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INSIGHTS

Learning Management Systems:

Seven Things to Consider for an LMS Implementation

Thinking about implementing a Learning Management System, also known as an LMS? You're not alone. The number of companies implementing LMS is on the rise, especially in highly regulated industries such as Financial Services and Life Sciences. With the increase in cloud-based technology and companies hoping to tighten travel requirements for training, LMS implementations are becoming mainstream.

Consider the business drivers for implementing an LMS. Perhaps there is a greater need to manage the skills and competencies within the business, or a need to meet a new regulatory requirement. Moving to a cloud-based, e-learning model may also be driving the decision. Most likely, it's a combination of many factors. In this paper, you will learn more about the steps that need to be considered, the pitfalls to avoid and some best practices while deploying an LMS solution.

1. Scope Definition

One of the biggest struggles for an organization is setting the parameters for scope, including both organizational scope as well as system functionality. First consider the individual training needs of each end user or department. For example, the Regulatory department may have its own set of training requirements while HR and IT have another set of requirements. Conducting a stakeholder analysis and identifying the key business drivers prior to the start of the implementation will help determine the initial scope. This will provide you with the individual, department-level needs of the LMS.

Eventually it needs to be rolled out company-wide, but consider implementing in a phased approach. If you cast the net too wide, there will be too many processes to be mapped and too much data to convert all at once. Many LMS projects fail or are still trying to get started because rolling it out to the entire organization at once is too aggressive.

Compliance First

Need a place to start? Many organizations begin with addressing compliance training needs as part their rollout strategy. Compliance training refers to the process of educating employees on the laws, regulations and company policies that apply to their day-to-day job activities. Regulatory compliance training is important for an organization because they are likely to be audited by regulatory agencies if there are suitable grounds for doing so.

2. Training Content Management

Many organizations that are starting from scratch with no LMS have a difficult time with their training content, and often do not realize this until the implementation has begun. Very often it is only during the blueprinting process or when conversations regarding content are brought up do clients realize the complexities of content management. Some common problems faced by clients are:

- No centralized location or system where all training content is stored.
- Either too much or too little content available for training.
- Existing content very often does not adhere to SCORM standards. SCORM, which stands for Shareable Content Object Reference Model, is a standard for Web-based learning.
- Little or no clarity around content revision management, making it more difficult to track certifications.

Activities around content management must start well before the beginning of an LMS implementation. Prior to the start of the implementation, content must be organized in a central location, such as SharePoint, and must be easily accessible. It is always useful to decide if the training content is going to be migrated into the LMS system or if it's going be linked to a third party system where content already exists. This will help determine the efforts involved in migrating training content. In a regulated environment, content must be approved when created or revised. It is always helpful to evaluate what content management capaibilities an LMS system has in terms of tracking content revisions for certifications.

3. Training Data

The significance of data is often overlooked in an LMS implementation. An LMS implementation can often require voluminous amounts of data to be converted and cleansed. Here are a few best practices when it comes to training data:

- Decide upfront how much historical training data will require conversion. This will help plan the timeline, estimates and the effort required for the project.
- Try and minimize the data conversion history if possible. Ideally, one to three years of history will work. Any data conversion beyond three years of history can strain project resources and also impact project timelines.
- Begin data cleansing exercises well in advance of the beginning of the project. This will minimize any impact to the project timeline and also ensure a smooth migration.
- Validate your training course mapping to the appropriate content. Many times we find after Go-Live that a course has the wrong content mapped in e-learning.
- Build enough cushion in the project plan for data conversion.
- Always conduct your integration tests with a full set of data conversions that also include history. This will help identify any errors and anomalies in your system configuration during the conversion process.

4. Challenges Around Security

Security in an LMS implementation can be extremely complex and challenging. Defining ownership is key. There can be little or no clarity around who is responsible for training and content administration. In highly-regulated industries, security requirements are extremely complex and training courses can only be accessed by those departments rendering it. In large organizations, the role of training and content administrator is a full time job that involves creating and updated course content and managing course participation. When it's clear who owns these responsibilities, security issues can be addressed better. But, when the training process is owned by multiple departments, this can lead to challenges around security.

To alleviate some of the challenges outlined above:

- Departments must reevaluate the training and content administrator roles in an LMS implementation. We want to emphasize the words "*full time job*" above in an evaluation since many organizations think otherwise.
- Determine if there's a need to separate out the training and content administrator roles. This will vary based on the volume of training a department has to offer. It is advisable to separate the two roles if this is the case.
- Rigorous security testing, with a minimum of three cycles, must be conducted to avoid displaying sensitive employee information.

5. Cloud Vs On-Premise

If you already have an on-premise HR system installed, are you considering a cloud-based solution for LMS? There has been a growing trend for using the cloud in managing an organization's training and professional development. While cloud-based solutions are packed with options, organizations should consider the following:

Data Sensitivity and Security – In some regulated industries there is always a concern for employee data being deployed on the cloud. Organizations must thoroughly evaluate the security protocols and procedures of a cloud solution to ensure that there are no cracks or leaks in the system. One recommendation is to have reference calls with similar organizations in a regulated industry that have deployed a cloud solution. This will help determine the best LMS product to be deployed.

Integration with Talent Management and Employee Data - An LMS implementation must be considered in the context of integration with Talent Management processes such as Performance Management and Career and Succession Planning. Courses from LMS tie into the Performance Management process as far as managers recommending courses for an employee during a performance evaluation. Also during the Career and Succession Planning process the skills evaluation of the employee may also result in the employee being recommended for certain courses. During the software selection process an organization must also evaluate what standard interfaces are available to integrate the employee master data with the cloud solution.

Flexibility –Many cloud solutions offer a visibly attractive user interface and functionality. They tend not to be as flexible compared to on-premise solutions when it comes to customizations or enhancements. One of the parameters to evaluate is to what extent the cloud solution is flexible in meeting process requirements and to what degree customization can be performed.

6. Compliance Reporting

If compliance is the main business driver for your LMS implementation, then do not overlook the reporting functionality. For many organizations compliance reporting is critical for day-to-day operations. If this is the case for your organization, be mindful how this could affect the scope of your project during the implementation. Each department will most likely have their own compliance reporting requirements and all of these requirements will need to be addressed during the implementation. Key actions items for an implementation that involves compliance reporting are:

- Set your scope in terms of the number of reports that need to be implemented. An assessment must be performed even prior to the start of the implementation to determine this.
- Build enough cushions in your project plan to implement compliance reporting.
- Evaluate your LMS system in terms of what standard reports are available for compliance.
- Define a reporting strategy for how the reports are going to be deployed and who will have access to these reports.

7. Training and Change Management

Training and change management is a critical step in an LMS implementation, especially when rolling out an e-learning component. E-learning will require employees to launch training from a self-service portal, driving a tremendous need for enterprise-wide training and acceptance. Several key tips for handling this process include:

- Conduct a training needs assessment to identify areas where you'll need the most training.
- Define a training plan that outlines the strategy for training and details the training delivery method, including the target audience .
- Consider conducting training through webinars.
- Define a communications plan to outline the target audience and timing for communications.
- Conduct system demonstrations via focus groups to target audiences across the organization. This can help drive acceptability and adaptability of new system.
- Launch a pilot of the implementation to a small audience prior to rolling it out to the entire company and solicit feedback about the system. Use a survey tool to gather feedback from the pilot group.

Ready to Implement your LMS?

With these seven tips, you now have a good understanding of the key issues for getting your LMS implementation off the ground. Remember, LMS implementations can be particularly long and complex. It is important not to underestimate the value of having a well-defined scope, a great plan for transitioning historic training data and a solid grasp on your organization's need for change management following the launch. Security is also critical, especially for highly regulated industries. Use this paper to help avoid major pitfalls and integrate the best practices to make sure your LMS implementation is a success.

About the Author

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