

Increasing Employee Engagement through Branding Activities of Corporate Learning Leaders

Viktória Lambert – Irén Gyökér

Budapest University of Technology and Economics

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The workplace learning environment and the responsibilities of learning leaders are increasingly important in the changing world of HR, as organizations recognize that they can maintain their competitive edge only if their employees are motivated to play an active part in the learning process. Our aim was to evaluate the role of learning leaders in this process, to offer a model of effectiveness in terms of the branding of corporate learning and to contribute to defining the critical indicator needed if investment in corporate learning is to be successful.

RESEARCH METHOD

We identified the corporate learning leader - i.e., Chief Learning Officer (CLO) - as playing the most important role in an elaborated model embracing all stakeholders in corporate education programs. We also examined the CLO's role as 'value creator' in the learning enterprise model, focusing especially on the branding of the learning program. After reviewing the relevant literature, consulting with practitioners in industry, investigating the most important features relating to the branding of corporate learning programs and drawing on the most fundamental level of Kirkpatrick's model, we conducted a web-based survey, with the aim of proposing a possible ranking order of effectiveness for these branding efforts.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Learning leaders have an emerging value-creating role in identifying and engaging the most highly motivated employees - those willing to invest their own time in opt-in learning programs. This role is strengthened by branding these learning programs, and so we suggest a possible framework for prioritizing efforts in this direction, targeting tangible outcomes. These include such factors as the numbers of participants enrolled and indicators of effectiveness such as course completion rates and attendance at follow-up sessions.

SUGGESTIONS

Building on an assessment method of learning program branding activities, dimension-based branding activity attributes and their intensity, we suggest making these branding initiatives more conscious, so helping learning leaders to make their corporate learning program branding activities more comprehensive.

Keywords: corporate learning, learning leader, CLO, learning program, branding

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE CORPORATE CONTEXT

Much has changed in the world of HR and workplace learning, as well as for the leaders who are responsible for human capital and its development. HR is a strategic asset since it can play a critical role in both strategy implementation and management systems. Specifically, the ability to implement strategy well is a source of competitive advantage, and “people” are the lynchpin of effective strategy execution. Technological inventions and improvements appear in a turbulent market-place in which competition is increasingly global and where the importance of customer service is critical. Workforces are increasingly dynamic, fast-paced, pursuing multinational career paths (Gyökér – Finna 2012) and the requirements which they have to meet are rapidly changing. Organizations can keep their competitive edge in this environment only if their employees are willing to adapt, innovate and learn.

The surroundings and the context of this form of learning have become important issues. The world’s largest association of learning and development professionals (ASTD) proposed a logic for adopting workplace learning and performance (WLP) as the workplace specifies the context for learning and performance (Bernthal *et al.* 2004, 26-27). Accepting this concept, learning broadens the scope of the responsibilities of learning leaders to include all opportunities – formal or informal, planned or unplanned, on-the-job or off-the-job – which help individuals to learn and develop new knowledge and skills and also to change their perceptions, attitudes and behaviour. Considering that the owner of the intellectual capital remains the individual and that any investments in it are the results of the individual’s own decisions (Gyökér 2004), there arises the questions of how to arrive at and to initiate these decisions, of how to motivate adult learners in relation to their own professional development in the corporate environment, of how to convince them to enrol for the

next corporate learning program and how to raise the level of their commitment - of their engagement with learning.

To have a better understanding of possible ‘anti-learning’ behaviour, we must first determine who pays and who benefits from corporate learning programs. Ironically, these are key financial considerations in a standard ROI (Return on Investment) calculation, in which ‘I’ represents what is actually paid out by a first ‘who’ (related to the ‘I’). A second ‘who’ relates to the ‘R’ — the return — specifically, who benefits from the investment (Echols 2015)?

There are mandatory, corporate-funded training schemes where the benefactor is the company, which needs the specific human capital capacity which the training is designed to develop. In these situations the company has the primary need for learning outcomes and so the company invests by organising the required training in company time – training funded by a specific corporate expense item in the budget. Given these learning investment conditions, marketing is not only unnecessary; it is inappropriate. Opt-in is not an option; learning is mandatory, and so the only choice which the employee has is to opt out (Vance, 2015). There is, in addition, a separate class of learning where the employee has the primary need for the learning outcome, and both company and employee invest. The financial investment is a combined product of the company and the employee, although the investment in terms of time is always the employee’s as the learning takes place outside working hours. The company wants the employee to be some kind of joint venture partner in their own learning (Echols, 2015), and in these cases it becomes more relevant to examine the strategy for branding and marketing the learning to the employees.

The key strategic difference between mandatory learning and opt-in corporate learning brings us closer to the definition problem: do learning leaders need to brand corporate training as other organizations brand and market their products? If so,

why does current branding practice not primarily aim to be comprehensive and results-oriented? How can the branding efforts of corporate learning leaders be more aware and more firmly grounded, supported by an up-to-date model?

For this reason our study follows the following research tracks:

1. The extent to which a CLL's value-creator role involves branding opt-in corporate learning programs;
2. Possible priority rankings for a CLL's branding activities relating to opt-in corporate learning programs.

The significance of the study lies in offering a ranking-based model of branding effectiveness, driven by tangible outcomes, such as the number of participants enrolled and effectiveness indicators such as course completion rates and attendance at follow-up sessions.

It was clear that there is much to be learned by "going to the top" to collect information from those learning leaders actually responsible for the branding of their learning implementations. The limitations of the study are the lack of relevant literature and the fact that we were focusing on a special sample of CLL responses. Our aim was to identify the range of branding activities from 'practice excellence' supported by examples from large, multinational companies. To test the validity of our interpretation, we selected 10 pre-qualified members from the Advisory Board and Speaker Panel of an annual Corporate University and Corporate Learning Summit representing both the objective side (with a holistic knowledge of corporate universities and learning departments) as well as the industry practitioner side. After reviewing the relevant literature, we carried out semi-structured interviews with these industry experts and continued with our investigations on the following models based on their responses.

CORPORATE LEARNING PROGRAM "STAKEHOLDERS"

Those involved in learning programs must drive performance and behavioural change, as without their individual efforts, the program will not be successful. When pressed for reasons for not applying new types of decision and new behaviour, participants usually blame others, most of the time the immediate manager or some unchanged process. That, however, may not be the real reason.

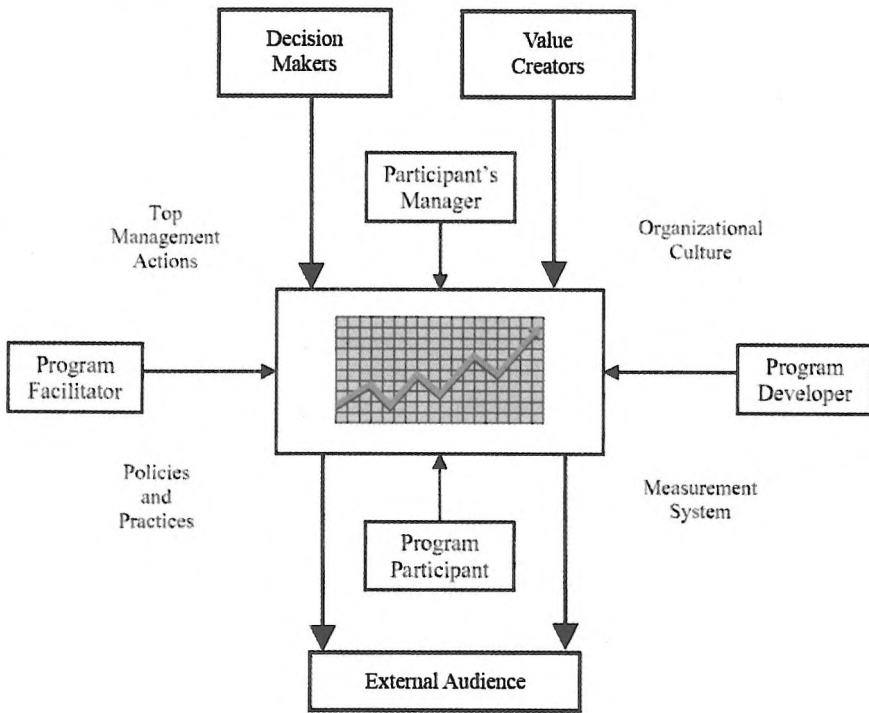
Figure 1 illustrates our interpretation of major stakeholder groups who are held responsible for the results of learning programs. The developed model is based on the Elkeles – Phillips's model which shows these groups.

In their book Elkeles and Phillips (2006) identified four major groups or individuals who are responsible for results from learning programs. According to them, the employees, the learner target audience, form the group of *Program Participants (1)*, their immediate supervisors and colleagues at managerial level can be referred to as *Participants' Managers (2)*. The Trainers, Mentors, Coaches (Internal and External) are considered as the *Program Facilitators (3)* whilst the Corporate Learning Department's Representatives are typically the *Program Developers (4)*.

We propose a possible development of this stakeholder group model whilst completing it with additional critical players who are responsible for the success of learning programs. C-level Executives, Management Board Members who have to provide the critical support and additional voice for learning programs are the *Decision Makers (5)*, whilst the customers, clients who can experience the end results and the direct impacts of learning programs (i.e. through a customer service call) are identified as *External Audience (6)*.

From our current perspective, the most important added stakeholders are the Corporate Learning Program Directors, Corporate Learning Leaders, Chief Learn-

Figure 1. Elaborated model of major stakeholder groups of corporate education programs
 Source: own research, (Elkeles et al 2006)



ing Officers (CLOs) who can be the *Change Enablers* and *Value Creators* (7) at the top of their organizations.

We suggest that the Corporate Learning Leader and the Learner Target Audience stakeholder groups are categories which deserve more attention. The problem is that the Program Participants do not see their own change in behaviour as their responsibility, and CLOs are held responsible for a lack of results. Nevertheless, their role in increasing the intrinsic motivation of the workforce, a behaviour change towards corporate learning programs (and ultimately their success) has often been overlooked.

CATALYSTS OF CORPORATE LEARNING: CLOS AND THOSE WHO PLAY THAT ROLE

To begin investigating the learning leaders and their role specifically in branding corporate learning programs, we need

to have a broader perspective of how top executives perceive the CLO roles and the challenges they need to address. There are six important challenges taken from a study of CEO perceptions about the competencies of workplace learning and performance professionals (Lindholm 2000): apart from understanding the products of the company and the company's business issues, facilitating business model changes (Financial Challenges), understanding the company's culture (Globalization Challenge), there are Recruiting Challenges, Customer Challenges, Technology and Internet Challenges and Corporate Knowledge Challenges.

Being able to cope with these in a global environment, within precise financial targets, is what makes the CLO role dynamic. In follow-up research to this study, CEOs identified the competencies needed by CLOs to help the organization to meet these challenges (Rothwell 2006).

These competencies are:

- Business Knowledge
- Communication
- Broad perspective
- Assessment skills
- Implementation of effective delivery mechanisms for different forms of learning
- Innovation
- Drive, which translates in demonstrating energy and enthusiasm for programs, projects, initiatives and building bridges across barriers to learning program acceptance.

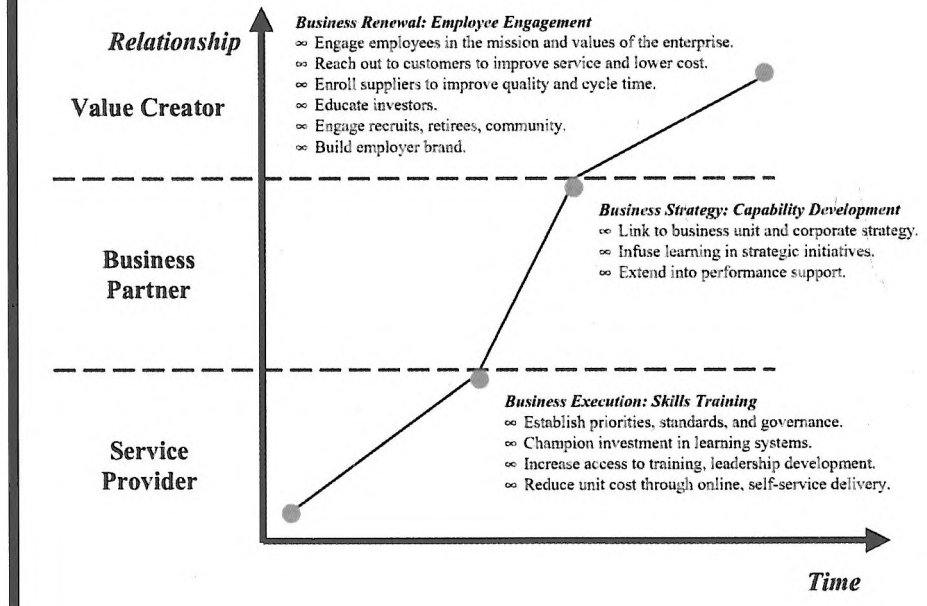
A total of 464 learning executives, many holding the official title of CLO, responded to these issues and other questions as part of a CLO Futures Survey to determine the trends related to both the position and the issues concerning the individuals who hold that position (L'Allier 2005). The outcome of that survey is that the top four competencies (rated on a scale from "not critical" to "very critical") which CLOs should have are:

1. Demonstrated leadership skills
2. Possession of experience with strategic planning
3. Commanding knowledge of the learning and development process and
4. Demonstrated impact on business performance.

We suggest that this set of competencies needs to be refreshed to ensure the CLO's success now and in the future. The new CLO is expected to do much more than design, develop and deliver learning. He or she must be the catalyst to bring change and create value in the organization - as stated as the goal of the book on "The Chief Learning Officer" (Elkeles, Phillips 2006).

The role of the CLO has evolved. Building on the CLO's critical characteristics for success (Bongiorno *et al.* 2005) and the maturity of the learning enterprise model (Gratton 2004) depicted in Figure 2, the CLO has now to be a value creator and to achieve still higher levels of employee engagement. This engagement occurs through employees being able to resonate with the mission and

Figure 2. The maturity of the learning enterprise
Source: Gratton 2004



values of the enterprise, engaging recruits, retirees and communities as well as building the employer brand among others. Continuous business renewal is needed on the basis of business execution (skills training) and business strategy (capability development).

There is almost universal agreement that more attention is needed for creating and showing the value of corporate learning programs to justify their existence on an ever higher level of strategic importance. In an era where technology will replace half of today's jobs with automatised solutions in the next 20 years, the ultimate goal is to achieve competitive advantage and value-creation with corporate learning and by developing programs viable in the long term for employees who *stay and participate*. Employees stay if their generation-based commitment concerns are addressed (Krajcsák *et al.* 2014), if they feel involved, if they know and can exploit their professional development potential, if they are motivated by recognition and rewards, if they resonate with the organization's mission and feel that they have a role in the wider context. This type of engagement is strongly powered by the internal corporate education branding activities of CLOs and other learning leaders who are regarded as catalysts to develop their specific brand with critical impacts.

Considering the development of the learning enterprise and learning leaders (as shown in Figure 2), the CLO role model also needs renewal in the post-experiential informal learning ecosystem (Szeghegyi *et al.* 2014). In order to embrace fully the value creator role, learning leaders need to be good marketers and brand specialists, which is why, in this article, we wish to examine the elements of corporate learning program's value creation through branding, and in this way to provide guidance for CLOs as to how they can efficiently fulfil the value creator role. In addition to engaging employees, it is also critical to reach out to customers, suppliers, investors and the community to improve service, lower costs and to educate. Branding alone cannot ensure the visibility

of workplace learning for these external audiences also, but it can be an excellent tool to involve them, create ownership and ensure that they are maintained as the primary source of important feedback loops in this process.

BRANDING CORPORATE LEARNING PROGRAMS

An important, of intangible, measure has evolved in the learning and development community: developing a brand for learning programs. Branding has always been a critical issue in the field of marketing, but successful organizations are developing a strong, identifiable, attractive brand and maintaining it. The same case can be made for the learning and development function in requiring attention to the various elements - which we will describe in more detail. Collectively, the brand should provide evidence of the role, importance, success and value from the learning and development processes. Capturing the brand, then developing and presenting it effectively enables the stakeholders to understand clearly what can be expected from the learning program, whatever their position: Participants, Facilitators, Developers, Decision Makers etc.

Brand Discovery

The first step in developing a brand for corporate education programs is to explore the role, function, process, and desired outcomes. Discovering the brand includes developing the brand elements which identify the different parts of a brand and analyzing what attracts members of the organization to the learning and development centre, together with the results expected.

Brand Essence

Brand essence is the fundamental issue around the brand, reflecting the values, beliefs, attitudes, and opinions of those involved. It is the heart and soul of the brand. It identifies what the learning stands for, what value can be expected, what makes

the learning program successful, and what can make the experience compelling. Successful brands offer more than a product and provide more than a service; they offer an experience. For example, Disney is not only in the business of running theme parks, but provides family fun. Starbucks sells time to relax and not just coffee. Nike sells athletic performance and not just shoes. Therefore, a critical component of a successful brand is to understand value and experience which the customers (in our case: employees) are seeking, and being able to communicate and deliver that experience (Travis 2004).

Brand Identity

The actual identity of the brand is usually the tag-line or logo of value statements which reflect what the brand intends to offer. Unfortunately, whilst attempting to brand, many learning organizations move directly to this step without thinking through previous steps. With a clear focus, the brand discovery, in essence, must be developed first.

The identity can reflect the essence of the brand. The brand identity should include logos, web sites, key presentations, marketing material, and handouts. Consistency, clarity, and instant recognition are very important. The focus on creating value for the corporate learning program—the brand and its identity—should reflect key words such as performance, results, improvement, value, success, accomplishment, growth, and achievement. These are deliverables that individuals, particularly executives, are seeking in the learning and development enterprise, at a corporate university or academy.

Brand Building

On the basis of the classic four P classification: *product*, *price*, *promotion* and *place* (McCarthy 1964) we propose the elements of learning program brand building, whether it is a menu of courses or the educational branch of the organization.

The *product* in this context is an intangible service providing a learning experience

and satisfying the learning and development needs. As every product, it is subject to a life-cycle including a growth phase followed by a maturity phase and, finally, a period of decline as interest falls. Learning leaders, as marketers of these programs, should research carefully the likely length of the life cycle and focus their attention on different drivers of demand.

When considering not just an entity (i.e. a corporate university or academy) but the entire range of professional development programs, learning leaders should also propose a certain type of product mix. They can expand the current mix of corporate training courses by increasing a certain course's depth or by increasing the number of courses. Learning leaders should consider how to position the *product*: the basis of the need which is identified during performance management and evaluation processes based on strategic goals, the pool of employees for whom is it meant to be, and how to configure the mix so that each product complements the other.

The *price* is very important as it determines the product's profit and survival, although in this sense we cannot talk about the amount paid for a product as employees are not paying for their professional development within the company. The expenses, however, can be determined (or at least estimated) at both organization and individual levels. At the same time, the benefit of professional development is a more important characteristic, and so a cost-benefit analysis can be conducted. In addition, learning leaders should investigate the employee's perception of the value of the product i.e. the completion of a course. The price should reflect the value of the learning process, whilst considering the alternative cost represented by other types of learning. Increased levels of performance, cost-efficiency related concrete numbers are desirable (preferably by focus groups as the basis of comparison) to show the real value of the product and other alternative solutions.

The *promotion* includes all of the methods of communication which the learning leader may use to provide information to different stakeholders about the product. Promotion comprises elements such as: advertising, public relations, promotion by participants' managers as well as by the decision-makers i.e. the CEO. The targeting and positioning of the promotion should go beyond the internal stakeholders and address external audiences also. It can not only strengthen the reputation but also the involvement of these audiences by, based on their help, improving the relevant content and increasing customer orientation. Advertising covers any communication which is paid for, whilst public relations on the other hand, is where the communication is not directly paid for and includes emails, intranet, newsletters, articles, press releases, brochures, sponsorship deals, exhibitions, conferences, seminars or trade fairs and corporate events. Word-of-mouth is any, apparently informal, communication about the product by ordinary individuals, satisfied program participants or people specifically engaged to create word of mouth momentum.

The *place* refers to providing the product at a place and platform convenient for stakeholders to access. Various strategies can be used by the learning leader to make the corporate learning visible and accessible (depending on the type of learning) whilst increasingly taking into consideration the need to optimize for the individual interest of the participants.

Drawing on this logic we can extend this model whilst adding "physical evidence", "people", and "process" (Booms and Bitner 1981) to the above Ps, given that the relevant product here is providing learning experience - which is not merely a physical good, but a service.

Physical evidence shows that a service took place, positively or negatively.

People refers to the employees who carry out the service, chiefly to the manner and skill employed.

Finally, *process* stands for the processes and systems within the organization which affect the carrying out of this service, such as a platform for 'gamifying' the learning experience or running an internal YouTube-like learning channel.

Living the Brand

The next step should be living up to the brand. The old saying, "Actions speak louder than words," is very true in brand development and use. The reactions of the learning and development staff members, the success of the programs, the quality of the materials, the value of the experience, and the results are all connected to the brand in some way. If there is a breakdown in delivering the value perceived in the brand, the brand is destroyed. If the service, offerings, experience and success do not align with the brand, the value of the brand will disappear, opening up opportunities for ridicule. If the brand is to deliver unmistakable value, the value must exist; if the brand is creating results through learning, the results must be evident. This will require constant focus on branding, on ensuring that the brand becomes an important consideration in the development of new programs, on the design and delivery of the programs, and on the data which are constantly developed to provide the proof points. A successful learning brand will drive unique benefits for an organization. External press about a company with a successful learning organization will be attractive to potential candidates and potential learning partners (vendors, trainers, etc.). Internal press about a successful learning function will be important for retaining employees and will influence learning participation and executive involvement.

Brand Discipline

The final step is the discipline to maintain the brand. Branding is not a one-time event; it is a continuous and consistent process to ensure that stakeholders are engaged in the brand, identify with the brand, and are con-

stantly reminded of the brand. Year-to-year, corporate learning leaders should reflect the brand, and the proof points should be a constant string of data to convince all stakeholders that the value of the brand exists.

Wherever programs and processes are communicated, they should relate directly to the brand and its identity, always ensuring that the employees and other key stakeholders identify with what the brand stands for.

BRANDING EXCELLENCE IN PRACTICE

During creating the programs of 4 Corporate University and Corporate Learning Summits specifically designed for corporate universities and reaching with them the highest attendance in Europe, a vast amount of data and knowledge had been gathered from Europe- and US-based CLOs and learning leaders. A review of the relevant literature and research into the trends published in some leading industry journals and periodicals, consultations in the preparation phase of these summit programs, and - most importantly - on-site anecdotal evidence from industry practitioners proved to be both unique and the most relevant source of knowledge for us to exploit, thanks to the presence of corporate learning leaders and their openness to on-site interviews. These sources offered a wide variety of branding excellence examples in practice to these elements.

Product

At Turkish Airlines' Turkish Aviation Academy, the learning program ("Leaders of Tomorrow") is represented by Aysu Acar and her team as an appealing learning experience, career growth path and leadership development opportunity. They pay close attention to clear communication of the career pyramid and the career plan as well as the life-cycle of the learning program which has to satisfy learning and development needs at different phases of the employees' professional development path, whilst meeting individual and corporate expectations

(Acar 2013). So Turkish Aviation Academy aims for continuous renewal of itself and its "product": the portfolio of learning programs. This institution is a pioneer corporate academy in aligning the product mix to the demand and creating a range of courses which complement each other. They are currently on the way to obtain certification (Renaud-Coulon 2005) for their courses to make the product even more attractive from 2015 onwards (Acar 2015).

Price

The Lely Academy defines the purpose and the value of the learning department and their programs, answering upfront questions such as "why do we exist?" and "what would happen if our department would not be there?". Ronald van der Molen, the Global Head of the Academy invites stakeholders to examine practice and visit the field; he defines the added value of the Academy within the field, the costs of alternative solutions, increased levels of workforce performance and cost-efficiency results (van der Molen 2014).

Promotion

A prime example of promotion is how the Italian award-winning Banca Mediolanum University embodies the identity, the culture and values of the brand: besides internal PR tools such as emails, newsletters, articles, brochures and corporate events, they established the Mediolanum University Museum and Media Library. It represents the roots of knowledge from which Mediolanum Corporate University is sustained and it is a stable, continuous place of corporate learning's promotion (Randazzo 2014).

Place

The Turkcell Academy goes beyond the traditional methods of making corporate learning visible and accessible. The corporate learning team (formerly supported by Nilay Ozman) re-launched the Academy and its courses in partnership with Coursera as a free and digital learning platform - so

providing the product at a place and on a platform convenient for stakeholders to access, optimized for their individual requirements and available in Turkish also (Ozman 2014).

Physical evidence

To provide evidence that the learning program took place, Stefaan van Hooydonk, the CLO and Dean of Philips Lighting University created the so-called LED certification system at Philips to show not only course completion but also tangible figures justifying its relevance to work, the positive impact on performance, the improvement in productivity and the impact on the bottom line – in other words, the ROI of the LED-certification (van Hooydonk 2014).

People

Southwest Airlines' approach to people who execute the service and the manner in which they do so is simple. They do not care much about education and experience, since they train people to do whatever they have to do. They hire attitudes (Gallo 2013). In this way they ensure that the employees and people involved in corporate learning programs have the right attitude to provide a learning experience with the needed skills, in the appropriate manner.

Process

To the process element the industry practice offers several good examples, from Nestlé University's corporate learning spaces which enhance social learning and 'flipped' classroom methodology (Rajon 2014), through EDP University's 'My Might' avatar-based personalized learning process (Sanches 2014) to Alstom University's AU Tube, a peer video streaming portal dedicated to education. Through this interface (available in several languages), Alstom employees are encouraged to share their best working practices, knowledge, skills and expertise with the entire Alstom community in a fun and interactive way through self-produced, instructional videos (Salone 2012).

Suggested Methods for Assessing a CLO's Branding Activities

Branding activity by CLOs and learning leaders are much needed and must be versatile, although they appear in a rather *ad hoc* manner and there is no systematic (or, at least, organized) approach or a formal branding plan. The tools currently in use do not primarily aim to be comprehensive and results-driven. We suggest, therefore, a method to make the learning leaders' branding activities more conscious and more firmly grounded, supported by a renewed model.

Ultimately, the most pressing challenges facing the learning leaders continue to be measuring the organization's intellectual capital (Gyökér 2004) and demonstrating the success of the learning investment. A widely accepted method of examining the measurement and evaluation of learning as a value chain where various types of data (levels) are collected at different times (sometimes from different sources) to generate a balanced profile of success, providing the value desired by various stakeholders of the process. Figure 3 shows this value chain, which is fundamental to the work in evaluation and which has provided since its appearance a framework for CLOs to measure the success of learning.

The most fundamental level of measurement is Level 0, the capture of inputs and indicators.

1. *Volume* or *Participant count* is a common measure and it can represent participants with various job titles, in various categories.
2. *Efficiencies* reflect a wide variety of measures such as the percentage of learners completing the programs, the percentage of individuals attending follow-up sessions and the time it takes individuals to complete the programs.

From Level 0, the two dimensions which we regard as the most important from the branding point of view, and the categories selected to present these measures are: the

Figure 3. The learning value chain
 Source: Elkeles, Phillips 2006

Level	Measurement Focus	Key Questions
0 Input and Indicators	Measures input such as volume and efficiencies	What is the number of participants, hours, and programs and what are the costs?
1 Reaction and Planned Action	Measures participant satisfaction with the project and captures planned actions	Was the learning relevant, important, useful, and helpful to participants in the job environment? Did the participants plan to use the content in the program?
2 Learning and Confidence	Measures changes in knowledge, skills, and attitudes	Did participants increase or enhance knowledge, skills, or perceptions and have confidence to use them?
3 Application and Implementation	Measures changes in on-the-job behavior or action	What did the participants do differently in the job context? Was the program implemented effectively? What changes were made on the job?
4 Impact and Consequences	Measures changes in business impact variables	What are the consequences of the application in terms of output, quality, cost, time, and satisfaction?
5 ROI	Compares project benefits to the costs	Did the monetary benefits of the learning program exceed the investment in the program?

employee enrolment count and the efficiency factors for opt-in corporate learning programs. In short, these relate to how the success of CLOs branding activity or efforts can be quantified as the number of participants who have registered for non-mandatory learning programs and the efficiency rates (longer-term engagement

levels) for those programs which are a free choice on a learning program “menu” and not compulsory training “prescribed” by a line manager.

The reason why we have selected Level 0 and not upper Levels (i.e. Level 1’s Reaction and Planned Action) as a base of measurement is that the real engagement

towards these programs is not satisfactorily indicated by a score on an evaluation form filled in immediately following the course; it is far better to use the 'new participant' count and the percentage of those completing a newly launched program.

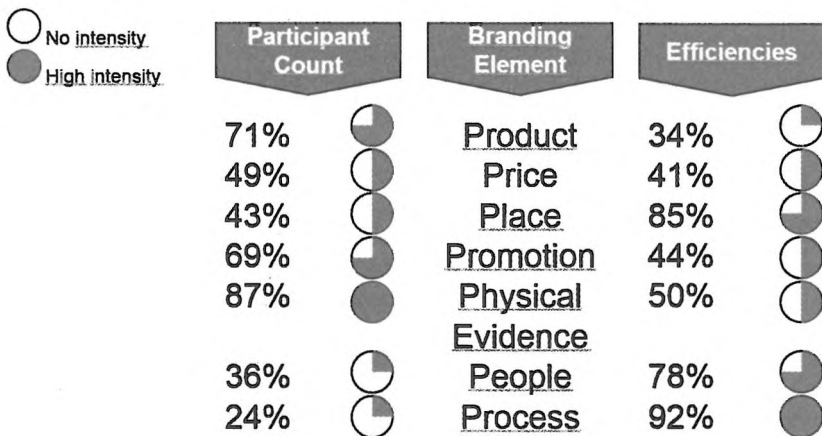
On this narrowed focus of Kirkpatrick's model, we would suggest a framework for measuring the intensity of learning leader's branding activities based on the two chosen dimensions of Level 0.

To investigate and describe systematically a sample of these, we opted to use a quantitative survey approach. The development process proceeded as follows. Based on the dimensions described and the literature review, presentations were made at corporate university conferences, and survey questions were devised for use in semi-structured interviews with learning leaders. Each survey item was created to represent a branding activity element. To support the content and structure of the survey instrument, pre-pilot expert validation was conducted. The selected pre-qualified members from the Advisory Board and Speaker Panel described earlier (excluding those mentioned with examples in the "Branding Excellence in Practice" part) were asked to rank the intensity of branding

activity elements according to their impact on: 1) the number of employees who register for opt-in corporate learning courses or corporate university programs and 2) their efficiency rates, with responses on a 1-5 point scale arranged as: 1=Not at all, 2=very little 3=Quite a Bit, 4=Somewhat, 5=A Great Deal.

These learning professionals (n=8) representing 'typical' survey respondents were asked for their feedback on the survey. The learning professionals held titles such as Chief Learning Officer, Director of Learning, Head of Learning and Development, Vice President of Training, Head of Corporate University, etc. Based on the feedback, a further refinement of the survey was made, such as having certain branding elements be more specific, illustrated by examples. Then the survey was converted to a web-based questionnaire using an easy to access internet tool as our intention was to reach learning leaders across geographic locations and have responses returned quickly. The sample for this study was comprised of senior-level individuals who work for or are part of a corporate university or learning department within a larger company. The study required one individual respondent per organization.

Figure 4. Intensity of branding activity elements (attributes) based on a survey about the attributes rankings – a Branding Efficiency Model for Learning Leaders
Source: Own research



The completed surveys were subjected to further inspection to filter them for possible non-sampling errors, and now, from a sample of n=27 completed surveys. We offer our findings as follow:

For the *Participant Count* dimension, the *Physical Evidence*, *Product* and *Promotion* proved to be the most intensive branding activity elements in encouraging the learner target audience to participate in opt-in corporate learning programs. In respect of for the *Efficiencies* dimension, the *Process*, *Place* and *People* headed this ranking, providing the higher satisfactory and engagement levels during the course.

Our aim was also to examine the results compared to already existing findings and we found that there is a thin weak literature and research base on the branding of corporate learning leaders and their impacts on learner engagement.

David Vance, founding and former President of the Caterpillar University argues that learning and development departments should not try to market training to employees, creating awareness and demand for the courses as their important priority (Vance 2015). These departments and their leaders exist primarily to help their organizations achieve their goals. Consequently, learning leaders should align and prioritize their efforts around the organization's highest priority goals, and then work with those who have set the goals to develop learning initiatives in direct support of those goals. According to Vance's reasoning and if we apply the expanded model of corporate education program stakeholders, the learning and its ultimate effect on the goals will be a result of close collaboration and partnership between the learning leader and the goal-setting stakeholder (*Decision Maker*) in the owner's organization.

In this model, why would learning and development need branding or marketing? The goal-setter, such as the Senior Vice-President of Sales, has agreed that targeted salespeople need the training. Presumably, everyone in the target audience will be

required to take the training or to demonstrate the desired proficiency. The Senior VP, with the help of the learning leader, will need to convey the expected benefit of the training, and will need to communicate the appropriate positive incentives for applying the desired behaviours, but this is not marketing. If the Senior VP decides the learning will simply be recommended, then primarily the learning leader will need to communicate the expected benefits, but this still should not represent an all-out selling effort for the course. Thus, for learning programs aligned to high-priority organization goals, learning leaders should not have to brand, market and "sell", although they may need to help the goal-setter communicate the expectations and benefits of the learning program. Vance (2005) describes the rest of the learning offerings as unaligned to the highest-priority important goals – certainly important, but much less so than the other learning which is aligned or mandatory. Consequently, it simply makes no sense to spend a great deal of effort selling this learning to employees. He agrees that good marketing will lead to more employees taking these courses, but that should not be the goal of learning leaders. The goal is to help the company achieve its goals by offering learning aligned to the company's goals and by providing all the required compliance and basic skill training. He suggests to spend time and resources there and not on branding and marketing the unaligned learning.

The assumption behind our study is driven by the importance of capturing the real value of an opt-in corporate learning strategy as described in a recent article (Echols 2015). In the case of these non-mandatory learning courses, the dollars invested are a certain combination of company and employee. The time investment is always the employee's, as the learning takes place outside working hours. For this second learning set, it is a very useful strategy to brand and market the learning offering to employees and this is where we think that

the significance of this study lies. Requiring employees to be investors in their own learning, the company is identifying one of the most important success factors needed for these investments to be successful. Opt-in implicitly identifies the most highly motivated employees for the corporate portion of the joint venture investment. Finding the most highly motivated employees is of key importance when it comes to prioritizing corporate learning investments. In this case, marketing the investment's benefits to employee is not only appropriate, but also it benefits the company immensely. Therefore, our aim was to investigate comprehensiveness and a possible framework in prioritizing learning leaders branding activities, driven by tangible outcomes as numbers of participants enrolled and efficiency indicators such as completion rates and attending follow-up sessions. This is a fundamental level which is often neglected; it can, however, provide the representative respondent pool to continue with the measurements at higher levels. It is essential for learning leaders that they understand how they want to create value and how they communicate it. A comprehensive - yet very logical and transparent - tool of learning program value creation can be the Corporate University Value Creation Menu (Meyer 2012, In: Rademakers 2014). This "menu card" is a matrix formed by four distinctive value-creation options: personal development, cross-unit networks, corporate identity and business expertise - and learning leaders need to send the messages of their Ps considering these matrix quadrants in order to achieve sustainable learner engagement.

SUMMARY

Once elevating the learning and development leader to a C-level title, the company is communicating the clear message that it is committed to make a long-term investment in human capital via organizational learning. There is a renewed interest today in talent management, succession planning

and organizational effectiveness; therefore, the new breed of CLOs have an emerging role in employee engagement powered by value creation. Embracing this value creator role is strongly powered by internal corporate education branding activities of CLOs and other learning leaders who are considered to be the catalysts to develop this specific brand with critical impacts. The problems are that these branding activities may occur eventually rather than on an organized branding activity basis, a formal branding plan. The branding tools currently in use do not aim for comprehensiveness and are not sufficiently outcome-oriented. This paper aims to offer an assessment method of opt-in corporate learning program branding activities building on Kirkpatrick's framework in which two main dimensions had been identified on Level 0. Dimension-based branding activity attributes and their intensity had been consolidated and so a branding-efficiency model could be created. Our investigation into the perceived intensity of branding activity elements (attributes) aims at this stage to help current and future learning leaders to bring comprehensiveness in their corporate learning program branding activities and to provide a possible framework in prioritizing learning offering branding activities.

REFERENCES

- Acar, A. (2013), "Turkish Aviation Academy – Leaders of Tomorrow", in: *3rd Corporate Universities and Academies Summit Proceedings*, Brussels, Retrieved January 7, 2015
- Acar, A. (2015), "Achieving Global CCU Certification – The Journey of Turkish Aviation Academy", in: *5th Corporate Universities and Corporate Learning Summit Proceedings*, Amsterdam, Retrieved May 3, 2015
- Bernthal, P. R., Colteryahn, K., Davis, P., Naughton, J., Rothwell, W. J., Wellins, R. (2004), *ASTD Competency Study: Mapping the Future*, Alexandria, VA: ASTD Press
- Bongiorno, G., Coleman, G., Hessel, G. & Murphy, W. (2005), "Critical Characteristics for CLO Success", *CLO Magazine*, 4 2, pp.52-8
- Booms, B. H. and M. J. Bitner (1981), "Marketing Strategies and Organization Structures for Service Firms", in: *Marketing of Services*, Donnelly and

- George (Eds.), Chicago: American Marketing Association, pp.47-51 Retrieved May 3, 2015
- Echols, M. (2015), "Who Pays and Who Benefits?", *CLO Magazine*, 14 11, pp.31-5
- Elkeles, T., Phillips, J. J. (2006): *The Chief Learning Officer (Improving Human Performance)*, Saint Louis, MO: Routledge
- Gallo, C. (2013), "How Southwest and Virgin America Win by Putting People Before Profit", *Forbes*, 193 3, pp.44-53, Retrieved January 7, 2015
- Gratton, L. (2004): *Aligning Corporate Learning with Business Strategy*, Kingwood, TX: The Concourses Group
- Gyökér I. (2004), "A vállalat szellemi tőkéje – számolatlan vagyon", *Harvard Business Manager*, 6 6, 12-8. old.
- Gyökér I. – Finna H. (2012), „Nemzetközi karrierutak és karriermenedzsment hazai vállalatok gyakorlatában”, *A Virtuális Intézet Közép-Európa Kutatására Közleményei*, 4 4, 129-38. old.
- Hooydonk, S. van (2014), "Learning @Philips", in: *4th Corporate Universities and Ac@demies Summit Proceedings*, Brussels, Retrieved January 7, 2015
- Krajcsák, Z. – Jónás, T. – Finna, H. (2014), „An Analysis of Commitment Factors Depending on Generation and Part-Time Working in Selected Groups of Employees in Hungary”, *Argumenta Oeconomica*, 33 2, pp.115-43
- L'Allier, J. J. (2005): "The CLO's Role: Preparing for Future Challenges", *CLO Magazine*, 4 2, pp.26-34
- Lindholm, J. E. (2000): *A Study of CEO Perceptions of the Competencies of Workplace Learning and Performance Professionals*, Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Pennsylvania State University, Pennsylvania, PA: University Park
- McCarthy, J. E. (1964): *Basic Marketing. A Managerial Approach, 2/e*, Irwin, IL: Homewood
- Meyer, R. (2012), "Learning to Learn: Unleashing the Potential of Your Corporate University", In: Rademakers, M. F.: *Corporate Universities – Drivers of the learning organization*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2014
- Molen, R. van der (2014), "Lely Academy", in: *4th Corporate Universities and Ac@demies Summit Proceedings*, Brussels, Retrieved January 7, 2015
- Ozman, N. (2013), "Turkcell Academy", in: *3rd Corporate Universities and Ac@demies Summit Proceedings*, Brussels, Retrieved January 7, 2015
- Rajon, B. (2014), "70/20/10 Revisited – From Effectiveness towards Impact at Nestlé", in: *4th Corporate Universities and Ac@demies Summit Proceedings*, Brussels, Retrieved January 7, 2015
- Randazzo, G. (2014), "Mediolanum Corporate University – Relationship for Excellence", in: *4th Corporate Universities and Ac@demies Summit Proceedings*, Brussels, Retrieved January 7, 2015
- Renaud-Coulon, A. (2005), "Corporate University Certification", in: *GlobalCCU*, <http://www.globalccu.com/globalccu-tcu-certification.html>, Retrieved May 3, 2015
- Rothwell, W. J. (2006), *What CEOs Expect from Corporate Training*, New York, NY: Amacom
- Salone, M. (2012), "Educational Video Learning", in: *2nd Corporate Universities and Ac@demies Summit Proceedings*, Paris, Retrieved January 7, 2015
- Sanches, A. (2014), "Frameworks for a Successful CU Implementation – EDP University: Energizing our Organization through a Renewable Source of L&D", in: *4th Corporate Universities and Ac@demies Summit Proceedings*, Brussels, Retrieved January 7, 2015
- Szeghegyi, Á. – Lambert, V. – Velencei, J (2014), "Informal Post-Experiential Learning", *Acta Polytechnica Hungarica*, 11 4, pp.241-52
- Travis, L. (2004), "Branding Enterprise Learning", *CLO Magazine*, 3 4, pp.28-32
- Vance, D. (2015): "Avoid 'Marketing' Learning to Employees", *CLO Magazine*, 14 6, pp.19-24

Viktória Lambert, PhD Student
vlambert965@hotmail.com

Irén Gyökér, CSc, Associate professor
gyoker@mvt.bme.hu

Budapest University of
Technology and Economics
Department of Management and
Corporate Economics