Future of the Learning Experience Platform

KPMG – 2024 Research Programme

—

October 2024

01 What is a Learning Experience Platform (LXP) ?

The LXP consolidates learning platforms into a single, user-friendly interface, addressing the issue of overwhelming options for employees.

“

In 2012 the LXP emerged to address the problem that organisations simply had too many places that employees had to go to find learning. It is not unusual for small-medium sized business to have multiple Learning Management Systems (LMS), and large organisations more still (the record we believe is 147!). Add to this a laundry list of the latest third party digital libraries, learners are left asking “where should I go…and why am I going there?”. Ironically, investing heavily in employee development can cause a kind of options paralysis with users opting to abandon the exercise all together.

The promise of the Learning Experience Platform is to solve this by aggerating all learning locations into a single view to rekindle learning adoption and refocus on a more consumer grade, seamless experience. In the same way that a smart TV or Amazon fire stick is able to pull together content from across streaming providers into a rationalised view, the LXP can aggregate your learning locations, index the content into learning pathways and provide a federated search mechanism across the whole learning estate.

The LXP proposition is clear and proven to be effective across many organisations. However It is amazing that technology that is such a common part of the learning industry consciousness remains one of its biggest points of confusion in the minds of learning professionals and tech buyers. As we will discuss in this report this is due in large part to the evolution of features in LMS tech and a gradual harmonising of functionality across the industry.

We suggest that the terminology be brought up to date and that by introducing the new categories of “Federated LMS” and “Learning Intelligence”, the features and functionality are more clearly represented and more easily understood.

Alex Adams,
KPMG.

02 LXP features have become LMS table stakes

LMS vendors replicating LXP functionality, has blurred the lines between the two platforms.

The main point of confusion in the market today is that all LMS and LXP vendors appear to be saying exactly the same thing. This was not always the case and the story used to be really clear. An LMS owns the hosting, completing and reporting of mandatory training. An LXP sits over the entire estate, using the LMS (or multiple LMS's) and third party content libraries as the source material of a single user view of learning options. The LMS did not provide API's to aggregate neighbouring LMS's or content stores and the LXP had no interest in hosting or providing auditable reporting for the content. And therefore there was a logical place for both in an organisation as the LXP is not replacing – but simply aggregating the LMS and other providers. The LMS vendors came to resent this trend as until this point the LMS was the centre of the corporate universe, as whilst their platform remained an essential component, the move to middle office from front of house felt at best a relegation and at worse a threat to its valuation. Predictably the LMS vendors have worked to close this gap and re-stake a claim as the front door of learning and are now offering the majority of original LXP functionality.

Third Party Library Aggregation: Turn key integrations to connect the thousands of learning content vendors, was once the defining characteristic of the LXP. Any premium LMS will now offer this too, so that users can access pathways which offer content from across all the learning systems in the estate. Its worth noting that in some cases the LMS is able to provide an aggregated view of and rationalise third party completion data too, whilst others still hand this off to the content host.

In the Flow Collaboration: Although the LMS vendors are quite precious about not deferring engagement away from their platforms – the option to have a "plugin" or "Teams App" has also been adopted from the LXP – so that learning can be represented within the spaces people work.

Self led career Progression: The LXP stood out by not just offering mandated and pushed learning initiatives but a catalogue of resources that allows learners to create their own learning plans, and to help structure more dynamic and tailored performance conversations. This is now LMS standard issue.

Federated Search: Search is of course the hallmark of learning technologies moving away from the purely administrative and toward the consumer grade. Whilst forward thinking LMS's having search at the centre pre date the LXP – this feature has only come into its own now that the remit of the LMS extends beyond assets it natively hosts. Google style federated learning search results are now assumed and standard.

AI Optimisation: It's slightly unfair to say that the LMS market has adopted the LXP's AI optimisation features. In truth automations such as AI Authoring, AI pathway creation and conversational searching is being developed concurrently by several vendors across the learning category. Suffice it to say that AI optimisation will not ever be a module unique to either LMS or LXP and instead jointly owned and advertised by both.

User Generated: The old adage that when people leave the organisation so does the unique knowledge that person holds seems perennially relevant. And yet whilst mobile features that can capture best practice at source has never been easier to use – the discipline has never really been widely adopted. In an industry where the relevance of endless content often comes into question, the tactic knowledge that exists within an organisation offers an unrivalled source of hyper-contextualised learning bites. Added to inherited LXP features where users can pull their wider web learning back into the platform for others to enjoy and be recorded. Expect to see a renaissance in these important content creation / curation methods.

Centralised Comms: As the platforms aggregator it makes good sense for the LXP to also be the amin channel for internal comms particularly as they relate to training and learning. Company intranets are not redundant but have and should become mutually exclusive with the LXP and now the LMS.

03 Tender Themes: Is there really a one platform approach?

Consolidated messaging: Learning vendors offering similar features has led businesses to expect a single platform can fulfil all their needs.

Ambiguity and unrealistic expectations: Organisations are requesting features that historically required multiple platforms, leading to disappointment when a single platform falls short.

How has consolidated messaging from learning vendors affected client buying themes in 2024 you might ask?

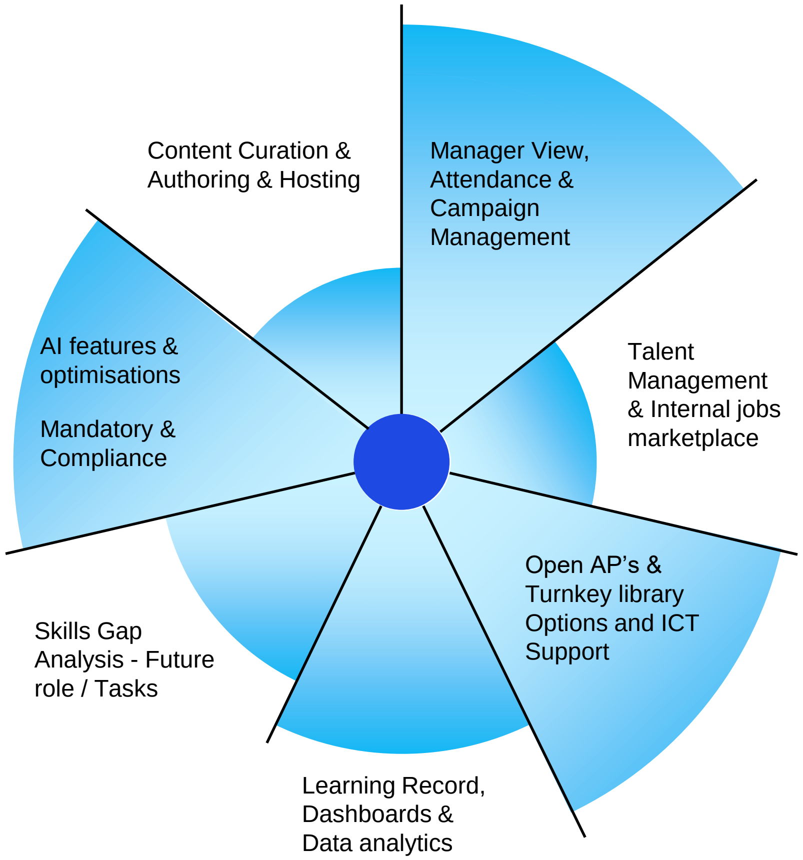
In analysing a snap shot of the learning technology RFP / RFI's that have landed this year, an undeniable theme is the requirement (or perhaps assumption) that a single systems can offer the functionality that used to require 3–4. Now this could just be indicative of a common corporate ambition that departments, and especially L&D must "do more with less" – but we suspect is more likely influenced by the amalgamation of the learning tech vendor feature lists.

Ambiguity by design

You only need to attend the annual Learning Technologies Exhibition to gauge just how standardised the design (and sales) language of learning platforms have become, and how much the narrative has adopted the themes of departments out side of learning, in particular Workforce planning, Talent and Recruitment. Little wonder then that attendees leaving this and other events do so having heard and often feeling they've seen systems that appear to solve the full remit of their organisation's requirements.

Quality of bid responses

There is an interesting net result here. Figure 1 shows what has become a regular requirements summary in LMS RFP's in 2024 and outlines the volume of questions within the bid documents that relate to each topic area. To comprehensively meet all these minimum expected features would historically require at least an LMS, LXP and Talent intelligence tool. And yet the buying market believes that a single platform approach does exist. Strangely then it is not uncommon for the best in breed LMS's, LXP's and talent platforms to all be in the same bid process which would seem to be counterintuitive.



04 LXP Differentiators

Now that the LMS vendors advertise "LXP features" how are technology buyers meant to tell them apart?

Multi-LMS aggregation

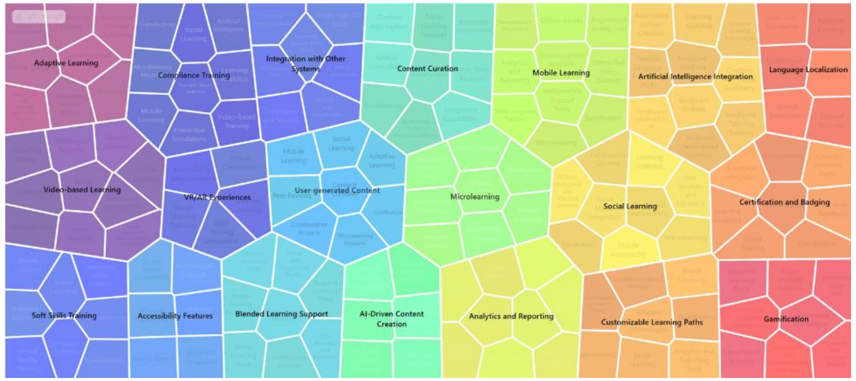
One of the enduring (and most likely future proofed features) of the LXP is it ability to aggregate multiple LMS's. Its not unusual for even small and medium sized organisations to have multiple LMS's across the estate, and with the perceived high cost of transformation a strategy of 'aggregate' over 'consolidate' will always be an attractive option.

Technically there is nothing stopping the LMS vendors aggregating neighbouring LMS's, but laying an LMS over an LMS is quite a hard case to argue – and speaks more for the need for consolidation and not aggregation.

Moving from 'role based' to 'skills based'

Rationalising content based on role requirements and on sequential association data (e.g., "you did X, or liked X… you may also enjoy Y) has been par the course and proved useful across LMS and LXP's alike.

The LXP market is however pioneering skills recommendations – where content is pushed based on an assessment of the required skills and future skills across an organisation. But how does it do this?



Skills taxonomy

The obvious blocker to measurable skills centred learning is the need for and maintenance of a comprehensive company wide skills taxonomy / ontology. The constant evolution of the world of work has meant that keeping these artifacts meaningfully up to date is resource and time intense and leaves many companies with a partial view or wondering where to start.

Skills inference

By scraping the web for millions of open roles – the LXP's skills inference tools can do much of the heavy lifting and build dynamic skills taxonomies inferred from what the market has determined are the critical skills required for the roles they are hiring for. These inferred taxonomies can then be hyper-contextualised by blending in the skills mapping work the specific organisation has already done into a single nuanced view.

Skills Proficiency

Beyond a simple skills based recommendation the LXP maps content and course completion with an increase in overall skills proficiency. This revolutionises internal hiring and turbo charges performance conversations.

How can vendors be more clear about the core use cases of their technology? Time for a name change?

At risk of suggesting the market needs yet another acronym – ultimately the main problem here is that the learning tech market has evolved to the extent that the category descriptions have been out grown.

We offer 2 simple descriptors that set the two approaches meaningfully apart;

Federated LMS

One Central platform for learning:

- Core mandatory, compliance and learning record store with granular learning dashboards
- Third party content aggregation
- Low – medium estate complexity

Learning Intelligence (nee LXP)

- Single shop window over multi-platform estate
- Cross-system skills based content rationalisation
- Skills proficiency data
- Medium – high estate complexity

05 Federated LMS

In summary, the primary use case for the federated LMS is one of **consolidation**, where a low – medium complexity organisation can reduce their number of learning systems down to a single front door.

The market has attempted to define the evolution of the LMS in the past and had hoped that self describing as “Next-Gen” or “LMS 2.0” would go some way to help represent changes in innovation. The problem has been that these terms are too vague and do not in an off themselves describe the core difference. How would one intuitively tell a 1.0 apart form the inevitable 3.0 for instance? Defining the advanced LMS market as “federated” (we argue) better defines the true nature of the platform against the entry level LMS’s that remain available. A classic standalone LMS provides one learning location that sits among numerous others. A federated LMS sits on top of the heritage learning estate and provides connectivity for data and content to flow into a single user view.

The example below (Figure 2) shows a learning estate that relies on many locations including content libraries, internal storage and 3 standalone LMS’s. This configuration results in a disjointed experience for users and high costs in terms of administration and annual licenses. A solution to this is a Federated LMS (Figure 3) which allows them to switch off the 3 LMS’s, connect the content libraries and host internal assets in a single front end, consolidating a clunky multi-platform approach into a federated estate where users have to navigate just one primary platform.

Figure 2: Learning Estate Before

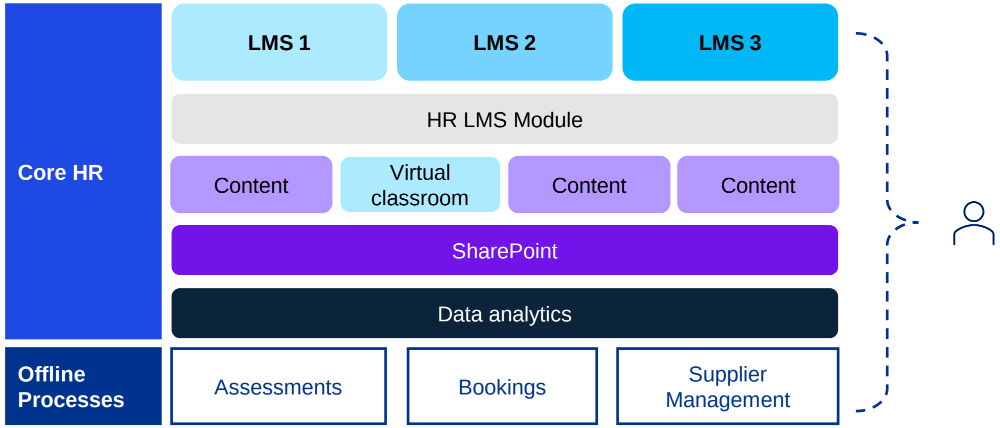
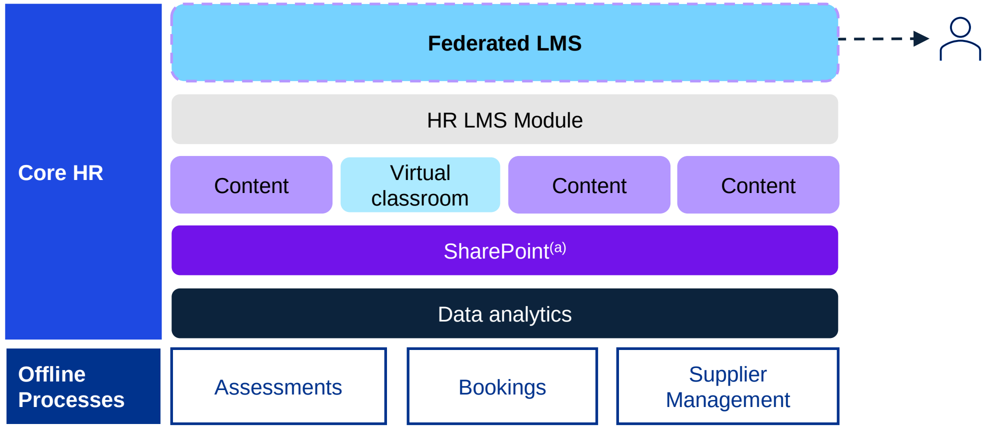


Figure 3: After



Note: (a) The Federated LMS does not (in most systems) extend to SharePoint connectivity. The advise is that Learning assets stored in SharePoint should be identified, migrated and hosted natively within the LMS so that consumption can be accurately captured and recorded. All offline processes also remain offline and are not federated.

06 From LXP to Learning Intelligence

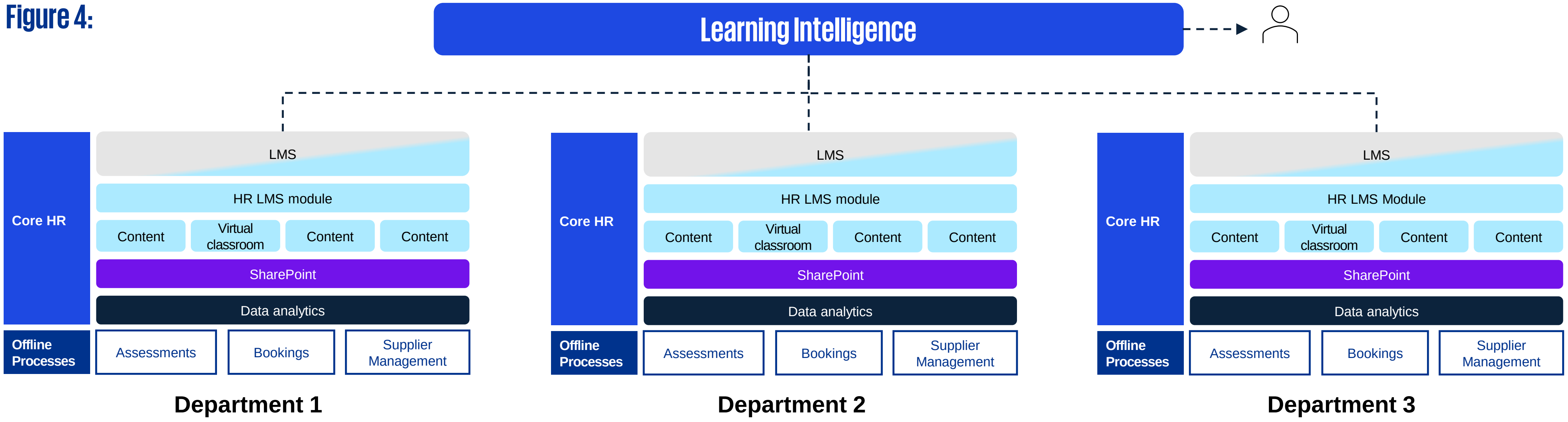
Redundant term: "Learning experience" no longer differentiates vendors as most offer experience-led features.

Learning Intelligence: A more useful description emphasises rationalising enterprise learning sources, multiple platforms and content sources into a single intelligent view.

The term “Learning experience” has become redundant as a descriptor that meaningfully differentiates the vendor landscape. Why? Well because the vast majority of vendors today are experience led and in its simplest terms all learning platforms are now LXP’s. What is shown to learners (beyond the mandatory requirements) should be based in high levels of personalisation and ensure that “*my*” experience of learning at work reflects “my” interests, career aspirations and delivery preferences. And so describing a platform as LXP feels like its run its course as it fails in and of itself to describe its unique core function and instead describes a feature that we all assume today to be standard issue across the market.

We suggest therefore that a more useful description moves away from a focus on experience (as this is a given) and towards enterprise **learning intelligence (**As outlined in figure 4), where the primary role is to plugin to any learning source across an organisation and aggregate into a single rationalised view. Importantly this is not just about content. By drawing on data from HCM, workplace planning, coaching and mentoring, assessment, talent market places, LMS and learning programs, a learning intelligence platform promises a highly accurate view across all the components of learning at the enterprise level. For many companies, particularly those of medium to high complexity (size and scale etc) its is not always realistic or optimum to look to consolidate platforms as multiple core LMS’s (5+) can and do exist for a host of business critical reasons. Add to this high volumes of content libraries and neighbouring learning stores, a single rationalised view to optimise the learning journey is instead achieved by enterprise grade **intelligent aggregation**.

Figure 4:



07 Learning Intelligence: Skills

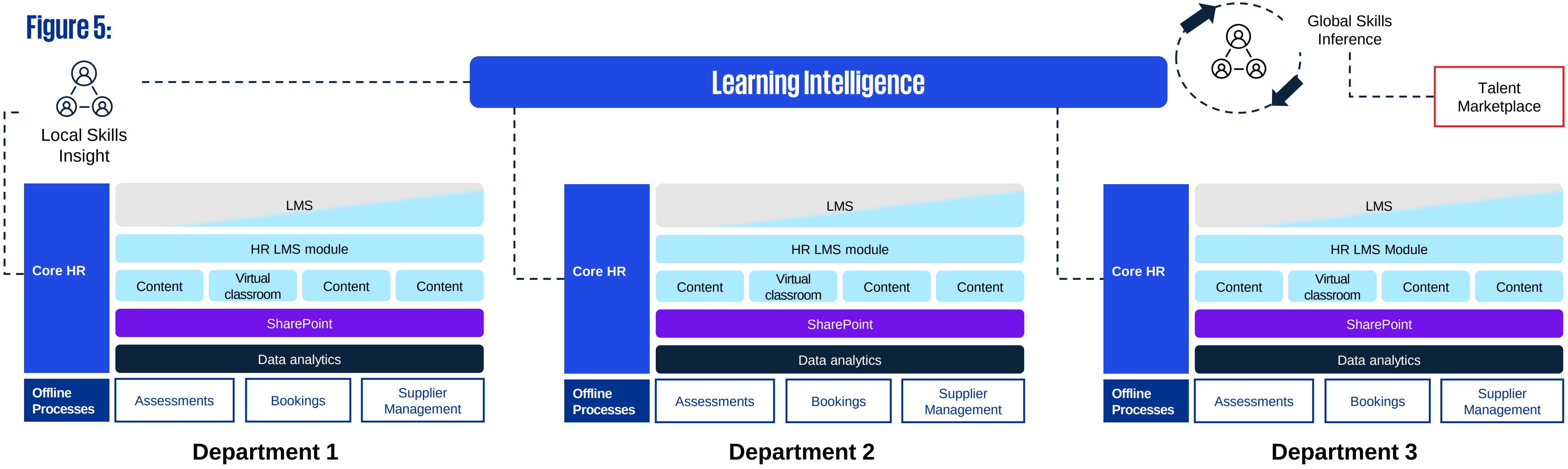
Skills aggregation: The LIP plays a crucial role in consolidating skills data from various sources, including internal frameworks and external market insights.

Content recommendation: The LIP's ability to aggregate skills data enables it to recommend learning content based on individual and organisational needs, providing a more personalised and impactful learning experience.

Learning intelligence is not solely defined by the term ‘aggregation’ but also in the logic it uses to determine relevance, as ensuring learning speaks to business critical outcomes requires a close alignment with a companies skills landscape. However, internally held skills insights, frameworks and ontologies can sit in silos, across multiple systems and departments. Learning Intelligence connects the locations where skills are held to cross-reference global workforce insights (skills inference) with essential and nuanced organisational skills data (local skills). Therefore medium to high complexity organisations looking to use skills (and future skills gaps) as the rationalisation engine for aggregated learning content will need an Learning Intelligence Platform. Whilst there is nothing preventing the federated LMS adopting the skills market data set too, the need for attorney over multiple LMS’s, HCM and opportunity marketplaces for local skills data just wont be available.

NOTE: It is important that technology users (and buyers) are not tempted to rely on inferred skills data alone. Without the context of local skills data the output is often reduced to simply mapping generically available skills results with generic library content – which neither provides high level experience (a source of genuine development that leaners will continually return to) or a source of measurable knowledge transfer & business impact.

Figure 5:

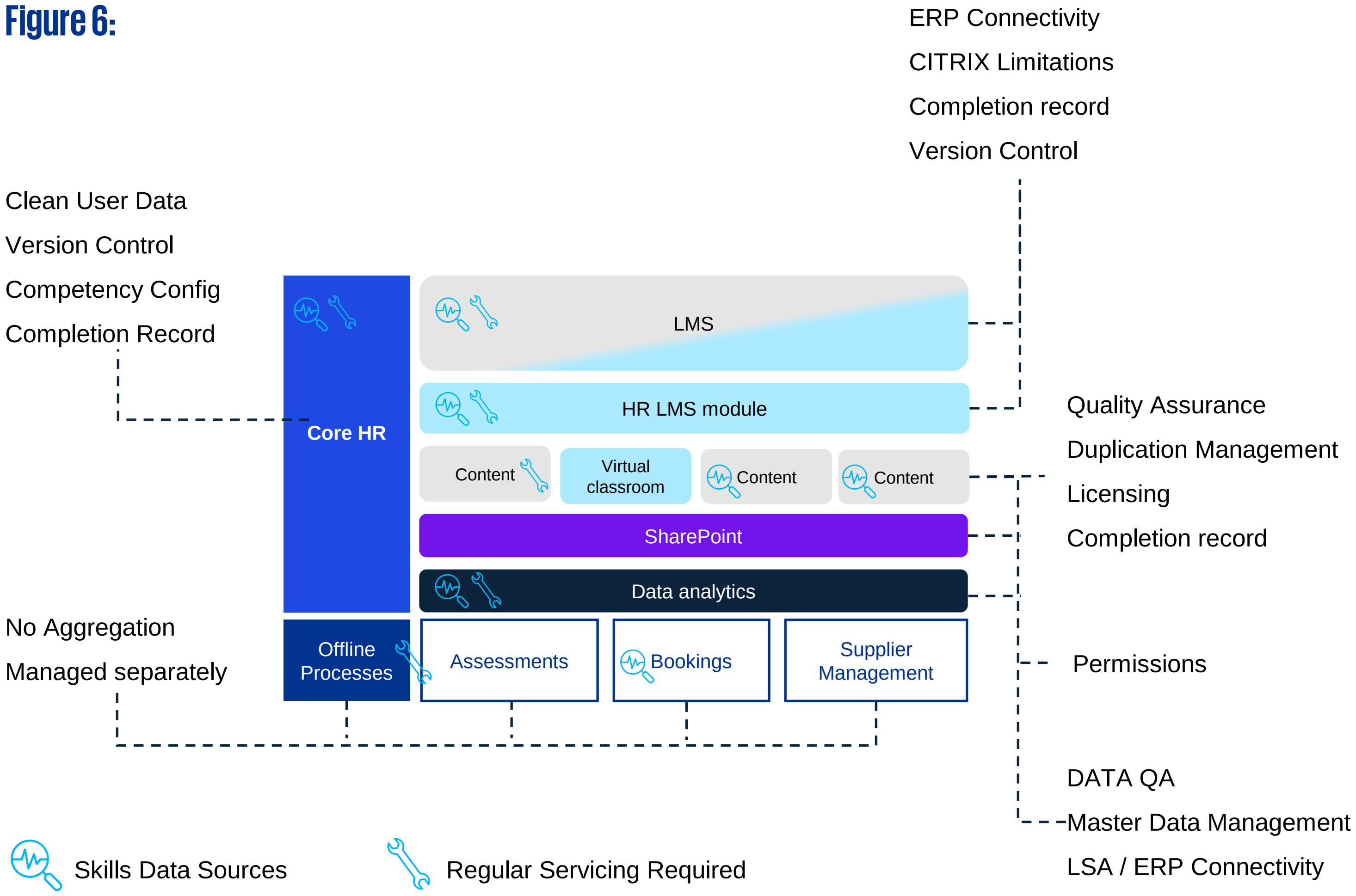


08 Deploying with Impact

Data foundation: Both Federated LMS and LIP rely on accurate and well-maintained data from underlying systems for optimal performance.

Process and governance: LIP & FLMS cannot solve experience issues caused by poor configuration, content quality, or lack of unified processes and governance across systems

Figure 6:



Its is also really important that tech buyers and users fully understand how any **new technology is only as good as the foundations you lay them on**. Figure 6 outlines a typical view of the component parts that both LIP's and FLMS's rely on that must be configured correctly and serviced regularly.

"Plug and Play" can be misleading!

We speak with many businesses that have bought learning technologies – only to find that the platforms don't work entirely as described. All platforms even at a foundational level rely on connectivity with the existing systems.

Any Federated LMS or Learning Intelligence Platform requires the underlying estate to be continually maintained for them to operate as designed. Any component that is unable to share accurate data (People, Skills, Content etc.) will impact the relevance at the experience layer – and will adversely effect adoption and in turn, ROI.

Aggregation of Process and Governance

We also hear organisations describe their need for an LIP (Nee LXP) as the silver bullet to solve to the route causes of their learning experience issues and are disheartened to learn that the LIP can only aggregate content and data. The LIP is not able to solve experience issues that stem from poor underlying configuration or poor content quality – nor is it able to overlay unified processes & governance across host systems.

The slogan "garbage in garbage out" continues to be a useful guard rail.

Get in touch

If your organisation is trying to make sense of the learning tech market then we hope that this report has served as a first step in outlining the technology options available to you, and given some important context as to why navigating the vendor landscape alone can at times be so difficult.

Are you coming to market for new systems? discussing how to optimise your existing learning provision? Feel you are slipping behind the pace of technological change or simply want to discuss the themes of this report in more detail then please do get in touch.

Authors and key contacts

We'd love to continue the conversation with you and share more insights, please reach out to:

Alex Adams

Associate Director

alex.adams@kpmg.co.uk

Mark McCarney

Director

mark.mccarney@kpmg.co.uk

Alejandro Modarelli

Partner

alejandro.modarelli@kpmg.co.uk

Louise Scott-Worrall

Partner

louise.scott-worrall@kpmg.co.uk

Some or all of the services described herein may not be permissible for KPMG audited entities and their affiliates or related entities.

kpmg.com/uk