LMS FAIL?

How to recognize a failing LMS and remedy it

WHAT'S INSIDE

WHEN YOUR LMS LETS YOU DOWN

Every organization has a story about the system that was supposed to make life easier but somehow made it harder. For many of us, the LMS is that system. What should be the backbone of learning often ends up acting like the weakest link.

And it's not just you. Only 9% of organizations say they're completely satisfied with their LMS. And according to Brandon Hall Group, More than a third are actively looking to replace their LMS, and almost half plan to do so within two years. If misery loves company, the LMS market is a pretty crowded room.

The cost of 'making do' with a system that no longer fits isn't only financial. Learners disengage. Compliance gets shaky. Reporting becomes a guessing game. And your learning team? They're spending more time fixing problems than delivering value.

So why do so many leaders hesitate to move on? It's rarely because they think the system is great. It's because change feels messy. The sunk costs, the thought of migrating data, the worry that the next platform will be just as disappointing. It's easier to limp along than to risk a big switch. Until it isn't.

STAY OR GO?

This white paper is here to make that decision easier. You won't find a lecture on what an LMS is - you already know that. Instead, we'll walk through:

> **Signs your LMS is working against you.**

> **Why some organizations take the leap while others stall.**

> **Create a practical roadmap for discovery, vendor selection, migration and implementation.**

TOP SIGNS OF AN LMS FAIL

Every platform has quirks. But if you spend more time working around your LMS than working with it, that is not a quirk, it is a warning sign. Here are some of the most common red flags we see when an LMS has outlived its usefulness.

1

Admin, admin, admin

A platform that is complicated for administrators does not just frustrate your L&D team; it slows down the entire business. If your people need extra training to manage the LMS itself, you are adding friction where you need speed.

2

Poor integrations

Your LMS may claim it works with your HR system… if your HR system is a filing cabinet. Modern organizations need clean connections across HR, talent, and business systems. Anything less is a drag on efficiency.

3

Every new hire says, "Wow this feels retro"

When learners are more likely to Google the answer than log in, the LMS has lost credibility. Poor design, irrelevant content, or clunky access all chip away at trust until people stop bothering altogether.

4

Low learner engagement

Engagement matters here: 90% of L&D professionals say it is the single most important feature in an LMS, yet 72% still cite engagement as the top barrier in digital training programs.

5

Learners adapt to the system, not the other way around

When navigation feels like a maze and content access depends on patience. People simply give up further compounding learner engagement.

6

Zero Performance and Competency management

Learners want personalized pathways for their career not a generic set of courses. The eye watering costs of doing this via a HR system often makes this avenue prohibitive.

A good LMS should have Performance and Competency Management built in.

7

Compliance is an afterthought

Compliance training is not optional, and yet many LMSs treat it like an afterthought. When completion rates are too low to satisfy regulators, you are dealing with more than a technology issue, you are exposing your organization to risk.

8

Outdated technology

Today's learners expect video, mobile access, and social features as standard. A platform that cannot deliver modern learning formats is not just behind the times; it is holding your strategy back.

If you spend more time patching, updating, and fixing than creating new learning, the system is holding you hostage.

TWO WARNING SIGNS OF A SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIP FAILING

Let's put the technological reasons behind for one moment there are two further negative reasons while organizations change suppliers: Supplier Sloth and Eyewatering costs. You may know these two scenarios:

1. Supplier Sloth

There are several warning signs

> When everything feels like a major issue taking 12 months to develop.

> You are told that you must wait for a roll-out of new software, whenever that may be.

> They lack proactivity and do not come up with fresh ideas to keep you in front.

> Everything is a chore.

> You may have been through a succession of account managers or work with one who simply doesn't care.

> Their support team show no energy or desire to act at pace.

> You stop attending meetings with them as you will get nothing new.

2. Eyewatering Costs

Yup, the price of some LMS have gone through the roof. And what do you get with it? An off the shelf solution that fits the supplier and not you. And don't even think about any modifications as you may have to sell a division of your organization to pay for it.

Believe it or not, you can have your cake and you can eat it too. Solutions are available that will make your CFO smile and will give you the flexibility you need

Our two cents

When evaluation feels like joint problem-solving, you are probably in good hands.

If it feels like smoke and mirrors, you already know the answer.

TOO MANY LMS

One of the most common scenarios organizations face is ending up with too many LMS.

When LMS Multiply

It usually happens when companies grow quickly, merge, or acquire other businesses. Imagine this: your organization buys five other companies, and each one brings its own LMS into the mix.

Some of these systems are well-known, externally hosted platforms, while others are home-built solutions that only a handful of people know how to maintain. Suddenly, instead of one streamlined way to manage learning, you're juggling multiple logins, data silos, and very different user experiences.

The Hidden Costs of Complexity

The impact can be huge. Learners often get frustrated when they have to figure out where to go for their training or when the systems don't talk to each other. Admins are buried in duplicate work—managing user accounts in several places, pulling inconsistent reports, and trying to troubleshoot issues across platforms that were never designed to work side by side.

Let's not forget the costs: licensing fees, hosting fees, maintenance costs, and the hidden expense of lost productivity all add up fast.

Why Consolidation Matters

At this point, consolidation becomes not just a nice-to-have but a necessity. Bringing everything into a single LMS can simplify administration, reduce costs, and give learners one consistent, user-friendly experience.

The challenge is finding a system flexible enough to meet the needs of different business units, while still providing the scalability and security your entire organization requires.

Here's the thing

Too many LMS confuses learners, cause admin nightmares, and become far to messy to manage.

By not acting now you are simply prolonging the pain.

DISCOVERY: LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

Before you jump into a feature-by-feature comparison, start with what your learning platform is really for and who wants what. Many organizations rush into a head-to-head on features. That is the wrong way to choose a system that will support your needs over time.

Ask early questions like: will people actually use the functionality, can your IT infrastructure support it, and will it integrate with other systems. Involve learners and stakeholders throughout the process so the choice works for the organization as a whole. The key groups to consider can be seen below.

1
End users
If learners don't like or find value in your platform, they won't use it. Involve them early to learn what works and what doesn't. This can be the difference between success and failure.

2
IT/IS department
Your IT team cares about robustness, security, interoperability, and technical specs. Don't drop a system on them that won't fit your infrastructure. Their input is invaluable before big, costly decisions.

3
Learning designers
This applies to your in-house learning designers and outside vendors. They often have a wealth of experience with various platforms, so choose a system that lets them innovate and work with the content they create,not against it.

4
Managers
Managers will need to track progress, monitor completion rates and control access, so make sure you understand exactly what they need from your new system to help support their everyday workflow.

5
Administrators
Think about the people who will be managing the learning platform on a day-to-day basis. Their satisfaction and ability to drive the system efficiently is key to the success of the platform.

6
Sales team
The sales team may want specific features such as leaderboards and may want access for extended enterprise audiences outside your immediate organization.

7
Leadership team
Leaders may request a more resource-based approach and the ability to support informal, peer-to-peer learning alongside formal activities.

8
Compliance team
They are likely to want role-based assignment of content, granular reporting and robust certification of completion of mandatory training.

9
Marketing
Marketing will want to know how they can customize the look and feel of the learning platform. They can help with any internal marketing campaigns and create a successful deployment.

Take it from us
A long list of features looks great in a sales demo, but in practice it usually tells you as much as a restaurant menu with 200 items. You do not need everything, and half of it will give you indigestion. Instead of chasing features, focus on the real situations your system needs to handle.

BUILDING THE BUSINESS CASE

Spotting the cracks in your current LMS is one thing. Convincing leadership to invest in a new one is another. A strong business case turns everyday frustrations into measurable impact, giving decision-makers a clear reason to act.

1

Presenting facts and figures

Start with what is easiest to prove: cost savings and productivity gains. An LMS that reduces admin work and automates reminders saves time and money.

Add to that the ability to streamline training, introduce personalized learning plans, and give staff easier access wherever they are, and you can show how efficiency translates into better results.

2

Identify relevant KPIs

Metrics make your case harder to ignore. Consider including:

- **Onboarding efficiency:** How much time and cost are spent bringing new hires up to speed, and how could that be reduced?
- **External training costs:** What are you paying for outsourced training today, and what could be delivered in-house?
- **Training time:** How many hours are tied up in mandatory training, and what could be saved with better pathways or diagnostics?
- **Team productivity:** How much time does your learning team spend on repetitive tasks that could be automated or simplified?

These KPIs not only strengthen your argument but also give you a baseline to measure against once a new system is live.

3

Choosing the right system

The system you select will determine how much of that potential return is realized.

The right fit will depend on your organization's priorities, whether that is usability, flexibility, or smooth integration with existing tools.

If you are evaluating a specific platform, connect its strengths directly to your needs. If you are making a case for replacement more generally, be clear about the non-negotiables a new LMS must deliver.

The next steps

Pull together a business case for a new LMS by following these steps:

1. Define your business objectives
2. Conduct a needs assessment
3. Gather the data that proves the gaps
4. Calculate the return on investment
5. Address objections before they come up
6. Present the case clearly and confidently

Think of it as building your argument brick by brick. Skip one, and the whole wall looks shaky. And no one wants to defend a shaky wall in front of the CFO.

VENDOR SELECTION & EVALUATION

Choosing a new LMS is undeniably an intimidating prospect for many organizations. It is easy to see why so many L&D teams get fatigued by the process and simply opt for a system that is "good enough." But "good enough" generally means a whole lot of compromise.

The system is only half the story

Selecting the right LMS platform is a big decision, but the technology itself is only part of the picture. The success of your learning strategy depends just as much on the partner you choose to help you implement, configure, and support that system.

A great LMS paired with the wrong partner can create just as many challenges as sticking with an outdated solution.

Why the right partner matters

Every vendor brings a different set of strengths to the table. Some specialize in specific industries, others excel at customization, and some focus on rapid deployment or ongoing support. Their collaboration style also plays a major role: are they hands-on and consultative, or more transactional and self-service?

Don't be afraid to shop around

The best approach is to explore multiple options and compare not just features but also the people behind the platforms. Meet with different vendors, ask how they typically work with clients, and pay attention to whether they listen to your needs or push a one-size-fits-all approach.

You'll quickly notice differences in expertise, responsiveness, and cultural fit. Finding a partner who understands your organization's goals can make the difference between a smooth rollout and a painful, drawn-out project

Questions to ask

To help you navigate this process, our experts have created a list of essential questions to ask your LMS vendor before signing a contract. These cover everything from visual design and user experience to hosting, data security, implementation support, and long-term scalability.

By asking the right questions up front, you'll gain clarity on whether a vendor can truly deliver what your organization needs—and avoid costly surprises down the line.

Trust

Your vendor will be one of the most important business relationships you have. So, spend time with them and get to know their people. That way you can have open conversations about what works and fix things easily if things do not go to plan.

IMPLEMENTATION

When you're procuring a new LMS, you need to know how the implementation process will work. Each learning technology partner will have a different approach, so asking these questions will help you understand if they're the right fit.

Planning & Requirements

How will you gather and capture our requirements?

What do you need from us for a successful project?

Security & Compliance

What are your data protection and IT security policies?

Resourcing & Delivery

Do you have the resources to undertake this work?

Can you guarantee that you can meet our milestones?

Communication & Transparency

How will we keep up to date with your progress?

Data & Migration

How will we migrate any existing data?

Quality Assurance & Issue Tracking

What are our QA processes?

How will we log and track issues we find?

Support & Documentation

What help and technical documentation will you provide?

Success & Outcomes

What are our mutually agreed measures for success?

DESIGN

The look and feel of your LMS is a vital way to cement your brand and to show your learners what they can expect from your system. Whether it's an informal, exploratory experience or a structured, formal program, these questions will help you get the visual design right.

Project Scope

What does the scope for this project look like?

Requirements Gathering

How are our design requirements captured?

Design Assets

Do we supply design assets, or will you create?

Design Iterations

How many rounds of design edits are included?

Accessibility

What accessibility standards will we work to?

Compatibility

Which browsers/devices will be compatible?

Testing

What are your testing processes?

User Experience

Will there be a UX review?

Maintainability

Will the theme be easy to maintain after upgrades?

HOSTING

Hosting is an often-overlooked part of the LMS procurement and implementation process, but it's important to know where and how the LMS will be hosted. Asking these questions will help you find the right solution for your organization.

Hosting

Where will the site be hosted?

Specifications

What are the server specifications?

Data Recovery

Will there be follow-up training or activities?

What steps are in place as part of your disaster recovery process?

Your IT Team

You may notice this section contains far fewer details than previous. The reason is that your IT department will have their own highly specific requirements. These differ massively between organizations and to list them all here would take a white paper on its own.

Get them involved early to lay out what they desire. This will save a lot of problems later.

TRAINING

Even the most experienced LMS administrators and managers can benefit from training when you're launching a new LMS. Get everyone up and running as quickly as possible by ensuring you know what training opportunities are available.

Format & Timing

How will training sessions take place?

When will training be held in the implementation process?

Will we need to complete any pre-training reading or activities?

Which members of our team will receive training?

Training Environment & Resources

Will you provide dummy data for us to test the system?

What sort of training environment will be provided?

What documentation will be available?

What equipment will we need?

Follow-up & Ongoing Learning

Will there be follow-up training or activities?

Will you be available for ad hoc questions if we have further questions?

Support & Availability

Will support be available in business hours only or 24/7?

How can we track support requests?

SUPPORT

Securing the right level of support is essential with any new LMS. Whether it's technical issues, customization requests or bugs, these questions will help you figure out what level of support you need to keep your LMS running smoothly.

Costs & Payments

Will there be an annual cost or will we pay on a case-by-case basis?

Limits

Is there a limit on the number of support requests we can make?

Scope

What is the scope of our support package?

Support Channels

Will we receive support over the phone, via email or via online chat?

Flexibility

Can we change our support package partway through the contract?

Service Levels

What level of service will you guarantee?

Availability

Will support be available in business hours only or 24/7?

Tracking

How can we track support requests?

VENDOR EVALUATION: MAKING A CONFIDENT CHOICE

You have built the case for change. Now comes the task of choosing a partner who can deliver it. This stage is about testing how well a platform and its vendor align with your organization's needs.

Stability and roadmap

Start by checking how long the vendor has been active in the market and how often they release updates. A clear roadmap, upgrade policy, and customer references give you a sense of how stable and adaptable they are.

Many LMS providers focus on improved user experience, collaborative tools like workspaces, and stronger mobile access. Look for this kind of steady progress to be sure the system will evolve alongside your organization.

Implementation support that shows up

Success does not come from technology alone. Ask for the implementation plan with milestones, testing processes, and how issues will be managed. Documentation, training, and follow-up support should be part of the package. Integrations also matter. Check how well the LMS connects with your existing ecosystem.

Real-world user experience

Do not accept a guided demo at face value. Put the system to the test with scenarios that reflect how your people work. Have managers view team dashboards and learners navigate a course catalog.

Score and shortlist

Turn your discovery findings into clear, weighted criteria and use them to score vendors consistently. Include factors such as compliance management, reporting capability, personalized learning plans, mobile usability, collaborative features, and integration with HR systems. Bring IT, L&D, and compliance into the evaluation to capture the full picture.

Once you have a shortlist, run a proof of concept with your own data and use cases to see how well the system really performs.

Trust

Yes we know we mentioned this on page 9 but cannot emphasise how important this is.

Your vendor will be one of the most important business relationships you have. So, spend time with them and get to know their people. That way you can have open conversations about what works and fix things easily if things do not go to plan.

PLANNING THE MIGRATION

Migration succeeds when it is planned in detail before a single record is moved. The roadmap is clear: know your content, clean your data, map your integrations, build a phased timeline, and bring your people with you.

1 Content audit

Begin with your learning content. Review what you have, and separate it into three groups: keep, refresh, or retire. High-performing courses and resources stay as they are. Materials that are still relevant but outdated get updated. Content that nobody uses can be retired. This avoids clutter and ensures your new LMS launches with only the most valuable resources in place.

2 Data migration

Learning records, transcripts, certifications, and completions carry weight, so moving them safely matters. Define what needs to come across and map out the data fields between your current system and the new one. This is also the moment to clean up duplicates, fix errors, and confirm compliance requirements for data retention.

3 Integration planning

Your LMS will not live in isolation. Identify which systems it must connect to and in what order of priority. HRIS & CRM's for user data is usually the first link. Beyond that, consider whether your learning platform needs to connect with collaboration tools, performance systems, or payment gateways. Map these connections early so they are tested before launch.

4 Timeline and milestones

A migration should not be one big switch. Break it into stages. Pilot with a small group first, then expand to larger audiences. Set clear milestones for content migration, integrations, data transfer, user acceptance testing, and signoffs. Build in buffer time. Delays are almost guaranteed, but it is better to plan for them than be surprised.

5 Change management and communication

Even the best migration plan can stumble if people do not understand what is happening. Communicate early and often about why the switch is happening and what learners and managers can expect. Identify champions in each department who can spread the word, encourage colleagues, and give feedback during testing.
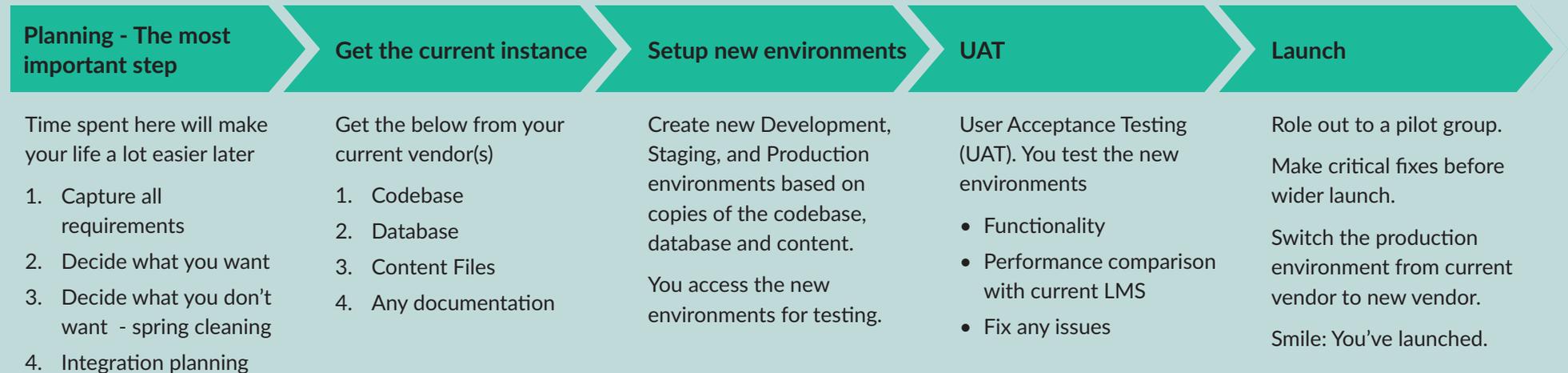
Spring Cleaning

You will never have a better opportunity to get rid of all the unwanted data, integrations, and duplicates. Use it.

MIGRATION ROADMAP

While every organization's journey is different, it helps to see what a realistic migration process looks like in practice. Here is an example plan taken from our experience of guiding teams through this process:

This kind of phased roadmap keeps the process manageable. It allows you to tackle a complex project step by step, with space to adapt if something unexpected comes up.

Planning - The most important step	Get the current instance	Setup new environments	UAT	Launch
Time spent here will make your life a lot easier later 1. Capture all requirements 2. Decide what you want 3. Decide what you don't want - spring cleaning 4. Integration planning	Get the below from your current vendor(s) 1. Codebase 2. Database 3. Content Files 4. Any documentation	Create new Development, Staging, and Production environments based on copies of the codebase, database and content. You access the new environments for testing.	User Acceptance Testing (UAT). You test the new environments • Functionality • Performance comparison with current LMS • Fix any issues	Role out to a pilot group. Make critical fixes before wider launch. Switch the production environment from current vendor to new vendor. Smile: You've launched.

READY TO GET STARTED?

Learning SYNDICATE

Every day we help organizations get the most from the world's most flexible LMS, Totara. It is not an off-the-shelf product you have to bend yourself around. We shape it to fit you.

We start by listening to what you need. Then we tailor the system to suit your organization and integrate it with your HR, CRM, and BI tools. The result is an LMS that does exactly what you want, without unnecessary restrictions.

And yes, we will make your CFO happy too. Our costs are significantly lower than most of the market. You get a tailored platform that works for your people and a budget that works for your business.

The Learning Syndicate

Highly engaging solutions that drive powerful learner experiences. Great designs, easy to use journeys, and the ability to offer enterprise-wide integrations. We do the hard work behind the scenes to make your life easier.

Learning SYNDICATE

Totara

A customizable suite that enhances compliance, training, and staff retention. Trusted by 20 million users across 1,500+ customers in 50+ countries. Providing scalable solutions learning, compliance, and performance management across industries.

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