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# **Learning Management Systems**

**.....an introduction.**

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# LMS Introduction

## THE WHAT, WHY, & HOW

### 1. WHAT IS A LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM?

At its core, a Learning Management System (LMS) is a software application or Web-based technology used to plan, implement, and assess a specific learning process. Typically, a learning management system provides an instructor with a way to create and deliver content, monitor student participation, and assess student performance.

The LMS enables the learning content to be to be available and/or accessible online thereby allowing students to view and interact with learning materials though a web browser on essentially any computer that has internet access.

There are many commercial LMS products available today as well as several open-source options from which educators and institutions may choose. The specific features and functions of these systems vary considerably, but certain core functions can be found across all of them. These functions include administration features such as:

- ✚ student registration
- ✚ course assignment
- ✚ tracking of test or quiz scores
- ✚ completion status.

From the student or learner perspective, the LMS provides personalized access to assigned course materials, messaging and notifications, and access to scores and transcripts.

Most Learning Management Systems offer a core role of functionality designed to

enable the training experts to manage the training and learning processes throughout their cycle. A good LMS will provide functions which will include:

- ✚ A method for assigning and tracking instructor-led and web-based training
- ✚ Management reports to evaluate learning performance
- ✚ A flexible structure that allows different combinations of user groups to be created
- ✚ An intuitive and user friendly interface for learners

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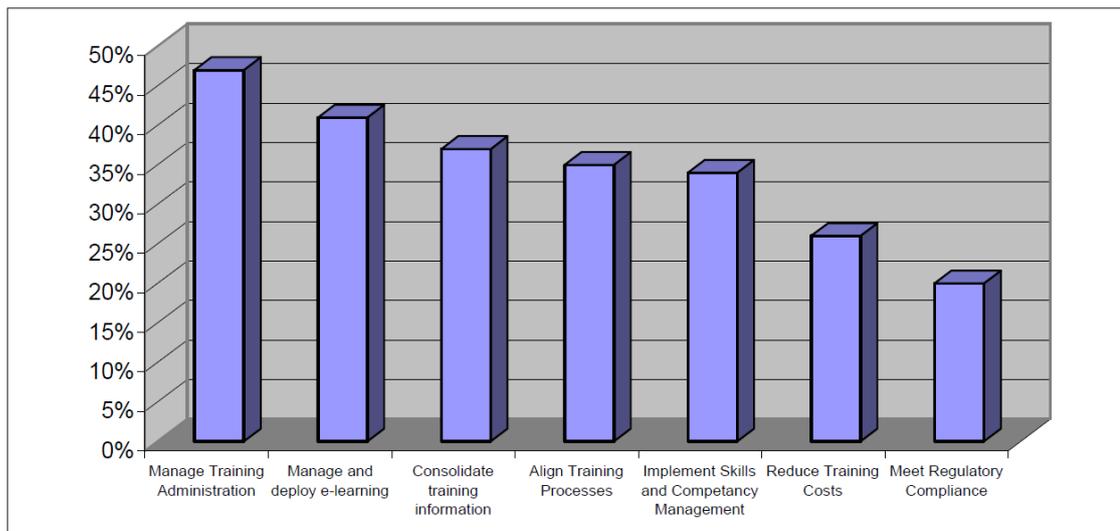
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### **1.1. CORE REASONS FOR PURCHASING AN LMS**

In a survey in the US (Bersin & Associates, August 2004), a number of core reasons were identified which encouraged organizations to purchase an LMS. These included:

- ✚ Managing training administration
- ✚ To manage and deploy e-learning
- ✚ Consolidate training information within a single system
- ✚ Align training processes with general business and HR processes
- ✚ Implement skills and competency management programs
- ✚ Reduce training costs (usually through introducing an e-learning programs)
- ✚ Meet regulatory compliance

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***Core reasons for purchasing an LMS compared***

In the US, the most popular reason for purchasing an LMS was listed as managing training administration with more than 47% citing it as significant. Meeting regulatory compliance was placed down the list though with greater regulatory demands of the UK and EC authorities, it may be safe to assume that this is a greater business driver than in the US.

## **1.2. LMS MATURITY**

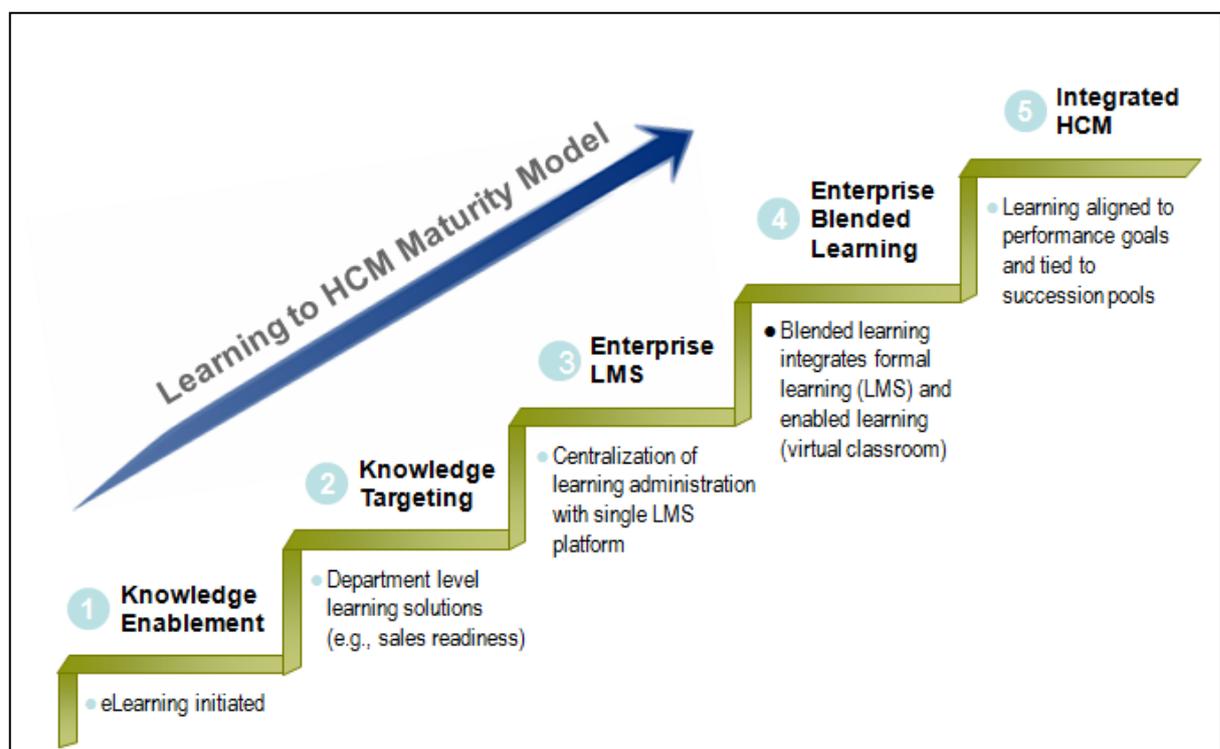
The move by the mainstream corporate world to embrace training and development as a necessity to attract and retain talent began in earnest approximately twelve years ago. At that time the primary focus was on tracking training at a departmental level to cover core and regulatory offerings – there was no definitive link to enterprise-wide business objectives and departmental autonomy in terms of solutions was the norm.

The departmental tracking of training allowed for the production of skills metrics which provide a roll-up view of skill levels across the department, clearly revealing skills gaps so that managers could focus their training and development resources. Detailed assessment scores in key skills allowed companies to quickly identify and

prepare employees with the competencies needed to fill in key job roles as proven performers move or retire. Finally, skills metrics helped employees move within the company by establishing skills milestones for career advancement and requirements for new positions.

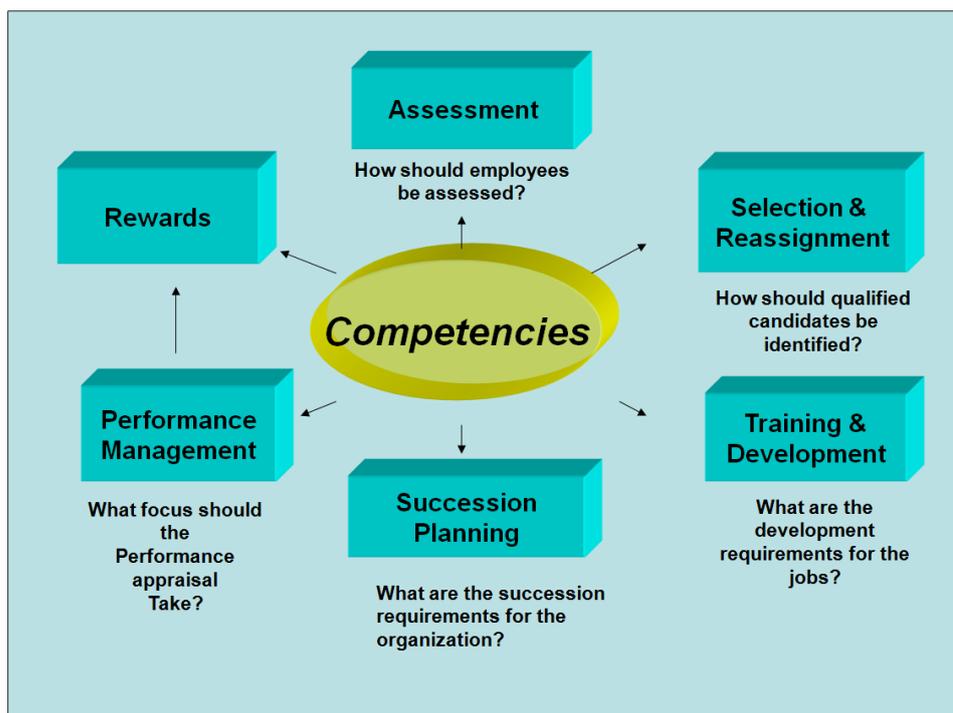
The benefits such data provided resulted in organizations expanding their LMS solutions to become company-wide thereby allowing for the centralized administration of learning on a single LMS platform.

As the impact of training on an organization in its entirety became more and more visible, so the potential benefits for a more integrated “hire to retire” solution became obvious – this resulted in the birth of Human Capital Management solutions. These modular enterprise-wide applications provide the ability to link training and development to performance and goals and succession planning. Referred to as “Integrated HCM”, these solutions are viewed as the end point of a cohesive talent development and retention strategy.



Underpinning HCM is the development, implementation and adoption of a Learning Management System (LMS) that provides users (learners) with easy access to the learning activities required. As a pre-requisite to implementing such a solution it is necessary to identify the skills/competencies associated with the job roles / grouping of job roles within a company. By identifying these skill/competency requirements and the learning activities associated with them it is possible to use this information to populate systems associated with:

- + Assessment
- + Selection & Reassignment
- + Succession Planning
- + Rewards



Such a model as that displayed above should be viewed as the ultimate end-state and requires a high level of maturity in the following areas:

- + Source data management and integrity

- ✚ Well defined job roles and associated skills / competency levels
- ✚ Adoption of enterprise-wide HCM related processes
- ✚ Well defined, documented and understood learning governance model

If the intention of the company is to eventually move to such a model as that described above, the implementation of a Learning Management System (LMS) as the first step will greatly simplify the entire process. If the company is primarily focussed on managing learning then the complexity of the LMS as an application can be greatly reduced thereby improving the initial return on investment (ROI).

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## 2. LMS – THE TANGIBLE BENEFITS

Regardless of the LMS solution chosen, the company must identify the potential benefits of such an implementation in a way that can be measured and tied back to the corporate objectives of that organization. All too often this step is not given the time and effort required which results in expectation confusion, lack of management buy-in, and end-user apathy.

**MANAGING RESOURCES MORE EFFECTIVELY** - As the name would suggest, there is no question that a Learning Management System is a powerful ally to help trainers manage resources more effectively and more easily. Typically training demands a wide range of company resources which might include:

- ✚ Classrooms either internally or externally
- ✚ Trainer or subject matter experts to deliver courses
- ✚ Books, CD's or other materials which form part of a course

- ✚ 'Live Time' in work environments
- ✚ Online content
- ✚ Projectors

Poor management of these resources can delay projects, incur additional costs and reduce the quality of the training being provided. Conversely good management will see better utilization of budgets and the opportunity to deliver more and more effective training where it is needed. The LMS enables users to allocate resources more effectively by keeping track and helping to distribute them where they are most needed.

**MANAGE AND MEET REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS** - Today, more and more industries are becoming affected by the demands of compliance. Examples of industries that are required to train, assess and report for compliance purposes include:

- ✚ Financial Sector
- ✚ Communications Industries
- ✚ Pharmaceuticals
- ✚ Manufacturing
- ✚ Oil and Gas
- ✚ Retail Sector
- ✚ Legal / Accounting

Today, a fully specified LMS provide tools which are specially geared towards meeting these regulatory pressures. They provide comprehensive reports and summary data in a format suitable for display to regulatory authorities which not only reduce the time needed for meeting regulatory requirements. They also ease the management of these processes by flagging training requirements and providing snapshots of achievements and shortcomings of the learning and scheduling new training as needed.

**MAKE EMPLOYEES & MANAGERS ACCOUNTABLE FOR TRAINING** - One of the often cited drawbacks of e-learning is that learners frequently do not complete or even start courses which are available to them. As a result, all the carefully estimated business benefits fall by the wayside.

Setting up an LMS will both mitigate this issue and make learners accountable for their own learning plans. In most companies, employees appreciate that the more skills they can demonstrate, the more opportunity they will have for promotion. Conversely, not taking up learning opportunities may suggest that they are disinterested in progressing their careers further. An LMS can be set up to enable employees and line managers to view the progress of individuals and groups through the courses that are available to them. There are real business benefits that accrue from doing this. It will enable training to be provided more quickly and learners to be more specific and honest about what training they need. A good LMS will also provide other tools that enhance this process. These include:

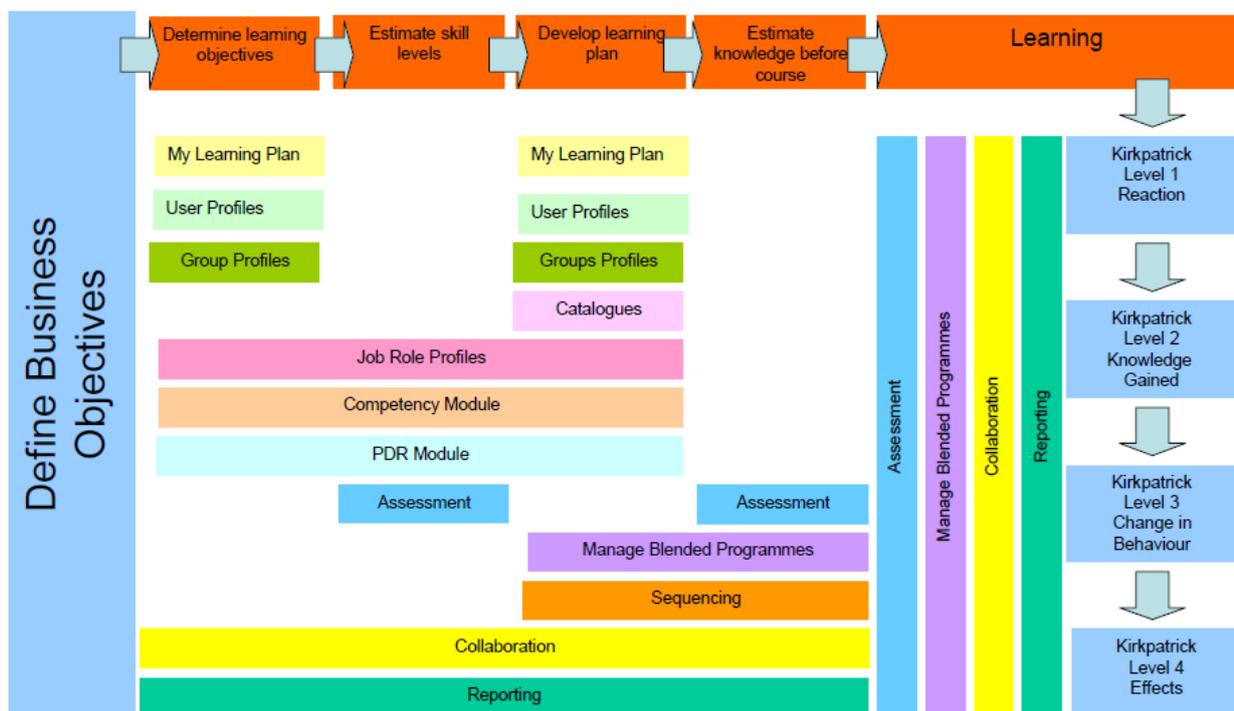
- ✚ Collaboration tools that enable learners to communicate directly about their experiences which can reveal shortcomings and misunderstandings within training programs. These are especially useful when (as is increasingly the case) employees are working from diverse locations and may not know others in a similar position
- ✚ Self service training which learners can personally subscribe to without intervention from trainers or line managers
- ✚ Learning plans which help learners understand the paths they must take to improve their performance
- ✚ 24x7 self service learning which enables learners to work on independently away from the workplace
- ✚ Deadlines to encourage and help learners understand the importance of completing a piece of training

- Accreditation to prove success and capabilities.

By shifting the process of learning from the hands of the trainer and into those of the learners themselves, organizations can encourage high performing employees to take on more responsibility and make a greater contribution to organization effectiveness.

**CONNECT KNOWLEDGE & COMPETENCIES TO BUSINESS OBJECTIVES** - One of the key benefits of the LMS is its ability to provide tools that can connect an organization’s business objectives to the knowledge and competencies of its employees.

In the diagram below, the processes have been mapped against the functionality provided within an LMS showing how, at each stage of the process an LMS will support the progress of the program.



*Using an LMS through the learning process*

The following section details the four typical steps which trainers usually deploy to map business objectives to learning plans and the ultimate training itself:

**Step 1 – Determine learning objectives**

What do we need to achieve with the learning – these may be linked to specific cost savings, regulatory requirements, the introduction of new technology etc. An LMS enables trainers to create profiles of individuals and groups, job roles, competencies and personal development which will help them understand how courses can be created to achieve the learning objectives.

**Step 2 – Estimate current skill levels and deficiencies**

Given our learning objectives, how far do our existing employee's skills match up to these? These may be determined via needs analysis surveys or by evaluating the historical records and data in an LMS. Once again, LMS profiles will provide an understanding of skill levels and deficiencies.

**Step 3 – Develop a learning plan**

Linked to the learning objectives, LMS's enable you to manage blended programs within the learning plan and effectively sequence them. They enable trainers to identify and catalogue suitable courses and lessons to create the learning plan. Learners will be able to visualize their learning plans and understand the requirements to achieve them

**Step 4 – Estimate knowledge before a course**

May be done by a pre course assessment, but once again, LMS historical records, reporting and collaboration tools will enable a trainer to gain a fuller picture of existing knowledge, which can be later compared to the improvements derived from the learning plans.

Throughout these processes, an LMS will underpin the process via reporting records and the use of collaboration tools to informally work with the learners to understand attitudes and expectations within the learning programs.

The following tables provide examples of specific areas where the implementation of an LMS can result in tangible benefits across the:

- ✚ Employee Training Organization
- ✚ Customer Training Functions
- ✚ Partner & Supply Chain

	Employee Training Organization	Customer Training Functions	Partner and Supply Chain Training
Lower cost managing training schedules and activities (e.g. fewer hours spent managing training.)	✓	✓	✓
Decreased travel costs with the use of web-based training and virtual classrooms.	✓	✓	✓
More rapid "time to proficiency" increase revenue (Employees learn the new product faster, start selling sooner, generates revenue sooner).	✓		✓
Increased revenue from well-trained partners and sales departments.	✓		✓
Decreased cycle times and process issues in supply chain.	✓		✓
Improved "time-to-market" training of sales departments and partners	✓		✓
Increased revenue opportunities by offering training to customers and partners	✓	✓	✓

	Employee Training Organization	Customer Training Functions	Partner and Supply Chain Training
Decreased support incidents and costs from well trained employees and customers	✓	✓	✓
Increased customer satisfaction rates and future revenue from customer retention	✓	✓	✓
Decreased costs due to more rapid employee “time to proficiency” (e.g. training for new product launch or revised/new processes)	✓		✓
Decreased time (and costs) from employees being pulled into training, thus allowing for more time in front of customers	✓		✓
Reduced financial risk and cost of negligent regulatory compliance training activities	✓		✓
Decreased employee turnover costs by enabling employees more development opportunities	✓		✓
Improve company performance (thus profits) by aligning training to corporate goals and by ensuring training activities strategically align with employee development needs.	✓	✓	✓

### 3. CONCLUSION

It is obviously important to provide training which is connected to the overall business objectives to an organization. In these competitive times, departments associated with employee development are increasingly being required to demonstrate that what they do provides this together with clearly identified business benefits.

Introducing an LMS will not only enhance those business benefits, it will also allow trainers to demonstrate and measure them. In some areas, notably ROI, the benefits of e-learning as a tool are clear. Using an LMS to manage that e-learning enhances that ROI and provides the bedrock for running and managing the training programs.

But the other benefits offered by LMS's – managing resources, meeting regulatory requirements, the increase in speed of learning, helping learners to take responsibility for their training and mapping learning to business objectives are as, if not more important in many cases.

