

IN SEARCH OF THE CHIEF LEARNING OFFICER: AN EXAMINATION OF A PROPOSED PHENOMENON

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Introduction

In 1994, Jack Welch of General Electric named the first-ever Chief Learning Officer, Steve Kerr (Elkeles & Phillips, 2007). By 2002, 22 percent of respondents to a survey by the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) reported that their organizations had someone who functions as the chief learning officer (Bonner & Wagner, 2002), with most Fortune 500 companies having someone serving in that role (Caudron, 2003). “Since then (1994), the title has become more popular, if not yet ubiquitous” (Sugrue & Lynch, 2006, p. 51), and may now be used by 30 percent of organizations or more (Bersin and Associates, 2008).

This paper seeks to explore the following questions: Are Chief Learning Officers discernable as a social group? Are they a social phenomenon that can be studied? And if so, are they already theoretically based? The answers to these questions will help determine whether or not developing a thesis about the Chief Learning Officer (CLO) phenomenon is a worthy research topic.

To do so, this paper will introduce the concept of the Chief Learning Officer as it is presented in both the academic literature and the trade press, examine how one might go about answering the questions posed above. It will examine the CLO from both within and outside those calling themselves “CLOs,” both academically and in practice. Finally, if the CLO is established as a social phenomenon that can be studied, this paper will conclude with suggestions for further thesis research.

The “C-level Suite”

Before pursuing the existence of the CLO, it might be helpful to take a step back and examine a wider perspective. The CLO aspires to be a member of something colloquially called the “C-level Suite” (or “C-suite”), meaning the set of executives in an organization occupying the heads of functional departments. “C-level executives spend the majority of their time focusing on strategic objectives.” (Nick, 2011, chap. 1) “C-level” executives in an organization may include the chief executive officer, chief marketing officer, general counsel, chief information officer, chief human resource officer, chief financial officer, and more (Groysberg, Kevin, & MacDonald, 2011). Together, these senior executives are charged with a variety of responsibilities, including operating the organization, strategic planning, budgeting, creating and maintaining an effective organizational structure, risk management, among others (Vallabhaneni, 2008). It is this group of “C-suite” executives that the Chief Learning Officer has strived to join (Ketter, 2006).

What is a Chief Learning Officer?

It is tempting to describe the CLO by the attributes that make up the job (Becker, 1998) or the roles they play. For example, the CLOs can be identified by:

- Competencies, behaviors, or characteristics (L’Allier, 2006; L’Allier, 2005; Bongiorno, Coleman, Hessel, & Murphy, 2005; Buchen, 2004; Masie, 2007; Rothwell & Wellins, 2004; Bower, 2007; Harburg, 2007; Watson, 2007;)
- Being a member of the “C-suite” (Phillips, 2009; Phillips, 2004; Davenport, 2006; Billington, 2005; Ricketts & Pannoni, 2010; Kamilow, 2005; Chang, 2005; Meister, 2005; Meister, 2007)
- Running the corporate university (Allen, 2010; Meister, 2006; Echols, 2010)
- CLO responsibilities and roles (Harburg, 2007; Elkeles, 2007; Phillips, 2004), and
- A variety of smaller roles:
 - Leader developer (Knighton & Krupp, 2009)
 - Knowledge manager (Desouza & Raider, 2006; Gary, 1996)

- Strategic planner (Phillips, 2004)
- Communications and marketing (Meister, 2005)
- Business manager (Meister, 2006; Bersin, 2009; “Tips from the top“, 2007)
- Member of the organization’s leadership team (Austin, 2005)
- Consultant (Davenport, 2006)
- Change manager (Billington, 2005)
- Performance manager (Bersin, 2007)

(Note: The vast majority of the references indicated above come from the trade press, and almost all of them are from one source, Chief Learning Officer magazine. This phenomenon will be addressed later in this paper.)

It can be reasonably assumed that the list above is hardly exhaustive. Not only is it not comprehensive, it is unwieldy. A comprehensive list—even if such a thing could be achieved—would be even more so. But there are better ways of determining if a social group exists to be studied.

Burke (2006) suggests examining how the group members themselves perceived the group and membership within it: “A group exists psychologically if three or more people construe themselves in terms of shared attributes that distinguish them collectively from other people.” (p. 111) In other words, if a group of people consider themselves a distinct group, they can be considered as such. But that is only half of the challenge. What about others outside the group?

Becker (1998) offers a way of thinking about this challenge: determine not only whether those inside the group consider themselves a distinct group, but also whether those outside that group also see a distinct group. If both conditions are met, the researcher can proceed with deciding whether or not to research the group. Whether or not chief learning officers constitute a

social group that can be studied (as opposed to whether or not they should be studied) will be the focus of the rest of this paper.

Inside the CLO/HRD Community

For the purposes of this paper, the “CLO community” will be the human resource development community (HRD), as it manifests itself in both the academic and practical worlds. Thus, the perspectives of CLOs, other HRD professionals, HRD scholars, and those who write about the profession will all be considered on the “inside.” Later, the views of those “outside” the community will be considered.

An important question is whether or not human resource management and/or human capital management perspectives are “inside” or “outside” the community? While the debate continues among practitioners (Elkeles & Phillips, 2007), it is more important to gather their perspectives than be concerned about whether or not they are inside or outside. For the purposes of this paper, they will be deemed “outside”; their perspectives will be considered later in this paper.

As noted in the previous section, a great deal of trade press written by practitioners is available. But what scholarship is being produced related to the CLO and what does it say? The reason for considering scholars and practitioners separately is the established gap between practitioners and scholars in HRD (Short & Shindell, 2009; Gilley, 2006; Short, 2006; Keefer & Yap, 2007; Mabry, May, & Berger, 2004; Berger, Kehrhahn, & Summerville, 2004; McGoldrick, Stewart, & Watson, 2001; Kuchinke, 2001) and the different perspectives they offer regarding the question at hand.

What Scholars Say

In order to develop an understanding of the scholarly point of view regarding the CLO, several journals were consulted. Emphasis was placed on articles about the CLO specifically (by searching for the terms “CLO” and Chief Learning Officer” in article titles), but articles merely mentioning the CLO were also examined to determine what was being said about CLOs.

Additionally, in order to weigh more-recent perspectives—and to ensure the manageability of this effort—sources included and considered will be from the year 2001 forward. This time limit will be observed throughout the remainder of the paper, except where noted.

Finally, this paper (and the thesis it supports) is focused on the CLO phenomenon as it might exist in the United States. Thus, sources considered will be similarly limited to those published in the U.S. The scholarly journals examined:

Advances in Developing Human Resources. Three articles mention CLO in passing—none in titles, and none in significant ways, except to mention the CLO as the organizational learning leader (Marquardt & Berger, 2003; Nafukho, 2009; Packer & Sharrar, 2003).

Human Resource Development Quarterly. One article mentions CLO, but not in title. It mentions that the CLO needs to make the business case for learning (Baldwin & Danielson, 2002). It is interesting to note that this journal is also the *only one found to have an article with the term “CLO” or “chief learning officer” in the title.* That article was written in 1991, however (Willis, 1991).

Human Resource Development Review. Three articles mention the CLO. Yorks (2004) describes the CLO as a learning leader who is an invaluable ally to the chief executive officer.

Burke and Saks (2009) mention the CLO role and note its function as a learning leader, while Holton III (2003) notes that the CLO is concerned about performance.

Human Resource Planning. Just two articles mention the CLO; one in passing in a non-academic article (interview) (Vosburgh, 2003) and one suggesting that enlightened organizations have CLOs (and was co-written by a CLO) (Younger & Smallwood, 2007).

Journal of Workplace Learning. Qiao (2009) mentions the CLO in passing, while Li et al. (2009) recount the development of the CLO position and place the CLO in the C-suite. They also recommend a design for an advanced academic degree program for aspiring CLOs.

Human Resource Development International. This journal is published in the U.S., but has an international perspective. No articles were found to even mention the CLO.

Doctoral Dissertations. While not a journal *per se*, 4 doctoral dissertations on the subject of the CLO were considered. The study done by Lackey (2003) found that CLOs (whether or not they had that actual title) were responsible for learning within their organizations. Lackey also suggested implications for both theory and practice, evoking the call to bridge the gap between these two elements of human resource development. Navickas' (2005) dissertation determined competencies the CLO should embrace. In 2009, Prafka wrote a study based on an in-depth case study of one learning executive, focused on how the learning executive contributed to his organization and what types of leadership he displayed. Finally, Goldsmith (2009) assessed leadership styles used by CLOs.

What Practitioners Say

The reader is directed to the section above titled "What is a Chief Learning Officer?" to find many examples of what is being written by practitioners in the field of HRD. However, most of those were drawn from one source, *CLO Magazine*, a trade magazine of interest to the HRD

community in general and to CLOs (and those who aspire to become CLOs) in particular. The other two prominent magazines examined for the purpose of this paper were *T&D* (published by the largest professional organization in the field, The American Society for Training and Development—ASTD), and *Training* magazine. Other sources considered included trade books and two related websites (from CLO Magazine and ASTD).

Training magazine is a popular trade magazine reaching more than 40,000 HRD practitioners (Training Magazine, n.d.). From the magazine's website: "*Training* magazine is a 48-year-old professional development magazine that advocates training and workforce development as a business tool" (Training Magazine, n.d.) A search on the site yields dozens of hits on the search terms "CLO" and "chief learning officer," but very few with those terms in the article titles. Articles mentioning the CLO focus on the CLO as a senior leader of the organization ("Training Top 10", 2011; Weinstein, 2009; Gordon, 2005; (Johnson, 2004), as an expert on training (Wolff, 2011; Weinstein, 2006), as a strategic planner of learning (Freifield, 2009), as an executive (Durett, 2006), and as a member of the C-suite (Gordon, 2006). (Gordon also cites ways to measure CLO performance and key behaviors and characteristics of CLOs. *Training* has also offered interviews with CLOs (Weinstein, 2011; Weinstein, 2007) articles on CLO pay (Kornik & Weinstein, 2006), and even questioned the need for a CLO (Schettler, 2002). Finally, many articles make mention of the CLOs of various organization without commenting specifically about the role (Weinstein, 2011; Freifield, 2011; and dozens of others).

T&D is the trade magazine published by the largest HRD professionals' association in the world, the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD, n.d.). Like *Training* magazine, *T&D* is targeted towards the HRD professional in general, as opposed to the CLO in particular. (*Chief Learning Officer* magazine targets the CLO; many of its articles were cited in

the “What is a Chief Learning Officer” section earlier.) The website’s search function was more difficult to use with less functionality. A manual search of articles back to October 2008 (the extent to which the magazine’s archives were available) yielded relevant results like these:

- CLOs are found in both public (governmental) and private organizations (Pace, 2011)
- Salaries for learning executives (Mohindra, 2011)
- Interviews with CLOs (“The long view: Rita Smith”, 2010; Roche, 2009)
- Learning executives reaching out to get support from other organizational executives (Steeves & Frein, 2010; Kelly, 2009)
- Enhancing one’s progress to the C-suite to become a learning executive (Beeson, 2010)
- CEO’s expectations of the CLO (Phillips & Phillips, 2009)

As with *Training* magazine, many articles mentioned the CLO in passing (Bingham & Galagan, 2009; Thornton, 2009; Wilde, 2011; Mattox, 2011; and many, many more).

Trade Books. Only one trade book has been written specifically regarding the CLO (Elkeles & Phillips, 2007)—others (Bonner, 2000; Israelite, 2006; Anderson, Hardy, & Leeson, 2008) are about leading the learning enterprise and contain a chapter or other content on the CLO. Others on the subject of HRD mention the CLO role in one way or another (Phillips & Phillips, 2010; Goldsmith, Morgan, & Ogg, 2004; van Dam, 2004; Barquin et al., 2001; Mooney & Brinkerhoff, 2008).

Websites. Two prominent HRD-related websites—both affiliated with publications previously discussed—were examined for content regarding the CLO: American Society for Training and Development (publisher of *T&D* magazine) at www.astd.org, and Chief Learning Officer (publisher of *Chief Learning Officer* magazine) at www.clomedia.org. A search at ASTD’s site using the term “chief learning officer” resulted in 336 hits, including reprints of articles from *T&D* magazine, research reports, practitioner-related articles, blog posts, discussion groups, news releases, and other related content (ASTD, n.d.). The website also makes available research reports, HRD practitioner tools, and a wide array of HRD-related books (ASTD, n.d.).

A search of the Chief Learning Officer website using the same term yielded more than 200 hits, including articles, photographs, videos, announcements, etc. (Chief Learning Officer, n.d.). The website also makes available back issues of *Chief Learning Officer* magazine, research reports, and other user content (Chief Learning Officer, n.d.).

Other. It is interesting to note that one of the leading business schools in the world (The Economist, 2011), the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business, now offers a doctorate for HRD professionals that is specifically designed for current and prospective CLOs (The University of Pennsylvania, n.d.).

In interim summary, several observations are becoming clear. First, the CLO as a research subject is a rare occurrence (with just five instances found, four of which were doctoral dissertations). Second, the CLO is occasionally mentioned, but usually in passing. This indicates a tacit acceptance of the role, but does not indicate any particular interest in it as a research subject. Finally, combining the copious amount of trade literature available on the CLO with the sparse amount of academic literature available presents a picture of a well-established (in practice) yet under-researched concept, and satisfies the first half of Becker's (1998) "trick": the people inside the group (CLOs and the HRD community) clearly consider the CLOs a group, even if an under-researched, atheoretical group. (This, in turn, suggests the need for further research in establishing the theoretical underpinnings of the CLO.) Next to be explored is what others outside the group—scholars and practitioners—have to say about the existence of the phenomenon of the Chief Learning Officer.

Outside the CLO/HRD Community

In the previous section on what is being said about the CLO inside the HRD community, the data was presented source-by-source. This method is repeated and expanded upon in this section, where outside-the-HRD perspectives from scholarly and trade sources were considered, examining what they say about the CLO in general, and the CLO's place in the C-suite in particular. Because myriad sources were included in the searches and considered, this section will not examine each separately, instead taking them by category (scholarly or trade), specialty area (general management and HR management), and type (journals, magazines, books, and websites).

(NB: Because of the close relationship between HRD and human resource management (HRM)—as well as the ongoing debate about whether the CLO should be aligned below or alongside the chief human capital officer (Elkeles & Phillips, 2007)—the perspectives of the human resource (or “capital”) management community will be considered separately.)

(NB: Although executives serving in the CLO role may have many different titles, the term “chief learning officer” was chosen for document searches in order to gauge its use as a descriptor. It is acknowledged that this search is not comprehensive.)

What Scholars Say

Journal Articles. A search was conducted using the term “chief learning officer.” Many resulted in citations of *Chief Learning Officer* magazine, while still others were from HRM- or HRD-related sources. However, there were other examples where the CLO was invoked. There were many examples where the CLO was either an article author or was used as a credible source (Arnone & Stumpf, 2010; Li et al., 2009; Frecka & Reckers, 2010; Fulmer, Gibbs, & Goldsmith, 2000; Madsen & Vance, 2009; Thompson, 2006). Others (DeSouza & Raider, 2006;

Felton & Finnie, 2003; Kesterson, 2004; Maietta & Bullock, 2009; Mitchell, 2007) cite the CLO as the executive leading an organization's learning functions, a key player in implementing innovation (Buchen, 2003; Greiner, 2002). Some authors (Buchen, 2005; Glynn, 1996) described the CLO as one of the newer "chiefs" (C-level executives), but almost never called for the creation of such a position (except Baskin & Schneider, 2003). In fact, when searching for articles discussing C-level executives, seldom did authors attempt to describe which positions were in the C-suite—despite many examples of the term being used—and none listed the CLO as one of them. This theme—the CLO as a member of an organization's executive team—will be returned to later in this paper.

Human Resource Management Journals. The following human resource management-related journals were reviewed for insights into the CLO:

- *Human Resource Management*
- *Human Resource Management Review*
- *Human Resource Planning*
- *Human Resources*
- *Journal of Human Resources*
- *Journal of Organizational Behavior*

Surprisingly, very little has been written about the CLO role; it was mentioned in very few articles. *Chief Learning Officer* magazine was occasionally cited as a source (Carliner & Bakir, 2010; Griffith & Sawyer, 2010), and a few other others either were CLOs or mentioned the CLO's role in enhancing HRM (McAlearney, 2006; McKnight, Doele, & Christine, 2001; Yeung, 2006; Younger & Smallwood, 2007).

Doctoral Dissertations. Doctoral dissertations *unrelated to HRD* and invoking the CLO were sought through a search of the Proquest database. While at least 20 cited *Chief Learning Officer* magazine as a reference, only eight were found that mentioned the CLO with any substance: as a valued resource in developing leadership (Nicholson, 2009; Stanley, 2010); as

part of a high-impact organization (Kohut, 2010; Kubit, 2009), as the organization's executive in charge of learning (Epperson, 2006; Fancher, 2007; Schreeder, 2008), or as one of many C-level executives interviewed (Cross, 2008; Heidt, 2006; Lapham, 2009). When seeking evidence of the relationship of the CLO and the rest of the C-suite, little was found. Most listing several C-suite examples (i.e. CFO, CIO, CMO, etc.) did not include the CLO (Davis, 2008; Francis, 2011; Green, 2011; Mack, 2010; Moore, 2009; Rocha, 2010), where only one that did (Cohill, 2007) was found.

What Practitioners Say

Trade Magazines (General). The trade press is filled with references to the CLO. For example CLOs are often authors of articles in non-HRD-related magazines or are cited as credible sources (Bailor, 2007; Brady, 2010; Cespedes, 2006; Darling & Smith, 2011; DeFlippo, 2010; Guttman, 2009; Jennings, 2010; Manville, 2001; Offerman, 2004; Prokesch, 2009; Sills, 2005), and are noted as their respective organizations' learning leaders (Baskin & Schneider, 2003; Bickerstaffe, 2011; Bronner & Kaliski, 2007; Davenport, Prusak, & Wilson, 2003; Liberman, 2010; Ulrich & Smallwood, 2007). Again, it is sometimes noted that the CLO is a new member of the C-suite ("Learning honcho", 2001; Baskin & Schneider, 2003; Bladen & John, 2010; DeJong, 2009; Poe, 2007), and in other instances the CLO is listed among other C-suite executives (Bladen & John, 2010; Grenny, 2009; Meyers, 2007; Weinstock, 2010).

HRM-related Magazines. In human resource management magazines, the CLO is frequently cited as a credible source or listed as an article's author (Cascio, 2009; Grossman, 2011; Ladika, 2008; Meister & Willyerd, 2010; Moscato, 2005; Zielinski, 2010) and is cited as an executive in charge of learning (Arnold, 2006; Babcock, 2004; Dobbs, 2002; Gale, 2003; Lin, Hitchens, & Davenport, 2001; Noelke, 2009; Roberts, 2007; Rodriguez, 2005).

Trade Books (General). In order to gain insight into what is being written about the CLO in trade books (non-HRD-related subjects), a search was performed on a robust library of e-books, *Books 24x7*, offered by the Skillsoft company. Its library contains more than 8,000 business-related titles. A search using “chief learning officer” resulted in 391 hits. The non-HRD-related titles were considered. In some cases, CLOs were considered credible sources (Kaplan & Norton, 2001; Seldman & Seldman, 2008). In others, CLOs were called out as the executive learning leaders of their respective organizations (Allen, 2002; Ashby & Miles, 2002; Crandall, 2007; Laird, Naquin, & Holton III, 2003; Lambert, Ohai, & Kerkhoff, 2009; O’Connor, Bronner, & Delany, 2007; Rudzki & Trent, 2011; Zoltners, Sinha, & Lorimer, 2009). Other examples of the CLO role being invoked include the CLO as a facilitator of strategy development (Sloan, 2006), a strategic leader (Robinson & Robinson, 2005) and partner (Davis, 2011), as a people risk reducer (Vallabhaneni, 2008), as a role on the rise (Stenzel, 2007), and as a key player in performance analysis and management (Rossett, 2009). There is an increasing use of the CLO role in government (GAO Human Capital, 2004); even the U.S. Navy has appointed one (CNO Guide, 2005).

HRM-related Trade Books. The CLO role appears in some titles. Buchen (2007) notes that the CLO is a new C-level title, but has no academic preparation available for the role. However, the University of Pennsylvania now offers a doctoral program specifically aimed at current and prospective CLOs (University of Pennsylvania, n.d.). The CLO is a talent manager (Israelite, 2010), learning leader (Efron, Grandossy, & Goldsmith, 2003), emergent executive role (Torres-Coronas & Arias-Olivia, 2005), and a key player in succession management (Rothwell, 2010).

Websites (General). Some websites related to executive management were consulted to see what (if anything) was being said about the CLO. *Chief Executive Magazine's* website (Chief Executive Magazine, n.d.) revealed 9 hits using the search term “chief learning officer.” Most quote an individual holding that title, but three articles mention the role of the CLO. Notably, there were zero hits from a search of “CLO,” while other C-level acronyms did result in hits—CIO had 392, CFO had 784, and even CMO (“Chief Marketing Officer”) had 163. At *Chief Executive Officer* (Chief Executive Officer, n.d.), only two hits resulted from a search on “chief learning officer,” both quoting people holding that title. There were also two hits from a search on “CLO.” One of those referred to the need for a chief learning officer, while the other referred to a “chief legal officer.” When searching for material on other C-level positions (and their acronyms), CIO turned up 21 hits, CFO had 27, and even CMO revealed 5.

HRM-related Websites. Two key HR-related websites were consulted. At *Human Resource Executive Online* (HREO, n.d.), a search on the term “chief learning officer” revealed mostly hits related to CLO’s being quoted or mentioned. At the website for the *Society for Human Resource Management* (SHRM, n.d.)—the leading professional organization for HR practitioners with more than 250,000 members in 140 countries—a similar search turned up 44 hits. Again, most were quoting or otherwise mentioning people holding the title of CLO. SHRM does acknowledge the CLO role in its membership guide, but “training and development” professionals (at all organizational levels) make up just 3% of its membership.

In interim summary, it can be said that very few instances of scholarly research done outside the HRD community examine the role of the Chief Learning Officer in any substantive way, despite it being routinely mentioned in passing. The trade materials examined—both in general and specifically from human resources-related sources—revealed more prevalence for

the CLO and for specific contributions the role makes to organizations. Thus, the second portion of Becker's (1998) "trick of the trade"—whether or not those outside the group consider it a distinguishable group—rests on a much less stable base.

Conclusion

This paper set out to examine the role of the Chief Learning Officer and to determine whether or not it exists and can be researched. It employed Becker's (1998) approach to making such a determination by examining whether or not those inside the group (in this case, the human resource development, or HRD, community) and outside the group (management in general and human resource management in particular) consider the CLO a distinguishable group. The "inside/outside" paradigm was further broken down by academic and practitioner/trade sources for each. Thus, the following conclusions are drawn:

- The practitioners inside HRD—particularly the CLOs themselves—consider themselves a distinct group. They use a commonly (but not universally) accepted and understood title—CLO. They have a professional magazine (*Chief Learning Officer* magazine, which also hosts seminars, symposia, etc.). Finally, the trade literature within HRD is rife with examples of the role of the CLO.
- The scholarly research coming from the HRD community does not match the robust nature of the trade press (and related materials). The CLO is a rare research subject; most references to the CLO are in passing and without in-depth examination of the role and its place in either HRD or in executive leadership.
- From outside the HRD community comes even less research referring to the CLO, and none about the role itself. It does receive passing mention on occasion in research pieces focused elsewhere, but very little is written to either support or challenge the

role of the CLO from the outside. Surprisingly, this is also true of HRD's related field, human resource management. Except in passing, the CLO is largely invisible to non-HRD scholars.

- The trade press from outside the HRD community is stronger as it relates the CLO, but the same conditions persist. CLOs are frequently quoted, sometimes acknowledged, but almost never studied. When memberships in the C-suite is examined with any detail, the CLO is usually omitted from the list. Still, the CLO is frequently mentioned (though usually just in passing) as the executive in charge of learning and development for the organization.

So, does the Chief Learning Officer meet Becker's (1998) criteria as a distinct group?

Yes, but barely. Significantly so from inside their group—the CLOs consider themselves a distinct population. But less so from outside their group (and the HRD community in general). And even less support is found on the academic side, both from within and from outside the HRD community.

Recommendation

Originally, the author sought to justify conducting a qualitative study of the CLO with the goal of creating a grounded theory about the phenomenon. However, a more distinct theme emerged from within that broad concept: the CLO getting “a seat at the table” and being recognized as a senior executive on par with other “C-level” executives (like the CIO, CFO, and others). It seems clear that (a) the field is imploring CLOs to get a seat at the table and (b) that some have done so. But how? And what constitutes having that seat?

This writer contends that the answers to those and other, related questions are not at hand. Thus, it is the recommendation of this paper that a qualitative study of the CLO phenomenon

be undertaken with the express purpose of creating a grounded theory that explains the basic social processes of the role of the CLO “at the table,” how the CLO role gets there, and how individuals assume those roles. The trade literature is rife with anecdotal—and atheoretical—stories and advice about this topic, but the research supporting it is non-existent. It is time to bridge the gap between theory and practice when it comes to the Chief Learning Officer performing at the highest level: with a seat at the table in the C-suite.

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