



FOSWAY
GROUP

Delivering Next Gen Learning Engagement

Why learning management systems need to evolve into learning engagement systems

As much as they have been pivotal in delivering learning transformation, learning management systems have also become a source of frustration and dissatisfaction for corporate learning. If LMS's are to prosper in the future, they need to take on a new role, one that they have often failed to do in the past; the role of stimulating and managing learning engagement.

June 2017



Executive Summary

The death of the corporate learning management system has been predicted for a number of years now. But those forecasting its demise are missing the point. Fosway's research shows, there is still a very real need for the functions that the LMS provides. The point is not that LMS is dead, but that it needs to evolve.

Employee engagement has become an increasingly important focus for organisations. In fact, our current research tells us it is the leading measure of success for HR strategy today.¹ Within L&D, the resulting impact of this is the need to become much more learner-centric and to proactively engage learners. No longer should training be something that is 'done' to your people! Rather, it should be an activity that learners actually want to get involved with.

This Core Insights paper explores the capacity of the next generation of learning systems to deliver true engagement, and aims to help organisations assess how well their current solutions are geared up to support the all-important learner-centric approach going forwards.

¹ HR Realities Research 2016-17

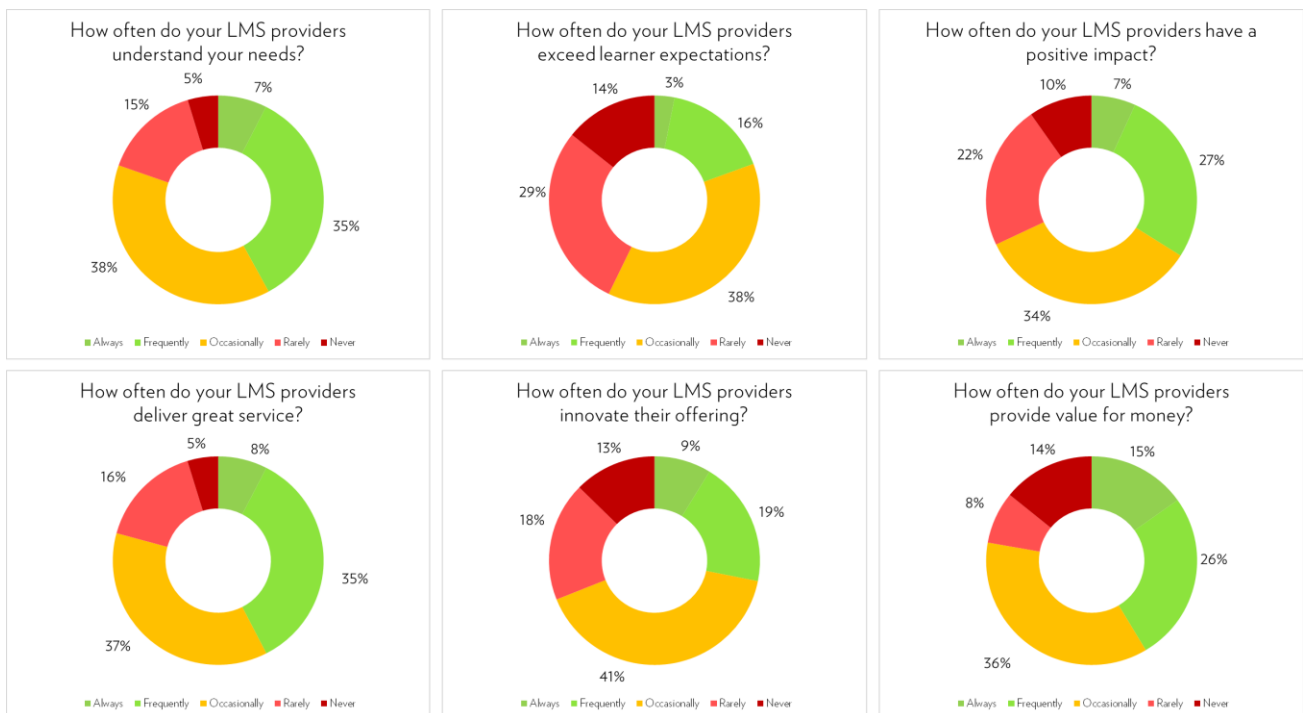


The evolution of the LMS

The evidence for the poor performance of learning management systems is strong, both anecdotally and in Fosway's ongoing research. In the [2017 Digital Learning Realities research](#), which had over 1,100 respondents, the statistics behind customer satisfaction with LMS solutions is quite damning. Around a third (32%) report that their LMS rarely or never has a positive impact in their organisation.

In fact, compared to authoring, learning services, bespoke content, consulting and outsourcing, the LMS is at the bottom of the pile when it comes to:

- Understanding customer needs
- Making a positive impact
- Providing value for money
- Exceeding learner expectations



Copyright Fosway Group Limited. All rights reserved.

Data from Fosway's 2017 Digital Learning Realities research with 1,168 respondents.



But, whilst some commentators like to claim LMS's have failed – that's far from the case. From the same research, 0% of organisations talk about stopping using their LMS, and 98% expect their LMS usage to increase or stay the same next year. Hardly what you'd expect from a system allegedly in terminal decline. Like it or not, LMS's continue to have a dominant presence in digital learning architectures and play an essential role in corporate training.

0% expect to
STOP
LMS! USING
their **LMS**

But what LMS's have all too often failed to do, is focus on the learner and truly support learners in engaging with the learning process. This means they are not fulfilling their full potential. Essentially they are letting learners down in very serious ways! The reason why is rooted in the name - learning *management* systems. We rarely see suppliers talking about 'learning engagement systems' or 'learning experience systems'.

The classic learning management systems have rich layers of functionality to make sure that the right training is available to the right people at the right time. But, as learning engagement systems, they frequently have little or no features. Despite a clear trend to improve the user interface, true learner engagement is something that has been systemically neglected by traditional LMS providers.

This is important because only by focusing on learning engagement, can the LMS market shake off its very tarnished image. In many ways, what's needed is a root and branch re-appraisal of LMS's, to look at the experience they offer through the eyes of the learner. And a new wave of systems is emerging that focus more on these areas of engagement and experience. Fosway differentiates these as Next Generation Learning Environments (NGLEs) in the [2017 Fosway 9-Grid™ for Learning Systems](#).

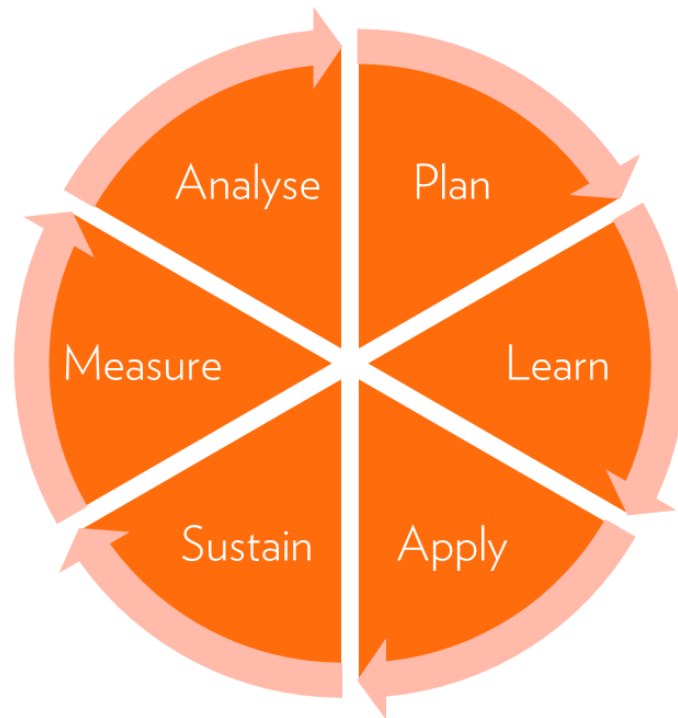
Despite a clear trend to improve the user interface, true learner engagement is something that has been systemically neglected by LMS providers



Digital learning that supports learning engagement

To truly understand learning engagement, we should start thinking about the LMS through the lens of the learning cycle. By thinking about things in this way, we can begin to appreciate the opportunities that exist to engage learners. Then, we can start to evaluate how good solutions support each stage of the learning experience, wherever we start in the cycle.

Now, you could create your own definitions for the stages of a learning cycle, but it will be much quicker using the one Fosway analysts have already prepared for you – the PLASMA model.



PLASMA Learning Cycle

Copyright Fosway Group Limited. All rights reserved.



The PLASMA Learning Cycle is very simple and the learning process can start at any of the segments.

For clarity, the questions learners might ask themselves at each stage of the learning cycle is illustrated in the following table:

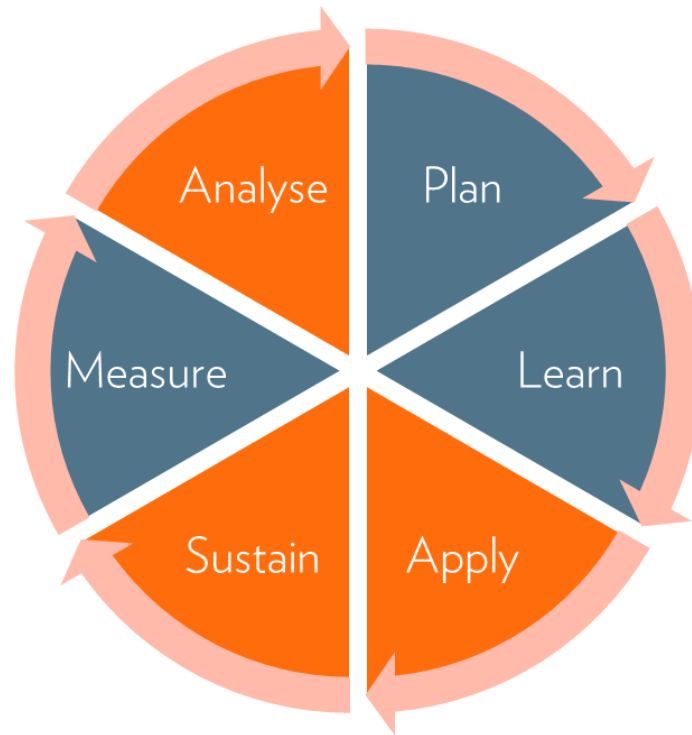
P lan	What do I need to know, understand, be able to do?
L earn	How can I learn that knowledge, develop that skill, build that proficiency?
A pply	How am I using my learning?
S ustain	What am I doing to consistently achieve the right levels of skill and performance?
M easure	How well I doing? Am I on / off target for what I need to be able to do?
A nalyse	Where / What should I be going / doing next to improve?

As simple as the model is, it is very flexible. It can apply to situations that last only a matter of minutes or cover a process that lasts months. In the PLASMA model learners can start at any stage, and the challenge is to keep the learning cycle moving for as long as it is necessary. Until they reach their desired level of confidence and competence.



How should the LMS engage learners?

The PLASMA model is a useful tool to assess the stages of the learning cycle where the LMS could better engage learners. In Fosway's experience, most LMS platforms typically only support two or three stages of the entire learning cycle; namely **Plan**, **Learn** and **Measure**.



A typical LMS platform's ability to support the full learning cycle

Copyright Fosway Group Limited. All rights reserved.

But, even in those rare instances where LMS's might support more than those three segments, they rarely package the experience with much elegance or intelligence. There is an opportunity to do so much more! But a combination of the other PLASMA Learning Cycle elements need to be used together with machine intelligence and behavioural science (rather than just cognitive science) to build more engaging learning based on actions, nudges, jeopardy and social pressure/support and personal motivation.



Assessing your own LMS

We suggest organisations reflect on their own systems using the PLASMA model.

There is a [useful checklist](#) freely available on the Fosway website to help with this assessment.

When it comes to delivering learning engagement, the likelihood is that most LMS's have a limited number of tools such as assessments or notification tools which can help with learning engagement. Whilst these tools are useful, they tend to be used for basic communication or broadcast, rather than to evolve an on-going learning relationship or dialogue. Critically, these tools are also hard to package to form a compelling learner experience. The result is that it is challenging for organisations to create truly blended learning programmes, learning campaigns, or a continuous learning journey.

Sadly, too few LMS's are able to provide the simple engagement tools to make a learning journey 'sticky' enough to really help learners progress through their full learning cycle. What is needed is an approach that treats learners like consumers, and helps create a relationship with their needs, desires and habits so that learning becomes compulsive. For example, nudging learners like a sports tracking app might. There is an opportunity to create machine-automated 'learning coaches', which use artificial intelligence and behavioural frameworks to drive our engagement and stimulate us to take our learning to the next level. Strangely, it's not something that there aren't good reference models for, Digital marketing has been taking this revolution in managing consumer experience forward at an amazing pace in recent years. So, there are some useful reference for what is possible.

But to do it effectively, we do need to think about the learning cycle.

What is needed is an approach that treats learners like consumers, and helps create a relationship with their needs, desires and habits so that learning becomes compulsive.



Going beyond 70:20:10

As most LMS's tend to be used as blunt instruments, this make it hard to create and manage an engaging learning campaign. Organisations often lack the right platform to enable L&D to treat learners as consumers.

What L&D should be doing is thinking like a consumer brand. Use insights into learners as individuals to trigger engagement, and to build the habits that make learning a 'go to' destination like so many personal mobile apps have become. What next generation learning systems need to do is enable L&D to support learning across the whole learning process.

That means managing a relationship with learners and learning actions across the whole learning cycle, not just manage learning events and digital learning resources.

It also means having a marketing engine and machine intelligence to prompt, promote and engage learners at whatever stage they are in the learning cycle and wherever they join the learning cycle.

It's not enough to say L&D supports informal learning and claim the LMS is dead. It's not enough to talk simply about moving from courses to resources and adopt a 70:20:10 approach, trading one content type against another.

Organisations need to engage learners in their whole learning journey with more than just content. They need to support learners across the entire learning process. What we need are solutions that can help us create and sustain learning experiences and engagement across the learning cycle. We need the support of learning engagement systems that go beyond the traditional learning management system.



In summary

When assessing an LMS – whether an existing solution in your organisation or a new one being evaluated as part of a procurement process - the following questions are the most critical, because they get to the nub of where many learning management solutions are most significantly selling buyers short.

- How easy is it to package these into a digital learning experience that can start at any stage of the learning cycle?
- How developed is the machine intelligence and behavioural automation that enables you to encourage learner to build great learning habits?

Interestingly, the marketing world has been looking at this from a consumer angle for quite a while. Likewise, digital learning systems should be playing a much richer role for our learners. But, we can only begin to imagine what this means by thinking about how systems support every stage of the learning cycle and bring engagement to each stage of the learning cycle.

For too long, digital solutions have been focussing on transmitting content. And that has been the fatal flaw in most e-learning in the past. Yes, there is a change in systems to supporting social learning – but so few solutions manage to create meaningful journeys between learning independently, reflecting, acting and socialising learning. And that lack of continuity or transition is a huge problem.

Learning solutions will only truly succeed in the future, where they support the learning cycle, rather than glib titles and marketing hype – be that social learning, mobile learning, rapid e-learning, learning experience, informal learning, resources not courses, 70:20:10... because each of these can become barriers to the creation of great learning experiences.

It's time to reset expectations about what we want from learning solutions. And using something as simple as the PLASMA Learning Cycle is as good a place to start as any in understanding what a next gen learning experience can look like. Try the [checklist](#) on our website and see how your current solutions measure up.



Recommended Fosway reading

For further Fosway analysis relating to this topic, please see the following papers and resources.

- [PLASMA Learning Cycle Checklist](#)
- [Digital Learning Realities Research 2017](#)
- [Fosway 9-Grid™ for Learning Systems](#)
- [Showing The Impact of Learning Painlessly \(Almost!\)](#)
- [Talent Management – What's L&D's Role and Why L&D Need to Fight their Corner](#)



Accelerate and De-risk

To talk to us about our research on learning and talent systems, or to discuss what it might specifically mean for your organisation please contact us directly.

We will use our independent expertise to provide you with the guidance you need to accelerate and de-risk your decisions. We have a wealth of experience, tools, research and profiles at our disposal. We don't have any "products" to sell and we have no "vested interest" to bias your outcomes. We concentrate on pragmatic, independent advice.

Accuracy of Information and Warranties

The analysis and recommendations made in this document are based on the information currently available to Fosway and from sources believed to be reliable.

Fosway disclaims all warranties as to the accuracy, completeness or adequacy of such information. Fosway will have no liability for errors, omissions or inadequacies in the information contained herein or for interpretations hereof.

Opinions expressed herein are subject to change without notice. All content is copyright Fosway limited unless otherwise identified. All rights reserved.



About Fosway Group

At Fosway Group, we understand that developing and engaging people is how complex global organisations deliver performance and achieve success. Just as every employee's talent journey is unique, so is every organisation's people strategy.

Fosway Group's analyst and advisory services deliver the insights your organisation needs to achieve results and eliminate risk. We know that every aspect of next generation HR and talent are more intertwined than ever. When you work with us, you accelerate your insight and make better decisions.

We're Europe's #1 independent HR analyst, and just like the Roman road we draw our name from, you'll find that we're unusually direct. We don't have a vested interest in your technology or consulting choices. You can depend on us to tell you what you need to know to succeed.

Example clients include: Alstom, Aviva, Boots UK, BP, BT, Centrica, Deutsche Bank, Faurecia, HSBC, International SOS, Lloyds Banking Group, Novartis, PwC, Rolls-Royce, Royal Bank of Scotland, Sanofi, Shell, Swiss Re, Telefonica, Thomson Reuters, Toyota Europe, and Vodafone.

Contact Us

Fosway Group Limited

Purlieus Farmhouse, Ewen, Cirencester, Glos. GL7 6BY, UK

Tel: +44 (0)20 7917 1870

Email: info@fosway.com

Web: www.fosway.com