



Top 6 Business Priorities for a 21st-Century CLO

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 **Adobe Captivate Prime**
Learning Management System

 **THE ELEARNING
GUILD**

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Reviewer

Nipun Sharma, Adobe Systems

A photograph of two men in business attire. The man on the left is wearing glasses and a blue shirt with a striped tie, looking towards the man on the right. The man on the right is seen from the side, wearing a white shirt. They appear to be in a meeting or discussion in an office setting with large windows in the background.

INTRODUCTION

The chief learning officer (CLO) of an organization has a myriad of concerns—from process improvement and managing training strategy to developing leaders and demonstrating ROI. Their broad responsibilities might range from determining how to most effectively onboard new hires, to overseeing implementation of new learning technology to support 21st-century learning needs.

Like fingerprints, each workplace is different. While individual CLOs are challenged by issues specific to their organizations, certain industry trends are projected to impact chief learning officers in every vertical. These universal concerns comprise what experts believe to be the top six business priorities for a 21st-century CLO. The top priorities are:

- Engaging Millennials
- Informal learning
- Mobile learning
- Content curation
- Data analytics
- Relevant, personalized content

This paper will cover each of these topics in greater detail.

Top six business priorities for a 21st-century CLO

Engaging Millennials

Millennials are the generation of people born from approximately 1981 to 1999. According to a [Pew Research Center analysis](#) of US Census Bureau data, they represent the largest generation in the American workforce, and their numbers are swelling. By 2020, experts predict that nearly half (46 percent) of all US workers will be Millennials. As this new generation takes over the workforce, learning leaders need to understand how to motivate, engage, and inspire them.

A lot has been written about how the Millennial approach to work and life differs from that of their predecessors, and some of the commentary has been less than flattering. Yes, Millennials might indeed have short attention spans, be fixated on social media, and perennially be tethered to their smartphones, but this generation also has many unique competencies that the modern CLO can harness. Socially conscious and technologically fluent, Millennials as a group are collaborative and continuous learners who can contribute a lot to the workplace when provided the opportunity.

What learning strategies are most effective? Some approaches that have proven to be successful include:

- Social learning via online discussions or networks
- Personalized formal and informal training recommendations based on the employee's job title, experience, prior learning, and future aspirations
- Group-based projects
- Job rotations
- Coaching and mentorship programs

Millennials have a dubious reputation as job-hoppers. Experts note that a key factor for retaining this generation of workers is to clearly demonstrate how their efforts connect to meaningful corporate goals or a more altruistic humanitarian purpose. As a group, Millennials yearn to align themselves with companies dedicated to helping them grow and develop their careers. They seek a sense of purpose and community, and they value a collaborative workplace environment where debate is an acceptable practice. They want to be acknowledged and crave clarity on workplace goals in order to be held personally accountable.

A big day-to-day challenge is keeping Millennials engaged. In a [video](#), Dalton State College psychology professor Christy Rice outlines what she calls the "five Rs" of engaging Millennials in formal learning. These include:

- **Research-based** methods that emphasize collaboration and group work and that cater to Millennials' own personal learning styles
- **Relevant** information that provides timely answers
- **Rationale** behind instructions, as opposed to an authoritarian teaching style
- **Relaxed**, laid-back learning sessions with a warm, empathetic atmosphere
- **Rapport** with an instructor who takes a genuine interest in their achievement

To address Millennials' unique learning needs, management can define learning paths and certifications associated with their roles. Other tools that are commonly used to engage Millennials include gamification, video-based learning, and mobile learning.

It should be added that the toolkit typically assembled to appeal to Millennials may in fact be relevant for the entire workforce. "Having watched more than one septuagenarian reach first for a smartphone to answer a question, and having been told by more than a few Millennials to think of them more broadly than their age, I focus more on the learners and their needs, rather than their generation," reports an industry expert.

"Providing better learning models supports not only Millennials, but their older co-workers who may also be sick of classroom training offered too late or too early for their needs; boring page-turner eLearning; learning experiences that don't respect what they already know about a topic; or one-size-fits-none required training," she adds.

Informal learning

While learning and development professionals have always been well versed in formal learning, informal learning often dangled outside the reach of the L&D team. The prevailing philosophy was: If we don't see it, we can't track it, and we have very little influence over it anyway.

Thanks to technology, today's L&D professional can effectively account for and support informal learning. There are several forces at play that put supporting and tracking informal learning within reach. First, social platforms such as Slack and Yammer are becoming standard in many workplaces. These channels offer the L&D professional a window to better understand the organization's learning needs. Second, new platforms are emerging to integrate external content feeds and user-curated or user-generated content with the LMS's formal learning plan.

Supporting informal learning is both a technical and non-technical endeavor. Learning leaders can support informal learning through tools such as online portals, discussions, and mentoring; however, technology alone is not enough. Important behavioral and cultural changes are required to take full advantage of informal learning. Organizations that promote collaboration and celebrate those who share knowledge reap the biggest rewards. In a [blog post](#), performance strategist Mark Britz describes some of the behavioral changes that line managers need to make in order to help employees make the shift.

How can a learning management system assist a 21st-century CLO?

A learning management system can be a valuable partner for today's chief learning officer. Here are some of the many ways a 21st-century LMS can help a modern CLO:

- Deliver training
- Generate and store data
- Track compliance
- Grow leadership
- Improve customer service
- Drive culture
- Increase engagement
- Build community
- Increase sales
- Create transparency
- Build an online academy
- Increase safety
- Reduce turnover

Since much of today's learning takes place outside of a classroom, 21st-century CLOs should establish and support a culture of informal learning. Here are some tips to help build that culture:

- Provide participants the ability to continue learning after a formal course.
- Establish learning communities with different focuses. Some examples might include role or occupational focus, demographic focus, or interest focus.
- Make sure it is easy to track informal learning. Employees can self-report their activities and a manager can enter the data into an LMS, or informal learning can be captured and tracked via Experience API, more commonly referred to as xAPI.

Mobile learning

In a [study that Adobe commissioned from Forrester Consulting](#) in December 2016, human resource and learning and development leaders in the United States and Canada were asked about the benefits of mobile learning. More than half (53 percent) said that it offered "flexibility of learning from any location at any time"; 47 percent said it was an "easy way to repurpose and share new content"; and 45 percent said it "makes learning more widely available and accessible."

CLOs are discovering that mobile learning has moved from "nice-to-have" to "must-have" status. There are numerous reasons for this phenomenon. Many members of today's global workforce operate from their home, their car, a factory floor, or even a coffee shop. Mobile learning permits them to access resources that help them perform their jobs; plus, it keeps them informed about company business. In addition, it enables employees to effectively manage the time they devote to continuing education. Using their mobile devices, they can squeeze in learning whenever and wherever they have the time or inclination.

The mobile learning trend is projected to grow even bigger in the near future. Exciting technological advances in augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) are poised to propel mobile learning to such an extent that pundits predict it may eventually overtake desktop eLearning.

Below are some insights learning leaders should consider when incorporating mobile learning at their organizations.

- Before doing anything, clearly define the goal. Do you want to use mobile for learning or performance? Identify whether mobile will be used to deliver an entire course, or as a support module.
- While many long-form eLearning authoring platforms offer a mobile output option, that doesn't necessarily mean you should be producing long-form eLearning to be consumed on a mobile device. Mobile is best suited for content that can be accessed in short bursts and while on the go.
- People generally use their mobile devices for quick information and one-click answers to their problems. Don't ask or expect learners to change their habits to accommodate your long training program.
- Design with a less-is-more mantra. Keep the user interface simple and easy to navigate because users consume it with their fingers on a small screen. Limit scrolling and keep content short.
- Many mobile tools are designed to work outside the learning management system environment, and therefore may not seamlessly connect with your LMS. If this is an important consideration, make sure your LMS can fully support mobile.

- Leveraging a smartphone's camera, GPS, or other sensors, workers can creatively interact with one another to solve problems. Consider these scenarios:
 - A salesperson could submit a video of their proposed sales pitch for a new product and receive instant feedback from a supervisor
 - A factory worker experiencing difficulty with a complicated assembly could forward a photo to a colleague for advice
 - Employees at a sandwich shop could snap photos of their most inspired culinary creations to share (or compete for prizes) on an internal company website

Content curation

Today's explosion in online content can provide employees with plenty of information to do their jobs; however, the resources they might turn to could be out of date or unsanctioned by the company. In an era when everyone is drowning in information overload, content curation should be on the radar of 21st-century CLOs.

The goal of content curation is to make useful information available to employees in a logical manner that is easy to consume. To ensure quality and consistency, and to avoid legal snafus, it is vital to select reputable sources. L&D and subject matter experts can provide governance to assure that recommended content is both reliable and relevant; however, a growing number of organizations are recognizing that content curation is itself a full-time job. In response, many are allocating funds to develop specific positions dedicated to content curation. Others are turning to outside sources for assistance.

Learning leaders should remember that in addition to collecting, vetting, and disseminating external content, L&D should also curate and promote internally-generated information and insights. Experts note that while the L&D team does not have to create all the internal and external content itself, it does need to oversee and monitor the process.

Data analytics

Data analytics is defined as "the discovery, interpretation, and communication of meaningful patterns in data." Today's 21st-century CLO must be skilled in data analytics or have someone on the L&D team who is. A CLO can use data to determine whether a particular learning module is having a positive influence on job performance, or to defend the expenditure of a costly yet valuable training initiative.

Where does the data come from? Today's learning management systems generate a vast amount of information. L&D leaders can pull detailed reports on the courses learners take, their quiz scores, and even exactly where they stopped watching a particular video. They can collect and examine aggregated data about a department, or the entire company.

Some argue, however, that L&D suffers from a lack of good data compared to other functions in an organization. "While SCORM [a collection of standards and specifications for web-based electronic educational technology] has enabled the growth of the eLearning industry by providing a standard for interoperability and low barriers to switching vendors, its inherent shallowness has left L&D with little good data about the learning experience or its impact on performance," says one industry expert.

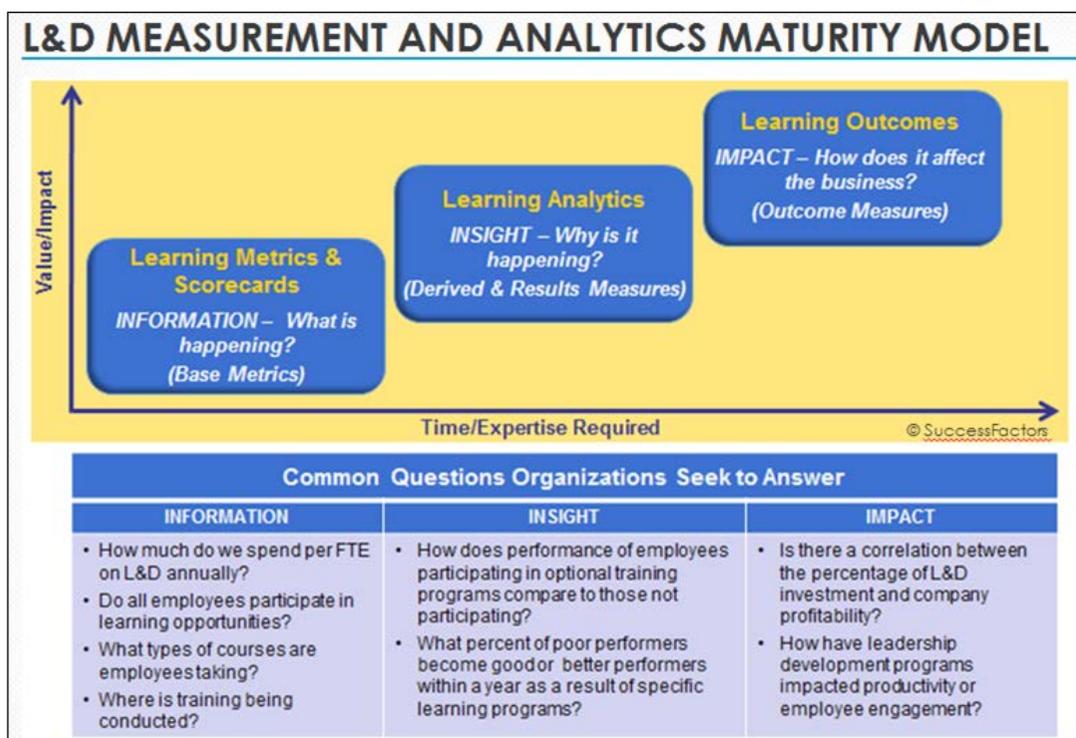
She notes that the newer xAPI specification, which allows CLOs to gather rich data about learning activities that take place outside the LMS, will change that scenario for the better. "With xAPI, organizations can break down the data silos between L&D and the rest of the organization, as well as those that exist between learning tools and platforms, thus future-proofing the learning infrastructure and allowing for growth over time," she says.

Better data can enable CLOs to make more educated decisions in how they allocate their L&D budgets. However, experts caution that they must know how to interpret the data they collect.

"We have access to a wealth of information both in our learning systems and outside, but we don't always know how to use the data to answer the big organizational questions," notes an industry consultant. "I suggest that organizations first look at [their] learning objectives, and then define the data needed to measure the impact that learning has had on achieving those objectives."

She finds the L&D measurement and analytics maturity model by SuccessFactors to be a helpful tool. It prompts users to examine L&D data on three levels:

- **Level 1**—metrics and scorecards
- **Level 2**—analytics
- **Level 3**—learning outcomes



SuccessFactors' L&D measurement and analytics maturity model

When working with clients, the consultant uses this model to guide them in diving more deeply into each level.

For **Level 1**, metrics and scorecards, she asks them to consider the following five metrics:

1. Training per employee (full-time/part-time)
2. Distribution across functional areas (key functions first)
3. Off-the-job training
4. Training spend as a percentage of salary bill/payroll
5. Percentage of staff with personal development plans

For **Level 2**, she recommends clients examine these top three analytics:

1. KPIs before and after learning, typically from LMS and performance data
2. Percentage of employees with required competence level, from performance data
3. Employee upward movement, from human resources

Finally, for **Level 3**, she helps clients identify their top three learning outcomes:

1. Revenue per employee, from finance
2. Sales per employee, from sales
3. Profit per employee, from finance

Relevant, personalized content

Today's workforces are diverse, and it is becoming clear that one-size-fits-all learning is no longer ideal. The 21st-century CLO must spearhead initiatives that direct users to relevant, personalized content.

A growing body of research supports the notion that learning should flex and adapt to address the particular needs of individuals. In a 2016 study by the Brandon Hall Group, over 90 percent of companies agreed that "personalized learning supports employee needs in continuously developing knowledge, skills, and abilities." Among respondents, 94 percent of companies said they use personalized learning at least some of the time in their learning strategies; nearly 10 percent use it all of the time.

Learning can be both formal and informal, and techniques used to personalize each may differ. To personalize formal eLearning, designers can create pre-content knowledge check assessments. Based on the results, users can be presented with different modules of formal learning content. Another way to personalize formal learning is to provide multiple modality options. For example, a learner could choose a face-to-face classroom, an online synchronous classroom, and/or an online asynchronous classroom.

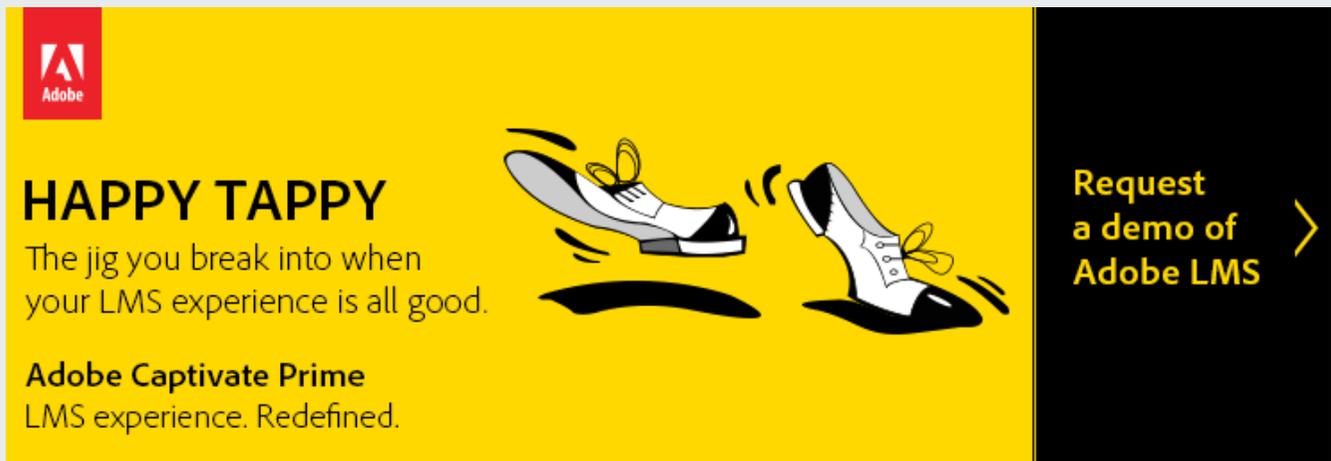
Personalizing informal learning is a bit trickier. If an employee seeks the advice of an internal or external expert or learns something from a peer conversation, the company could provide an online learning portal where employees could input their notes. They could also use the portal to tag or bookmark specific content relevant to their individual needs.

There are several excellent adaptive learning platforms on the market now that can personalize learning content for employees. However, investing in an elaborate platform is not the only way to provide a learning experience that meets an individual's needs. Organizations can offer choices in how learning requirements are met, provide access to social learning spaces, help individuals create their own personalized learning and reinforcement tools, and support curated content to offer a more flexible and relevant learning environment.

CONCLUSION

Our world today is complex, and most senior learning leaders have a lot on their plates. However, certain industry trends demand the attention of 21st-century CLOs. These include: engaging Millennials, informal learning, mobile learning, content curation, data analytics, and providing relevant, personalized content. Experts note that these universal concerns are guaranteed to impact workplace learning in 2018 and beyond, and should be the top business priorities for CLOs today.

Adobe's LMS Solution: Captivate Prime

The graphic is a promotional banner for Adobe Captivate Prime. It features a bright yellow background on the left and a black background on the right. In the top left corner of the yellow section is the Adobe logo. Below it, the text reads "HAPPY TAPPY" in large, bold, black letters, followed by "The jig you break into when your LMS experience is all good." in a smaller font. Below this is the text "Adobe Captivate Prime" and "LMS experience. Redefined." In the center of the yellow section is an illustration of two white high-heeled shoes with black bows, appearing to be in motion. On the black background on the right, the text "Request a demo of Adobe LMS" is written in yellow, with a yellow chevron arrow pointing to the right.

Adobe's LMS solution, Captivate Prime, addresses many of the concerns of today's 21st-century CLO: engaging Millennials, informal learning, mobile learning, content curation, data analytics, and providing relevant, personalized content. [Click here](#) to learn more about Adobe Captivate Prime.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Susan Jacobs is a senior editor with The eLearning Guild. She has a deep-rooted interest in and passion for education and technology. Prior to this position, she was a senior content producer at Bright Business Media, a leader in the meeting and events industry. Susan is a graduate of Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism.



CAROL GRAVEL

Carol Gravel, a learning architect at Global Knowledge Training and an adjunct professor at several universities, is a global consultant with nearly two decades of experience in talent development. Carol served as president and founder of two consulting firms, specializing in maximizing human capital through effective organizational design and training. Her recent efforts have focused on learning architecture, working to address the needs of adult learners worldwide through improvements in blended and online learning. She holds a doctorate in education, a master's in business, and a bachelor's in management information systems, as well as graduate-level master's certification in project management from George Washington University.



MEGAN TORRANCE

Megan Torrance is the CEO and founder of TorranceLearning, which helps organizations connect learning strategy to design, development, data, and ultimately performance. She has over 25 years of experience in learning design, deployment, and consulting with organizations large and small. TorranceLearning projects have won IELA and Brandon Hall (2012, 2014, 2016) awards, the 2014 xAPI Hyperdrive contest at DevLearn, and back-to-back eLearning Guild DemoFest Best in Show awards (2016 and 2017). A graduate of Cornell University with a degree in communication and an MBA, Megan is a published author and a frequent speaker at conferences nationwide.