Learning Experience Platforms

In This Landscape Market Report Excerpt

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Learning Experience Platforms: Solution Provider Capabilities

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Overview

Learning experience platforms (LXPs) have created a welcome disruption in the learning technology solution market since their emergence in the mid-2010s. They have earned a share of this market for good reason: they help organizations solve several existing problems with learning management systems (LMSs), including integration woes, underutilized content, inefficient search mechanisms, and a lack of actionable metrics.

As the demand for LXPs has grown, we’ve seen several established LMS solution providers make significant investments to build into their product offerings the consumer-grade experiences typical of LXPs. Concurrently, many LXP solution providers have been improving their offerings by including LMS functionalities, such as training administration management, content authoring, and skill assessment. This article reviews the solution capabilities that are available in the evolving learning platform market.

In This Article

- Current offerings in the marketplace that deliver improved learning experiences
- The five key capabilities of learning experience platforms
- Insights for practitioners to consider during learning experience platform solution selection
The Rise of Learning Experience Platforms

A great number of high-performing HR organizations are replacing top-down programs and processes with offerings that focus on crafting compelling worker experiences, including learning and development.1 Technology supports that goal by mirroring what workers love and expect from consumer brands and adding those to the HR and learning functions of the organization.2 Enter the learning experience platform (LXP), a growing segment in the learning solution provider market.3

LXPs are single-point-of-access, consumer-grade systems composed of integrated technologies for enabling learning. They can do many tasks, such as curating and aggregating content, creating learning and career pathways, enabling networking, enhancing skill development, and tracking learning activities delivered via multiple channels and content partners. By delivering on a central platform, LXPs enable businesses to provide an engaging and learning-rich experience and may lessen their reliance on an LMS or talent suite as the learning hub.

An LXP’s effectiveness depends on the quality of the user experience (UX), followed by the quality of content—how material is presented, organized, accessed, and tracked. Thus, when evaluating an LXP, organizations should select one that provides a compelling UX comparable with streaming services and video games designed for consumers.

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2 A “learning brand” defines why and how learning occurs in an organization; the “learning experience” is the physical manifestation of the brand.
3 Solutions in this market segment take many forms (e.g., LMS, LXP, CMS) and go by many names, including: intelligent learning platforms, learning engagement platforms, enterprise learning portal, aggregation platforms, curation platforms, content management platforms, microlearning platforms, knowledge management platforms, and talent development platforms.
This report is intended to support organizations seeking an LXP solution for a learning transformation. To that end, we define the five key capabilities to consider when selecting or upgrading LXP solutions:

- Content
- Integration
- Social interaction
- User experience design
- Data analysis

### Content Capabilities

In evaluating an LXP, an organization first should assess whether its content capabilities are properly aligned to the organization’s overall content strategy; at a minimum, they should align the company’s content offerings and the platform’s intended users. Next, companies should focus on how the LXP can improve employees’ performance in their current roles. Companies should consider these LXP content capabilities:

- Curation
- Contextualization
- Creation

#### Curation

Curation is the identification, aggregation, distillation, and organization of content from various sources. LXPs offer personalized content curation via playlists and channels, social sharing, and unified search—all of which are usually delivered with the help of algorithms and machine learning. They allow workers to:

- Set content preferences (by a variety of criteria)
- Tag content
- Assess their skills and competencies
- Search, share, and recommend content

These features may be built into the product or offered as add-ons provided by third parties.

Some LXPs have roots in content management systems (CMSs). For organizations looking to use an LXP to solve problems—such as improving internal efficiencies or centralizing, managing, and distributing content—an option with strong CMS capabilities is worth exploring.

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Contextualization

Workers often underutilize some digital content because it’s hard to find, outdated, too time-consuming, or simply not relevant. In addition, the maintenance of these learning assets can take employees away from more important work. Together, these challenges can be a significant drain on HR budgets and productivity.

Contextualizing content can help. In learning and development (L&D), contextualization is the art and science of delivering the right content in the right format for learning, development, and performance improvement at the right time.6

One way LXPs contextualize content is by leveraging artificial intelligence (AI). For instance, some platforms use machine learning to provide content recommendations based on users’ actions and behaviors.7

When evaluating the contextual capabilities of platforms, look for depth in surfacing relevant content, whether it comes from an LMS, the Internet, or content partners.

Creation

Today, learner preferences lean toward informal learning, such as:

• Discovering and sharing knowledge with team members
• Using search functionality
• Having conversations
• Accessing content curated from external sources

One reason for this is the shrinking half-life of knowledge and skills, which is driving a need for speed in all learning processes. To meet this need, many LXPs include creation functions that enable users to produce content on the fly. For example, some solution providers allow users to live stream and record commentary via webcams.

Other LXPs provide users with a simple portal for creating and uploading multiple types of content. Still others offer additional creation functions, including screencasting.

Integration Capabilities

A major benefit of LXPs is their ability to offer users access to multiple technologies through a single touchpoint; API (application programming interface) services enable this essential capability. API services allow organizations to streamline training, offer e-commerce, manage content, access third-party commercial content, and link to business applications—all on one platform.

KEY POINT: API services enable LXPs to integrate multiple technologies with a single touchpoint on one platform.

KEY POINT: Look for LXPs that can deliver the right content in the right format at the right time.

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7 “Machine learning” is an application of AI that enables systems to learn and improve from experience without human assistance.
API Services

APIs serve as the request mechanism between a third party’s application functionality—such as courseware from an app or website—and existing enterprise applications or platforms, such as an organization’s LMS. In effect, APIs call for something, and then that something is delivered.\(^8\)

Say a third-party developer wants to create a new courseware app but doesn’t want to create a sign-in method from scratch. Instead, the developer can use an existing API to allow users access to the app.

LXP solution providers typically build APIs around their core functionality, so their platforms may not meet all of an organization’s learning use cases, such as accessing proprietary systems or niche industry-related content. Thus, organizations without internal expertise on integration and common APIs may want to enlist the professional services arm of their LXP provider or an integration or API management service to customize their platform.

Extensibility is another important integration capability to consider when evaluating LXPs. Some solution providers offer an open framework with plug-ins and connectors for API developers, which helps organizations manage integration and extend their learning platforms efficiently.

Social Interaction Capabilities

As learning becomes increasingly embedded in work itself, affording employees the opportunity to learn directly from others (both inside and outside of the organization) becomes more important. To this end, LXPs should include capabilities that enable users to collaborate, network, and connect with each other and with experts.

Collaboration, Networking, Connecting

The ability of LXPs to enhance worker engagement, team-building, and social interaction ranks among their most valuable features. This is especially true for large global organizations and those with geographically dispersed footprints and/or remote workforces.

Like other platforms that are widely and frequently used by employees, LXPs can serve as a key mechanism for workers to connect with each other and share knowledge and expertise in a social media–like setting. This is particularly useful for organizations that lack a social media platform and those that have a learning-first mindset or culture.

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\(8\) APIs are a set of routines, protocols, and tools for building software applications. They specify how software components should interact. The APIs used in HR software systems should be clearly documented, tested, and proven.
User Experience Design Capabilities

Learning professionals trained in design thinking seek to understand and enhance the ways in which humans interact with technology. LXPs support their work with three design capabilities:

- Mobile experience
- Learning and career paths

Mobile Experience

The LXP solution providers with which we conducted briefings all recognize the ascendency of mobile devices—and they have designed (or redesigned) their solutions for mobile optimization. Accordingly, organizations should evaluate LXPs to determine how well this has been achieved, by examining elements such as single calls to action, content presentation within the user interface, visual layout, and ease of navigation. They also should look for several functionalities, such as push notification, SMS, voice recognition, and location awareness.

The other features found in mobile-first LXPs include gamification elements, on-the-fly content creation, live-streaming, and full accessibility via iOS\(^9\), Android, and web apps.

Learning and Career Paths

Many HR and L&D leaders indicate that they need to improve in leveraging technology to provide workers with greater visibility, discoverability, and transparency around career development options. LXPs support this task by allowing workers to create personalized learning and career paths, share expertise, and gather experiences based on their interests and preferences.

Data Analysis Capabilities

Business intelligence and analytics capabilities are essential in L&D to monitor business metrics and make informed decisions that support the development of a learning organization. Moreover, high-performing organizations are continuously monitoring and acting on data to better support workers and serve the needs of the business.\(^{10}\)

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\(^9\) "iOS" is a trademark of Apple Inc., registered in the United States and other countries. This report is an independent publication and has not been authorized, sponsored, or otherwise approved by Apple Inc.

\(^{10}\) Three Findings for Using Data and Analytics to Enable the Learning Organization, Bersin, Deloitte Consulting LLP / Elizabeth Barsik and Dani Johnson, 2018.
Organizations can glean many forms of data from LXPs, including:

- **Key performance improvement indicators**—Feedback from managers / mentors, customers, and self-evaluations
- **Cultural data**—Employee satisfaction, management and leadership behavior, and collaboration
- **Career and personal development data**—Accomplishments, certificates, badges, credentials, and skill endorsements
- **Employee feedback about development**—Results from one-on-one meetings, engagement and pulse surveys, and content ratings
- **Summary reports on learner activity and utilization of content**—Engagement, competencies, and other metrics on skill development
- **Summary reports on business metrics and program value**—Value / skills gained, impact to salary hours, total benefits, and benefit-to-cost return
- **Summary reports based on engagement**—Social activity, learning activity, and user visits
- **Team data**—Competencies, skills, and expertise summaries from the individual to the organizational level

We expect the data analysis capabilities of LXPs to continue to become more sophisticated in the future, helping organizations to identify potential skill gaps, linkages to business alignment, and talent vulnerabilities.

**Conclusion**

Technology offers organizations an effective way to elevate the employee experience by mirroring the UX of consumer brands in their HR and learning brands. LXPs can deliver engaging experiences and provide a more self-directed learning mechanism for role development and career advancement. Effective LXPs have five key capabilities, which organizations should consider when selecting and upgrading their learning platforms: content, integration, social interaction, user experience design, and data analysis.

Our research finds that organizations typically add LXPs to their overall learning strategies and ecosystems and afterward tend to rely less on their LMS and / or talent suites. LXPs help organizations solve long-standing problems associated with disparate systems, underutilized content, inefficient search mechanisms, and the lack of actionable metrics. For all these reasons and more, LXPs have earned a place in the continuing evolution of HR technology, moving from simply managing people, events, and content to humanizing training in a digital world.
SOLUTION PROVIDER PROFILE

Percipio (Skillsoft)

Skillsoft Corporate U.S. Headquarters
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Nashua, NH 03062
+1-603-324-3000 | www.skillsoft.com

Skillsoft World Headquarters
Skillsoft Limited: Bellfield Office Park
Clonskeagh
Dublin 4, Ireland
+353-1218-1000 | www.skillsoft.com

Year Founded: 1998
Number of Employees: 2,300
Top Industries Served: Manufacturing, retail, financial services, technology, healthcare, transportation, life sciences, and government
Geographic Presence: Skillsoft serves customers in more than 160 countries across the Americas, Asia Pacific, Europe, Middle East, and Africa.
Public or Private Company: Private
Current Total Revenue: Not available
Current LXP Clients: 1,200

Company Overview

About Skillsoft
Skillsoft is a global leader in corporate learning, delivering beautiful technology and engaging content that drives business impact for modern enterprises. Skillsoft comprises three award-winning solutions that
support learning, performance, and success: Skillsoft learning content, the Percipio intelligent learning experience platform, and the SumTotal suite for human capital management.

Skillsoft provides a comprehensive selection of cloud-based corporate learning content, including courses, videos, books, and other resources on business and management skills, leadership development, digital transformation, IT skills and certification training, productivity and collaboration tools, and compliance. Percipio’s intuitive design engages modern learners and its consumer-led experience accelerates learning. The SumTotal suite features four key components built on a unified platform: learning management, talent management, talent acquisition, and workforce management.

Skillsoft is trusted by thousands of the world’s leading organizations, including 65 percent of the Fortune 500. Learn more at www.skillsoft.com.

About Percipio

Percipio is Latin for acquiring knowledge. It is also Skillsoft’s learning experience platform, which delivers a personalized learning experience to engage and inspire employees.

Percipio’s LXP utilizes a multimodal content strategy that gives workers a personalized experience when accessing content from a variety of sources. The LXP incorporates learning content from Skillsoft’s archives, as well as from custom and third-party sources. It also presents personalized recommendations to individual learners based on their interests. Percipio also offers ELSA (Embedded Learning Synchronized Assistant), a browser plug-in to suggest content to users during the natural flow of their online work. To provide a robust search capability in the platform, the LXP uses a search engine called Elastic Search, which offers auto-complete recommendations as users enter text into the search field and delivers highly relevant results.

Percipio’s LXP allows users to organize and create customized content channels, which are discoverable across the platform through unified search (see Figure 1). As a way to further centralize learning programs into one platform, the LXP also offers Percipio Compliance courseware and assessments, which come with configurable completion rules, time tracking, and other customization options. In fact, all content on Percipio’s LXP can be customized with a company’s branding, logos, and color scheme to create a familiar experience for learners. These kinds of curation and customization represent important capabilities in an LXP.
**Figure 1:** Percipio’s Custom Channels Offer Content from Multiples Sources at a Single Point of Access

Learning Experience Platforms: Buyer’s Guide

Provider Business Model
- What is the vendor’s background and ownership? How many employees work there? What is the state of its financial stability and sustainability?
- Does the vendor have content partnerships with third-party solution providers? If so, how can they be leveraged?
- How is the vendor funded? If funding comes from private investors, how committed are they to continued investment?

Pricing
- Will the provider allow buyers to start with a pilot program and pay for only those employees using the platform (as opposed to all potential users)?
- Does the vendor have service and support tiers not included in the base subscription rate for the platform?
- Does the vendor offer flat-rate pricing?
- Does the vendor offer a “roll your own” pricing model, based on the specific needs of the buyer’s organization?

Content Handling
- Does the solution deliver personalized content over time? If so, how is this achieved (e.g., via algorithms at both the individual and collective level)?
- How well does the solution aggregate disparate sources of content through a single point of entry? Is the user experience seamless?
- Can content be organized for different purposes (e.g., content or career pathways in the form of playlists, channels, or feeds)?
- Does the solution support peer-to-peer learning? If so, how can workers contribute their own content?

Data Aggregation and Analytics
- Does the platform include mechanisms that allow users to enter personal information into the system (e.g., preferences, assessments, and informal learning activities)?
- Which reports, dashboards, and / or metrics does the LXP deliver “out of the box”?
- Can the LXP accommodate business-related metrics to calculate improvements in employee engagement and performance?
- Is reporting provided in real time?

Integration Capabilities
- How does the provider handle integrations with other learning solutions?
- Which applications or application programming interfaces (APIs) has the provider built into the platform? How are they maintained?
- Can all current and future elements of the platform be accessed through a single sign-in?
- How are authentication and authorization managed on the platform (e.g., social network authentication, biometrics, user name and password)?

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11 Application programming interfaces (APIs) are a set of routines, protocols, and tools for building software applications. The API specifies how software components should interact. In the selection of any HR software system, it is very important to make sure that the vendor has clearly documented APIs and that these have been used by other companies, tested, and proven.

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METHODOLOGY

Methodology for Learning Experience Platform Research 2018

About This Research

Bersin conducted the research for the articles in this series between October 2017 and February 2018. Following a review of literature available on the learning technology industry and information on companies identified through existing Bersin, Deloitte Consulting LLP work, we identified a target list of solution providers to contact for briefings. We also included in the analysis the learning capabilities of some firms we regularly follow in the marketplace through quarterly analyst updates, briefing days, and user conference attendance.

We placed no restrictions on participation based on solution provider size, customer base, or geographic location. The vendors were not intended to be an exhaustive representation of the market but rather representative examples of the market.

While participating companies have some or most of the capabilities of LxPs, as outlined in this article, several are also used in organizations as content management platforms, learning management systems, collaboration platforms, recommendation engines, aggregation platforms, or microlearning platforms, or to meet some other business need such as e-commerce or sales readiness.

We conducted briefings with experience platform providers via online presentations and demonstrations of applicable solutions. In some cases, we spoke to solution buyers and users.

Following briefings and demonstrations, we requested customer references from all participating solution providers. We interviewed customers confidentially and promised a copy of the resultant articles. We also asked participating companies to provide a screenshot or multiple screenshots of their online capabilities for inclusion in the report with permission.
Finally, we sought perspectives and opinions on learning experience solutions and solution providers from other learning practitioners through our own networks and connections and through a variety of interactions with industry peers, consultants, and market observers to better understand certain issues and trends. We based the findings in these articles on these qualitative inputs, in addition to our years of previous research on learning systems and solution delivery.
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- **Content and Insights**—Market-leading, proprietary research including research reports, high-impact industry studies, videos, webcast replays, process models and frameworks, and case studies.

- **Bersin Blueprints**—Designed to provide actionable approaches to help Human Capital leaders address their most pressing talent challenges, Blueprints offer convenient access to research, performance support materials, tools, and member advisory services to tackle key challenges.

- **Interactive Factbooks**—Covering a wide spectrum of Human Capital metrics, this platform allows members to filter by industry and company size and create custom benchmarks, analyze trends, and identify drivers of variance.

- **Maturity Diagnostics**—Research-based maturity assessments, integrated with business feedback, deliver actionable custom analysis, relevant research resources, and guidance from member advisors. These assessments help members develop a plan to progress in maturity.

- **Performance Support**—Practical materials in the form of illustrations, handouts, worksheets, templates, assessments, and recipes. Members can use these materials to help promote thinking, facilitate discussion, enable self-assessment, outline steps, direct processes, and aid decision-making.

- **Member Advisors**—Through virtual and in-person activities, our specialized member advisors help members understand our research, uncover deeper insights, prioritize human capital issues, and map solutions to some of their most pressing challenges.

- **Networking**—Member-only online Communities, working groups, and roundtables let you connect with peers and industry leaders to discuss and learn about the latest industry trends, emerging issues, and leading practices.

- **IMPACT Conference**—Our executive conference brings research-driven insights to Human Capital leaders and their teams, offering them the opportunity to exchange ideas with other senior-level practitioners, industry thought leaders, and Bersin team members.

A more comprehensive version of this report is available to Bersin members. For more information about our membership program, please visit us at [www.bersin.com/membership](http://www.bersin.com/membership).
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Prior to rejoining Bersin in 2015, Janet was responsible for developing the eLearning Guild’s professional development offerings, with additional oversight of the research and publications function. During her more than 15 years in the learning profession, she previously served as a senior analyst for Bersin & Associates from 2010 through 2013 and also held positions at Brandon Hall Research and Utica National Insurance Group. Janet holds a BA in communications and a master’s degree in education.

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