which encourages retention and thereby ensures that organizations won't have to consistently hire workers.

All of these findings suggest changing roles for both talent leaders and business educators, as well as the need for business, professional organizations, and business schools to work together to develop a better ecosystem or infrastructure to support lifelong learning—where individuals are enabled and empowered to be responsible for their own learning. These partnerships have the potential to create data-driven personalized learning paths, which organizations want for their employees. Following are key takeaways for organizations, employees, and education providers.

Organizations and Talent Management Professionals

Lifelong learning involves several initiatives:

- Organizations should recognize what skills and credentials they want their employees to have and make such learning available.
- They should leverage managers as mentors and coaches, encouraging managers to allow lifelong learning to blossom among their teams and holding them accountable if it doesn't.
- Finally, organizations should reach out to a mix of education providers for partnerships and collaborations that consider the current speed of disruption and provide employees with just-in-time learning.

Employees

Employees also have an obligation when organizations support lifelong learning:

- They must own their learning and be open to reskilling and upskilling.
- Much of the strategy revolves around enabling learners to take charge of their own learning.
- Employees must continue to adapt to new ideas and technologies as the world changes.
- Gaining knowledge, skills, and credentials that demonstrate they've been earned (as well as understanding new learning and training resources) are all critical priorities.

Education Providers

Education providers will experience expanding demand given the high importance of lifelong learning:

- To capitalize on this opportunity, providers must not only anticipate the skills needed for the future, but they must also adapt the credentials they offer to meet the changing needs of learners and companies.
- In the future, transparency, credibility, and affordability will matter as much as portability. In a world where learners take more responsibility for learning, education providers might offer more access to tools, such as skills assessments, learning pathways, and platforms to support their learning.

Appendix

Glossary of terms⁴

Badging program: Provides specific knowledge on a certain topic. A type of micro-credential. Typical time needed to complete: one day to one year.

Business school: A place of higher learning that confers degrees in business-related subjects.

Certificate program: Provides instruction on a certain topic. Offered at the undergraduate and graduate levels. No general knowledge requirements. Typical time needed to complete: one to two years.

Certification: Provides specific knowledge on a certain topic. Requires maintenance through skills practice and reassessment at regular intervals.

Degree program: Provides instruction on a certain topic. Offered at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Comes with general knowledge requirements in addition to content knowledge requirements. Typical time needed to complete: two to six years.

License: Demonstrates competency in an area of expertise. Awarded by a government agency after completion of proficiency requirements. Requires maintenance through continuing education.

Demographics

Name of survey

2018 CLO Lifelong Learning survey

Survey dates

January 2018

Number of respondents

424

Company size

Less than 1,000: 46%

1,000 to 2,499: 10%

2,500 to 4,999: 12%

5,000 to 9,999: 7%

More than 10,000: 25%

Geographic distribution

One country, one location: 33%

One country, multiple locations: 33%

One country, some global distribution: 15%

Highly distributed across the globe: 20%

Numbers may not total 100% due to rounding

⁴ Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE). *What is a credential?*

Methodology

The *2018 CLO Lifelong Learning* survey was conducted online by the Human Capital Media Research and Advisory Group—the research arm of *Chief Learning Officer*. Invitation letters were sent to members of the *Chief Learning Officer* magazine research board. Responses were collected from January 11 to January 29, 2018. All questions were voluntary and opt-in. Not every respondent answered every question, and survey respondents could belong to the same organization. All answers are the personal opinions of the respondents and are not the legal position of any organization or business. No incentives were offered for survey participation, besides a copy of this white paper for interested participants. Results were aggregated to ensure confidentiality.

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