

SKILLSOFT **360 SERIES**

THE NEW CLO

FROM TRAINING TO
TRANSFORMATION

by

Elisa Vincent

Vice President,
Global Talent Enablement
Skillsoft

with

Emma Engel

Director for Global Learning,
Engagement and Culture
Lenovo

(Previously Chief Learning and
Inclusion Officer, Unisys)

and

Dr. Karen Wolf

Chief Learning Officer
ManTech International

featuring

Josh Bersin

Global Industry Analyst

skillsoft®



INTRODUCTION

“Learning is the only thing the mind never exhausts, never fears, and never regrets”

— LEONARDO DA VINCI

POWER TO THE PEOPLE: LEADERSHIP IN A NEW AGE

Learning is power. When Nelson Mandela said that “education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world,” he recognized that learning is transcendent. It is a lifelong journey that for those of us who are lucky enough to enable, the past year and the coming years ahead serve as a tremendous opportunity to transform the industry.

As organizations have pivoted quickly to meet unprecedented challenges, the role of the Chief Learning Officer (CLO) is dramatically transforming.

Today’s CLO has evolved to become the voice of the workforce and the architect of company culture:

- **Focused on systems, processes, and people *and* enabling diversity, equity, inclusion, and empowerment.**
- **Leading learning and development programs *and* igniting a culture of continuous learning and growth mindsets.**
- **Enabling individual and organizational growth *and* demonstrating measured business results.**
- **Democratizing the full learning experience *and* targeting and curating specific training just-in-time.**

Today’s CLO is not simply a “Chief Trainer.” We’ve been called to serve as connectors, curators, educators, ambassadors, advocates, strategists, technologists, and especially today, caregivers of and for talent. We are responsible for enabling learning in the flow of life and work, in ways that transform people, systems, processes, and technology. A CLO is an officer of many functions beyond learning: human, diversity, experience, technology, disruption, transformation, and more. In a world that has been and will continue to be digitally interwoven, the CLO plays a vital role in organizational continuity and growth.

For more than 20 years, Skillsoft has been on the leading edge of learning — creating digital experiences that enable individual and organizational transformation. We thought we’d seen it all.

“Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.”

— NELSON MANDELA



THEN EVERYTHING CHANGED

As workforces went remote, skill development became the topic of conversation with more and more strategizing on how to fill organizational gaps, keep teams productive, and spark new career paths for people around the world.

Over the past eighteen months, businesses around the globe, across every industry, faced unparalleled change and disruption. Marginalized employees bore the brunt of this volatility due to economic, social, and familial disparities.

As entire workforces went remote, we shifted our focus from skill development to mindset development, to resilience and productivity for leaders and employees around the world.

Leadership competencies, such as empathy, emotional intelligence, and compassion gained renewed focus as all people adjusted to a new way of working, leading, interacting with each other. Digital transformation, as both a study and a practice, accelerated overnight. And it's unlikely that it will slow down any time soon.

Within this changing landscape, Chief Learning Officers have new opportunities to transform talent, to transform learning — refocusing organizational priorities and disseminating seeds of hope for a better tomorrow in our workplaces. Learning knows no boundaries, and now is the moment for CLOs to build, enable, and empower a global workforce to meet tomorrow's challenges and seize tomorrow's opportunities.

In this 360 Report, we'll share some highlights from our annual Learning Report, along with dynamic insights from top CLOs and thought leaders who have been leading this charge. Read on.



LESSONS LEARNED

“I thought the most important thing I did was run a 13,000-square foot training facility. We closed that on March 12th and it’s not reopened since. We used to put a lot of time and energy into that facility and overnight, poof, it was gone. And now what I’m focused on is taking care of our people.”

— DR. KAREN WOLF

In Skillsoft’s Annual Learning [Report](#), “Lean into Learning,” the common theme we discovered is the need for leaders to be able to pivot quickly, be catalysts for change, and still maintain continuity.

It’s been a balancing act. We also discovered a major convergence between learning as an academic practice and the evolution of what learners want, need, and can absorb right now.

We are evolving: from focusing on *what* to learn, to *how* to learn it. We are venturing outside of the training rooms, outside of our learning management systems, and building learning experiences that enable learning to happen side by side with working and living. This requires re-imagining how we marry collaboration platforms and learning platforms — creating one fully democratic, open access, highly collaborative experience, and still allowing individual learners to feel that learning has been personalized just for them.





FACE TO FACE, SCREEN TO SCREEN

At Skillsoft, we talk about **Power Skills** as the following leadership competencies.

- Agility
- Adaptability
- Empathy
- Resilience
- Innovation

As the workforce transitioned to operating remotely, widespread training was needed to help workers build the skills and learn the technologies needed to go virtual. Remote working skills, stress management and wellness, communication and business continuity became hot topics in a matter of weeks.

WE SAW MASSIVE SPIKES IN COURSE COMPLETIONS FOR:



189x
MICROSOFT TEAMS:
COMMUNICATING
VIA THE APP



56x
FACING VIRTUAL TEAM
CHALLENGES



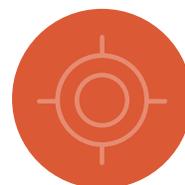
79x
MICROSOFT TEAMS:
GETTING TO KNOW
THE APPLICATION



8.2x
ORGANIZE YOUR
PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL
WORKSPACE



62x
EXPLORING VIRTUAL
COLLABORATION



7.3x
THE ART OF STAYING
FOCUSED



“Change is constant and faster than it’s ever been before. We started out the year with a great plan about all the content we were going to build that would align to our strategic solutions. And it all got thrown out in March, when 90% of our organization moved home. Literally in ten days, we moved 4,000 service desk agents home and continued to maintain our service level agreements. What that meant was that we had to pivot significantly.”

— EMMA ENGEL

We also believe that leadership competencies are not just for people who lead others. Self-leadership in a world that is volatile, uncertain, and complex is also paramount, and leadership characteristics such as emotional intelligence, empathy, trust, vulnerability, and compassion have quickly become the most important leadership behaviors of our time.



278x GROWTH IN DEVELOPING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE



5.5x GROWTH IN ENCOURAGING TEAM COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION



4x TRUST BUILDING THROUGH EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION



6 OF THE TOP SKILLSOFT DIGITAL BADGES FOCUSED ON COMMUNICATION

Learners demonstrated a new focus on empathy, recognizing its value in challenging times. In fact, “Become a Great Listener” grew to be the number one completed business skills.



DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

“One more change around meeting people where they are is really looking at things like unconscious bias — in the way that we curate content, in the way that we build content for our learners and provide a couple of different options. We’re blending audiobooks with books and courses with videos so that people can take advantage of whatever mode of learning is most comfortable for them.”

— EMMA ENGEL

BUILDING CONNECTIONS

For many of us, DEI initiatives were already part of our strategic priorities; we had a roadmap, and we thought we were moving right along — from compliance training to building awareness of biases to developing inclusive leaders.

Then the events of the past year pushed us to redefine how we drive agile and sustainable diversity, equity, and inclusion across organizational ecosystems.

Widespread social unrest and injustice, along with social justice movements and global calls for long overdue equity required that we leverage the energy and attention of the moment for significant progress. Organizations around the world took a hard look at their approach to DEI. They recognized that their existing programs didn’t go far enough and that more was needed.

We are pivoting from using the language and strategy of maturity models to that of journeys and evolution instead. In this work, we acknowledge there is no end and no perfect formula, but rather a need for iterative, continuous, and sustainable progress — one deliberative step at a time.



The imperative for Chief Learning Officers now is to extend our focus to not only building program and training people, but also to assessing the systems and processes we use to enable people and rebuilding them to eliminate bias and inequities — a renewed focus on the “HOW” of what we do, as much as the “WHAT” we and our teams deliver.

For DEI, we need to “train” differently. We’re called to report on talent metrics, promote and assign learning, curate content, and provide access to learning resources in ways that eliminate barriers between executives and employees, and enable equity across the organization. For many of us who lead human capital, we are called to champion diversity in how we train and enable leadership in our organizations. In response to this moment in our collective history, there are two approaches that CLOs have mobilized quickly to ensure the advancement of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

- 1. Providing just-in-time, open access learning opportunities that are respectful of dynamic and diverse schedules and responsibilities. Learning that is accessible anywhere, anytime, and that offers opportunity for self-assessment, reflection, and action.**
- 2. Supporting and amplifying grassroots efforts such as leader led groups, global discussion forums, and employee resource groups led workshops and panels — with the acknowledgement that some of the most transformative learning experiences are less formal and based in experience and storytelling.**



As one example, at Skillsoft, we decided to offer open, virtual, live discussion forums on topics that are relevant and touching people's heads and hearts in the moment, topics such as racial equality, social injustice, global leadership, diversity and inclusion. We're not mandating these sessions, but rather creating a safe space where people can tell their stories, learn from each other, apply curiosity, build awareness, and listen.

We discovered that these forums, these informal learning experiences, when framed with curated courses and assessments can be powerful and transformational — through storytelling, through connection, through virtual live collaboration. The lift for the Learning team was minimal, the return on investment was high.

And as challenging as it may be for CLOs not to apply the learning structure we typically do to these types of experiences, we've learned that when we build, apply, and structure a place for people to show up, they do — regardless of their role or level in the organization — and we practice and build a new muscle for many of us: agility.

By limiting a set agenda and a list of long learning objectives for topics like DEI, we've freed ourselves of the burden of redundancy and allowed ourselves to be more iterative and agile with each one. We are actively redefining how we learn, when we learn, what we learn. We are facilitators, mediators, coaches. As CLOs, we are called to set the stage for employee enablement, stand on that stage to advocate for the people we serve, and hold the stage for voices across our organizations to teach, train, and inspire.



BLURRED LINES: FINDING WORK-LIFE BALANCE

“Helping people find what they need is an important part of our role.”

— DR. KAREN WOLF

In an episode of our Skillsoft Podcast, [The Edge](#), “The Changing Face of the CLO” the conversation often centered around employee advocacy in times of disruption. We spoke with senior learning professionals Dr. Karen Wolf and Emma Engel.

Karen told us, “Helping people find what they need is an important part of our role and I find that often I am the voice of our people. That’s traditionally been the HR organization’s role — but quite frankly, they’ve been so heads down with benefits and flu shots and compensation that developing people has become much more the role of the CLO. My people are tired and burned out, and we just need to be really conscious of the psychological toll that this has taken.

“All this technology is great, but we also need to build some time to allow people to process, to allow people to reflect, and to pay attention to something other than just that face on the screen. We’re so programmed to look at non-verbals of the whole body, and we’re not getting that anymore. We’re very focused on just the human face. I think we need to give our folks permission to have some downtime, and we need to intentionally plan it in our schedules because it is really, really important.”



One mission-critical question remains: How do CLOs address all the needs of today's learners?

Emma continued, “We had all of the social unrest in the US and a number of challenging situations all around the world, plus the challenge of being locked down at home during the pandemic. It really accelerated a number of programs that we had thought about kicking off in 2020 that then just had to be brought to the forefront. We had no employee associate groups in March; we now have eight, coming from this need for people to connect with their shared experiences. We used to have six months to figure out how to become relevant, we literally have days now.

“And, over time, the role of learning and the learning department has moved much more towards curation. It’s about simplifying, it’s about helping people find what they need at the moment of need. Finding just the right nuggets and making them available and easier to find has become more and more important during the whole pandemic period.

“At the start, we thought, ‘Oh great, they’re going to have more time for learning because they’re not going to be commuting.’ And then, very quickly, we got feedback, ‘Well, no, actually we have less time because of things facing us around our families, and all the additional asks on our time.



“So, it’s about feedback.

“It’s about asking people what it is they need, what they want. I think it’s about balance. We thought we would only have a pandemic for a couple of months and then things would be fine. And now we’re realizing that that is not the case, and so it’s about really encouraging people to look at their lives and figure out how they bring back some balance. On my team, we’ve been meeting for fifteen minutes every single morning since March — but not about work; just about connecting. I’ve seen the team become a lot closer. I’ve seen the collaboration increase. I’ve seen the creativity increase. I forced it a little bit at the beginning, but now they’ve really gotten into it. I think that’s another role of learning to challenge, get people over their hump. Then it’s looking at how can we use technology to improve that rather than seeing it as a barrier.”

How do CLOs adapt themselves and their teams to the evolving needs of our workforce? What roles must we embody and how can we build the capabilities we need to have now?

In other words, what roles must we now play? How do we provide experiences that can support the health of our workers, ignite the desire to learn, meet learners’ preferences, and also exist in a way that’s sustainable for our organizations? In light of all that we have learned, how do CLOs develop themselves and their teams to build the capabilities we need and provide the experiences that ignite a desire to learn, meet learner preferences, and are sustainable?

SPECIAL SECTION

THE THREE ROLES OF THE NEW CLO

By Josh Bersin

Global Industry Analyst

The role of Chief Learning Officer has never been more important. Once considered a job of “head of corporate training” or “the chief of the corporate university,” today CLOs are being asked to take on a transformational role: creating a culture of continuous growth, skills development, and future planning for the company.

Consider how the business world has changed. Over the last two years companies have been shattered with disruption: The Pandemic, the massive growth of digital business models and new service delivery approaches, massive growth in AI and machine learning, and the enormous need for new leadership skills as we manage people through change.

And while all these strategies are happening, there’s an even bigger issue to address: coming up with a skills taxonomy so the company can plan for the future. The world of corporate learning has become very data-driven and technology enabled. Dozens of tools let employees learn in the flow of work, on-demand, or in the form of a corporate Academy. The CLO has to manage this complex process, and it’s one that interfaces with public workforce data, the IT Infrastructure, and the company’s core job architecture.

What should a CLO do? How can one executive manage this wide range of responsibilities? My research over the years shows that strong CLOs do three things well.

FIRST, THEY SET UP A L&D ORGANIZATION THAT IS SCALABLE, FEDERATED, AND HIGHLY SKILLED.

It's impossible to centralize L&D in a large company, but you also don't want to let it go crazy in every department. The best CLOs set up a clear delineation of central services and programs, regional services and programs, and the needs of individual business units, business partners, and line leaders.

This “federated model” of L&D lets the CLO focus on strategic programs and Investments while the company can do all sorts of learning and training at a local level. When most companies go through this effort, they realize they have massive amounts of duplication, lots of extra systems, and many creative people buried deep in the organization. A great “high-impact learning organization” brings all this together, and clearly balances the value of centralized and standardized infrastructure against the need for each geography or business unit to do their own thing.

THE SECOND THING GREAT CLOs DO IS STUDY THE WORLD.

The CLO job is one of pattern matching. They have to understand a myriad of new technologies being applied to learning. They have to see, and sense new skills and jobs being created. They have to understand economic trends and how supply and demand for talent is changing. And they need to be very well versed in the culture of the company, and what kinds of programs and interventions will work (and what will not).

Every company has a culture of learning (or a culture of not learning), and it often conflicts with the culture of execution. The CLO is the executive that must teach other executives how to “learn” while they “execute” and institutionalize the idea of continuous learning into every business unit, every executive, and every employee. Of course, they must work closely with HR, but in many cases, they work directly with sales, operations, or functional business areas. I've always felt that great CLOs are very worldly people, and they work both in and outside of HR and spend lots of time in the external market.

THE THIRD THING GREAT CLOs DO IS “EXECUTE.”

Learning organizations are filled with activity. There's lots of technology to manage and integrate. There's content to build, improve, and manage. There are a myriad of events, programs, and facilities. And of course, there are lots of creative people in learning design, execution, and change.

Great CLOs realize that running learning in a company is not about “delivering lots of programs” — it's about “delivering great learning experiences.” In other words, the CLO has to be a “design thinker” all the time. The CLO should always challenge leaders and L&D staff to innovate, adapt, and improve. Corporate learning is a never-ending challenge, and people learn in a myriad of ways. Great CLOs encourage their teams to always find new ways to execute and deliver learning well.

FINALLY, THERE'S ONE MORE IMPORTANT ROLE CLOs PLAY.

They are in many ways the “chief culture officer” of the company. Almost every major company today needs to focus on adapting to change, transforming its products and services, and reskilling its workforce. None of these things go well if the company is not able to learn. This means the CLO must be keenly aware of every company's culture, reward systems, and values. And this means they owe it to the CHRO and CEO to speak up when things are not going well.

In all my research over the last 30 years, perhaps the most important and enduring business strategy I've seen is an organization's ability to learn. Whenever a company loses its market to a competitor or finds itself in financial difficulties, it's always driven by the company's inability to see what has changed, learn from its mistakes, and reinvent itself for the future. The CLO plays a vital role in the ongoing success of every company and will play an even more critical role in the future.

ABOUT OUR AUTHOR



ELISA VINCENT

Elisa Vincent is the Vice President of Global Talent Enablement at Skillsoft, where she leads strategic initiatives that foster the individual and collective success of the organization. Her journey to human capital leadership was not a traditional one. She has built a latticed model to her own career path that has afforded her many opportunities to grow new leadership strengths and skills.

Elisa started her career in international education and study abroad where she designed, developed, and led international leadership development experiences for students and faculty — experiences that enabled research and study of gender equality and equity around the world. She was a founding member of the Bentley University Center for Women in Business leadership team, where she served as both consultant and leadership coach for organizational and emerging leaders in various industries.

After moving into corporate human capital management, Elisa's goal has been to build transformative talent development and management infrastructures that enable cultures of inclusion, equity, and belonging. She has designed and implemented leadership models and learning content, curricula, and experiences with proven success and rapid adoption in diverse markets, and she has loved every moment.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS



EMMA ENGEL

Emma Engel is Director for Global Learning, Engagement and Culture for Lenovo where she heads up leadership development for the Americas and Engagement/ Culture for all of Lenovo outside China. She was previously the Chief Learning & Inclusion Officer at Unisys where she led the Global Talent Growth team responsible for growth, performance, and development.

As a versatile, global talent executive, Emma increases enterprise value by partnering with executive leadership and clients to identify and resolve performance gaps. She effectively directs teams that design innovative and cost-effective solutions that accelerate business growth and improve the talent pipeline without disrupting business momentum.

Emma holds a post-graduate Certificate in Management from the Macquarie University Graduate School of Management in New South Wales, Australia. Her Bachelor of Arts with Honors in Clinical psychology is from Rand Afrikaans University, Johannesburg, South Africa.



DR. KAREN WOLF

Dr. Karen Wolf serves as Chief Learning Officer of ManTech International, responsible for overseeing the planning, staffing, and budgets for the company's training and talent management.

An accomplished professional in developing e-Learning solutions in higher education, government and corporate educational settings, Karen also manages all ManTech's education and training process and procurement, protocols, schedules, and learning methods.

In addition, Karen has over 20 years of experience managing workforce training programs with the FBI. Consistently recognized by her peers for efficiency and innovation in L&D, she is a six-time winner of the Chief Learning Officer LearningElite Award.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS



JOSH BERSIN

Josh Bersin is a world-known industry analyst, educator, and thought leader in all aspects of HR, leadership, and HR technology. A global research analyst, public speaker, and writer on the topics of corporate human resources, talent management, recruiting, leadership, technology, and the intersection between work and life, Josh advises a variety of HR and learning companies to help them align their products and services toward the needs of corporate buyers.

He lives in the San Francisco area, close enough to Silicon Valley to keep up with new technology and its impact on the business of talent. You can read his thoughts in the Josh Bersin [blog](#), at his [LinkedIn](#) Influencer site, and on [Forbes.com](#). Please visit the [Josh Bersin Academy](#) to join the growing network of HR professionals advancing the state of Human Resources.



ABOUT SKILLSOFT

Skillsoft delivers digital learning, training, and talent solutions to help organizations unleash their edge. Leveraging immersive, engaging content, Skillsoft enables organizations to unlock the potential in their best assets — their people — and build teams with the skills they need for success. Empowering 45 million learners and counting, Skillsoft democratizes learning through an intelligent learning experience and a customized, learner-centric approach to skills development with resources for Leadership Development, Business Skills, Technology & Developer, Digital Transformation, and Compliance.

Skillsoft and SumTotal are partners to thousands of leading global organizations, including many Fortune 500 companies. The company features three award-winning systems that support learning, performance and success: Skillsoft learning content, the Percipio intelligent learning experience platform, and the SumTotal suite for Talent Development, which offers measurable impact across the entire employee lifecycle.

Learn more at [skillsoft.com](https://www.skillsoft.com).

ABOUT THE SKILLSOFT 360 SERIES

The 360 Series comprises papers and reports by thought leaders inside and outside the Skillsoft community. It challenges assumptions, considers subjects from multiple angles, and provides a fresh, yet comprehensive, view of topics that are most important to today's business leaders.

