



## Leveraging Your Seat at the Table

Richard Y. Chang, Ph.D.

Before you start to redefine your role, it's vital to leverage your current seat at the table to help achieve greater organizational performance.

Whether you're at the table by special invitation to share your perspective on human capital development, or as one of the regulars at these high-powered executive meetings, it's critical to leverage your participation and add value to the discussion at hand.

The CLO's role will remain viable as long as learning executives can continue to think and act as strategic leaders, build credibility among their executive peers and sponsor the initiatives that build organizational capability, employee competency and measurable performance improvement. Not asking too much, right?

Although the formal title of "CLO" really only emerged over the past few years, if the general requirements referenced above were consistently achieved, it wouldn't be long before the CLO role transitioned into something like a CPO (chief performance officer). This expanded role could furnish the strategic leadership and expert management of everything that a CLO currently focuses on in terms of learning and development systems, as well as provide the oversight of strategic planning; performance measurement, management and evaluation processes; and rewards and recognition systems within the organization. This role transformation would help bring greater organization-wide leadership and alignment to the various systems that help define and translate strategic priorities into performance.

Before you start to redefine your role, it's vital to leverage your current seat at the table to help achieve greater organizational performance. To do so, focus on three areas:

■ **Do your homework:** It's important to fully understand the organization's vision, mission, values and strategic priorities. Understand their implications for the organization, not only from a human capital and learning perspective, but also from the "business of the organization" perspective. In addition, spend one-on-one time with each senior executive in order to understand their functional operating plans and priorities. This will help you formulate partnering strategies and contribute to the achievement of operating goals and measurable results.

■ **Know the organization's market, customers, and products or services:** Once you get to the

table, you may find that your technical knowledge about the organization's market, customers, and products or services is limited. This prevents you from contributing value-added ideas and strategies during discussions about market development, product realization, supply chain, distribution, service delivery, etc. As a result, you may be looked upon primarily as the "training person," rather than as a knowledgeable business partner and strategic leader. While you are clearly expected to contribute recommended learning and development strategies and interventions to help address organizational issues, to expand your value at the table, it's important that you not limit your participation to these contributions.

■ **Lead "non-HRD" strategic initiatives:** One of the best ways to leverage your seat at the table is to take an active role in non-HRD-related strategic initiatives when possible. During one of my former internal corporate roles, I led an effort to design and implement a global materials requirements planning (MRP) system. Although this was not within my particular technical expertise, the CEO believed that I possessed the required organizational alignment, strategic leadership, process management and human resource development skills to successfully carry out this initiative. It allowed me to get intimately involved with most of the functional operating areas of the company and act as the spokesperson during executive meetings on this critical business initiative. Assuming this kind of responsibility can position you in a role that will help demonstrate your strategic leadership capabilities and help others to perceive you as being "weaved in" to the organization's operating fabric. Yes, you'll want to incorporate various learning and development aspects into the implementation plans of the initiative you're leading, but again, this would be as part of the means to an end, rather than the end itself.

Clearly, taking the lead in this manner will require you to take personal risks and invest in personal learning along the way. However, it will make you a more value-added contributor and help you increase your time and enjoyment at the table! ■

Richard Y. Chang, Ph.D., is founder and CEO of Richard Chang Associates Inc., a diversified performance-improvement consulting, training and publishing firm. He is also the author of "The Passion Plan" and "The Passion Plan at Work." Richard can be reached at [rchang@clomedia.com](mailto:rchang@clomedia.com).