Navigating today's complex LMS landscape

A buyer's guide for choosing a next-generation LMS

schoox

Introduction

Foreword from Lefteris Ntouanoglou, CEO, Schoox

When was the last time you heard someone say, "I love my LMS?" If you just chuckled, it's likely because you know that very few organizations today are happy with their learning management systems. Words like "outdated," "difficult," "inadequate," and "lacking integration" are just some of the descriptors being used.

This is a surprising outcome considering there are over 800 learning management systems. It would seem that more of them "got it right." Right? Wrong. Today's LMS platforms have many gaps and limitations.

The reality is that learning management technology is in a major transition. This has been accelerated by several challenges—including today's changing workforce, technological innovations, and the sudden shift to a work fom home culture. An inadequate LMS only makes the challenges more difficult to overcome. That's why more organizations are looking for a next-generation learning platform that is equipped to help them transform their employee learning programs.

So where do you go from here—especially considering today's fragmented corporate training and learning management software marketplace? This eBook provides an overview of the learning platform landscape to guide your search and help you make an informed purchasing decision on an LMS you can truly love.

Lefteris Ntouanoglou
CEO

Table of Contents

What's Driving Learning Transformation?

The learning marketplace has and will continue to experience major disruptions as vendors develop a wide range of learning tools and platforms. The HR Technology Market 2020 report calls it "a renaissance,"[1] because the marketplace is moving away from traditional LMS platforms, which were focused narrowly on the administration of employee onboarding and training. Now, the focus is on platforms that deliver a much broader continuous learning approach—what industry expert Josh Bersin calls "learning in the flow of work."[2]

There are several drivers impacting today's learning disruption—from the employees themselves to the work from home (WFH) demand post pandemic. Here's an overview of the five leading drivers.

Employees

A major driver in the evolution of learning platforms is being led by employees themselves. Over 86% of employees want opportunities to acquire new skills (reskilling) and 83% want opportunities to enhance their current skills (upskilling).[3] They also want dynamic, self-directed learning and development experiences.

CEOs

Increasingly, the C-suite is recognizing the need for a learning system transformation that meets both employees' demands and the organization's business goals. In fact, 79% of CEOs worldwide are concerned that a lack of essential skills in their workforce is threatening the future growth of their organizations, according to PwC's Talent Trends 2019 report.[4]

86%

Over 86% of employees want opportunities to acquire new skills (reskilling).

83%

And 83% want opportunities to enhance their current skills (upskilling).

Learning teams as business partners

Learning teams are now expected to drive business results for their companies. Previously, an LMS could only deliver and track mandatory compliance training, onboarding, and certifications. But advanced LMS functionality now supports learner engagement, collaboration and coaching, provides talent development and career planning, tracks productivity, and delivers business outcomes. Learning teams can use an LMS as a revenue driver.

Better learning experiences

In 2019, interest and demand for learning experience platforms (LXPs) began accelerating. LMS systems have traditionally focused on scheduling, registration, and tracking learners' activities. LXPs go further by delivering personalized learning paths, channels, and collections that allow learners to organize, access, and share relevant resources, while gaining visibility into additional avenues of learning. Still, while LXPs have carved out a category in the overall learning technology space, there's a growing consensus that they create an additional (perhaps unnecessary) layer. Some feel the onus is on the LMS to innovate and incorporate the features and benefits that make a next-generation learning platform.
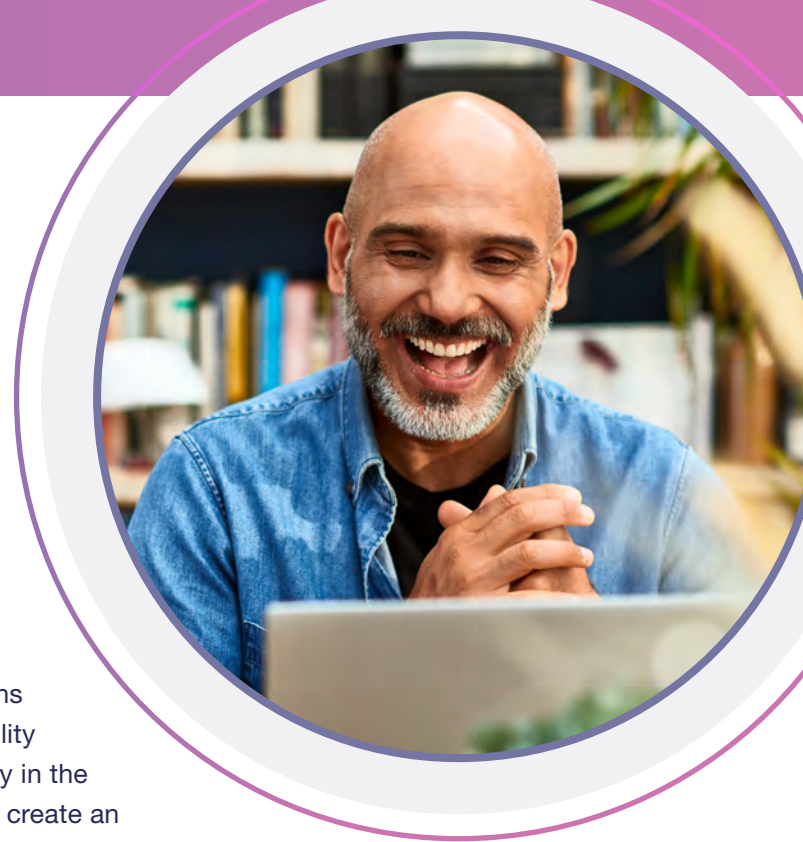
The work from home (WFH) revolution

The pandemic sent a record number of employees home to work instead of in their offices. However, learning management platforms never lost a step since online learning had long been a part of most organizations in some way or another. The major impact of the pandemic on learning platforms was that more organizations started investing in creating high-functioning virtual learning environments to keep up with and adapt to the pace of change. Online learning platforms shine when it comes to helping employees stay agile as businesses shift toward building resiliency. When it comes to mobile learning, not every LMS is well equipped. However, according to ADP, 64% of the workforce would consider looking for a new job if they were required to return to the office full time.[5] This means that virtual and mobile learning will only become more critical for most training and learning teams to support front-line, hybrid, and remote workers.

Today's LMS Options

According to HR Technology, an accelerated reinvention of learning technologies is underway today. The marketplace for talent platforms has exploded, and many new categories have emerged—from learning experience, to collaborative program management, to microlearning, there are more tools than ever before. Here are a few of the most compelling tools and how they benefit learners.

LMS: These are the legacy systems that most companies currently use. The core features include course administration and tracking, compliance processing, business rules management, and reporting.

Micro and mobile learning platforms: These support brief, targeted, and time-sensitive training. They are typically executed via videos on mobile devices.

Learning libraries: These contain learning content where employees can access the information they need when they need it. Examples include LinkedIn Learning and Udemy.

Learning record store (LRS): These expand LMS reporting and analytical capabilities by capturing a wide range of learning experiences and activities.

Learning content management systems (LCMS) and content authoring tools: These enable the creation, storage, delivery, and reuse of learning content.

Virtual classrooms and multimodal: These underpin various approaches to learning, including formal, structured social, informal, and blended styles.

Program platforms: Some organizations need the ability to guide employees through an entire curriculum, such as for sales training, leadership development, onboarding, supervisory training, and engineering. That's where massive open online courses (MOOCs) come in.

Digital adoption and workflow learning tools: These are platforms designed to facilitate seamless learning by simplifying the user experience and ensuring proficiency on any software platform, website, or app. Capabilities include interactive help, inline video, and other content for a particular job role.

Assessment and virtual learning: These deliver the opportunity to create safe and authentic spaces for learning in simulated environments. Learners can tackle real-world problems, inquiry activities, share content and collaborate, and develop individual empowerment through choice.

Virtual reality (VR): These tools give organizations the ability to create computer-generated environments and simulations to immerse users in virtual scenarios and situations.

AI learning: Learning platforms that feature AI include capabilities like inferred skills, recommended content, programs and skills, coach matching, virtual reality training, micro-learning, and peer assessment.

Learning experience platforms (LXP): LXPs are a front-end layer that typically resides on top of an LMS. They are used to enhance an individual learner's engagement via greater personalization and an expanded breadth of formal and informal content, such as TED Talks, YouTube, Harvard Business Review, and MOOCs. These systems employ machine learning to assess employees' skills and recommend content.
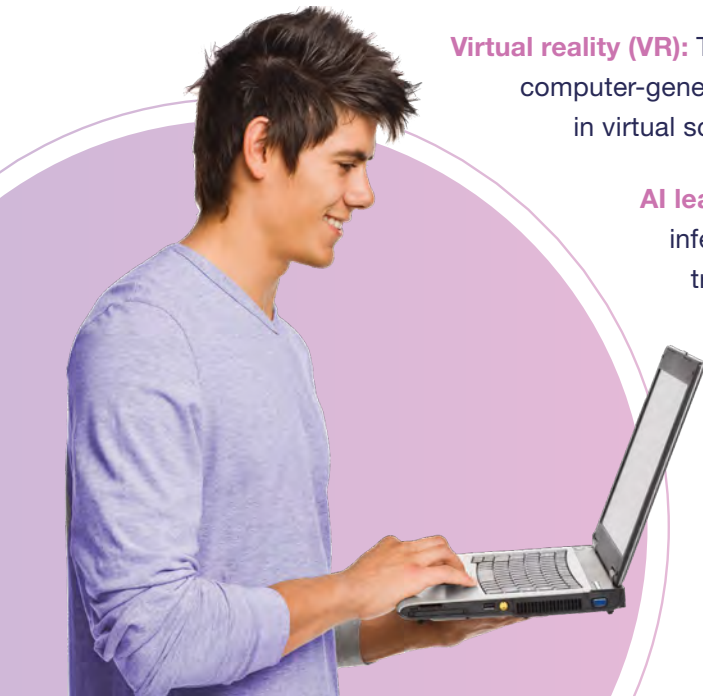
Must-Have Learning Capabilities

Due to the evolving expectations of the C-Suite, learning leaders require LMS platforms that go beyond delivering and tracking training. Today's LMS platforms need to deliver training, behavioral outcomes, and encourage career progression in order to increase employee satisfaction and retention while enabling the organization to have a stronger workforce that can be promoted from within.

> **Training management.** The right platform allows organizations to have a central hub for all activities that involve employee training—from assigning courses to analyzing the results. This creates consistency within training delivery and allows for easy tracking.
> *Includes: onboarding, initial job assignment training, transition management, and communication tools*

> **Performance management.** Performance management enables learners to meet current knowledge standards, adapt to changes, and expand their skills. It also helps administrators identify desired learning behaviors. From there, they can structure their learning initiatives to address skill gaps and add skill-building that will help develop top-tier talent who can deliver more successful business outcomes.
> *Includes: goal setting, coaching, feedback, job reviews and assessments, engagement surveys, and salary and bonus reviews*

> **Career management.** Advanced learning systems contain functionality that helps employees close their skill gaps, build new capabilities, and progress faster along their preferred career paths. With these tools, employees can access the learning content they want anytime. To help them manage their careers, the next generation of talent platforms will include workflow tools, productivity tools, and consumer apps.
> *Includes: career planning, job transitions, certifications, compliance, on-the-job training, succession planning, and support*

Employee & Administrator Experiences

When it comes to functionality and ease of use, there are two key audiences that must be considered: employees and administrators. Initially, learning systems were created for administrators first. But that approach short-changed employees, who are the actual end users of the systems. Today, the best platforms are designed to deliver optimized experiences to both learners and administrators. Here are some of the capabilities that create great experiences for both.

Learner experiences

To ensure the highest adoption rates, you need to think about how your learners use your system. If they don't engage with it, they aren't going to retain what they've learned. Employees need the ability to access, share, and become engaged in the platform, with functionality such as:

- Accessibility on any mobile device
- Filters to search for desired content quickly
- Content sharing and peer-to-peer learning
- Content playlist creation
- Content recommendations that track learners' historical behavior
- Learning reinforcements like boosters, quizzes, and support materials
- Content mapping to skills and/or specific competencies
- Gamification and social collaboration options to inspire engagement
- Content, curricula, or courses tailored to the individual

> Initially, learning systems were created for administrators first. Today, the best platforms are designed to deliver optimized experiences to both learners and administrators.

Administrator experiences

Learning platforms should make it easy for admins to support their team members' professional development. For example, they can assign or recommend relevant courses, and recognize employees who are actively completing courses. They need tools to manage, monitor, and measure learning, such as:

• Hierarchy functionality that supports even the most complex organizational structures
• Communication tools that offer multiple ways to send messages
• Flexible content and course organization by teams, groups, and departments
• Options to preview, curate, and assign content
• Custom content, certification, qualification, classroom, and external training management
• Tools for creating and assigning learning curricula
• Employee performance reporting tools
• Robust reporting functionality

If learners don't engage with your system, they aren't going to retain what they've learned. Similarly, admins need tools that will make it easy to manage, monitor, and measure learning.

Learning Solution Provider Questions

With so many LMS providers in the marketplace, one of the biggest challenges for organizations is that there are too many options. This checklist provides a way to compare vendors and find the one that best meets your organization's learning needs and business goals. Ask yourself these questions when doing your evaluation:

Technology. Is the solution strong enough to meet our organization's learning requirements?

Responsive. Has the vendor continually improved its learning product over the years?

Passion. Do they know the learning industry intimately and have a desire to stay on the leading edge?

Strengths. Do they have long-term viability beyond just learning, such as in company growth and leadership?

Mindset. Does their vision, mission, and values reflect an innovative and growth-oriented mindset?

Synergy. Does the vendor have a product vision and team you can relate to?

Focus. Is the vendor's solution focused on employees, administrators, or both?

Consultative. Does the vendor strive to understand your learning needs?

Roadmap. Do they listen to feedback and have actionable plans for addressing clients' needs?

Support. Does the vendor have a culture of flexible and accommodating customer care?

In-house teams. Does the vendor provide services to its customers or outsource them?

References. Does the vendor have referenceable customers in your core market?

LMS Selection Best Practices

Choosing the right learning platform requires careful evaluation of the options that meet your needs. Best practices in the selection process include the following eight steps.

Step 1 - Thinking beyond L&D

Today's learning platforms offer so much more than administering training and measuring compliance. Many organizations are integrating their LMS platforms with other areas of their organization, where challenges can be solved using the system's unique, robust functionality.

Step 2 - Set goals that align to the business

Determine the results you want to achieve from your learning program. These could include lowering staff turnover, supporting employee career advancement, or some other business-impacting outcome.

Step 3 - Identify the organization's learning needs

Understand the business strategy, and what the business needs from employees. Then, evaluate at a granular level where you have coverage, strength, and proficiency, and also where you have gaps and opportunities.

Step 4 - Define functionality requirements and use cases

Create a list of the learning features you'd like to see in your learning platform. It might be helpful to break this down into must-haves and nice-to-haves. And don't forget to identify all your use cases.

Step 5 - Evaluate platform capabilities

Compare your list of must-have features with the capabilities of each vendor's platform. Be sure they have what you need and check off some of your nice-to-have requirements, too.

Step 6 - Compare vendors

Assess and compare learning platform vendors as a whole (use the vendor checklist from the previous section). View demos of their solutions. Have real conversations with their teams. You'll be leaning on them for support so choose someone you can trust.

Step 7 - Test drive the product

When possible, run pilots of the platforms you're considering starting with small, targeted deployments on multiple devices. Find out if they perform as promised. Assess the platform's ROI and potential to deliver the value you need.

Step 8 - Gather feedback and make a decision

Once you have the features and data compiled, present it to your organization's decision-makers. Your learning team can offer recommendations and help make the final decision.

Want an easy way to compare LMS vendors?

With our **LMS Vendor Selection template**, you'll be able to use our plug-n-play components to create your own editable version of a comparison matrix using:

- Pre-formatted criteria and phase blocks
- Multiple vendor comparison rows
- Custom timelines, and more

Get the template

Benefits of Choosing the Right LMS

Investing in the right learning management system delivers incredible business advantages to organizations on multiple fronts—from high-quality employee job training to overcoming critical business challenges such as high employee turnover and stagnant sales. Here are just some of the many benefits organizations are gaining with the right learning platform guiding their training, performance, and career management programs.

Employee satisfaction

41% of employees cite a sense of purpose in their career as one of the benefits of company training.[6]

Employee engagement

Businesses that make sure they are actively engaging their employees see an **18% decrease in turnover**.[7]

Employee retention

94% of employees say they'd stay at a company longer if it invested in their learning and development.[8]

Boost productivity

40 - 60% of an employee's human-capital value are skills acquired through work experience.[9]

Upskill workforce

61% of workers mention upskilling opportunities as an important reason to stay at their current job.[10]

Increase adaptability

Higher levels of adaptability are associated with **increased learning ability, performance, and output**.[11]

Develop leaders

Orgs with inclusive leadership training were **4.2x more likely to financially outperform** those that didn't.[12]

Boost profits

Companies that offer training have a **218% higher revenue** per employee than orgs that do not.[13]

Conclusion

Forward-looking organizations have adopted a modern learning mindset and are moving beyond legacy learning models. They're deploying more robust and advanced learning platforms to ensure their employees have access to critical learning content, can share information, be more collaborative, and more productive. Companies are promoting employee job satisfaction with learning experiences that help employees get what they need, when they need it, wherever they are.

References

1. Josh Bersin
2. Josh Bersin
3. UiPath
4. PwC
5. ADP
6. Workplace Intelligence
7. Gallup
8. LinkedIn Learning
9. McKinsey
10. Gallup
11. McKinsey
12. DDI, EY, The Conference Board
13. ATD

About Schoox

Schoox is workplace learning software with a people-first twist. People aren't cogs, and Schoox was designed for how humans actually learn. We keep learners curious by letting you deliver more kinds of content wherever they are, from the front line to the corporate office. And by making learning easy, accessible, rewarding, and fun, we help you get everyone more excited about their career development. Learners can "up" their skills, grow on the job, and get more done—and you can measure the impact of their awesome accomplishments.

> **Why choose Schoox?**