

Beginners Guide: How to Track Informal Learning with an LMS in SharePoint



How to Track Informal Learning with an LRS in SharePoint

Training in the workplace has grown by leaps and bounds. The first Learning Management System emerged in the 1990s and evolved and grew more popular in the 2000s and beyond. Not only were companies able to provide comprehensive training to their employees but also run reports to identify the effectiveness of their programs.

As with anything, the training world evolved and executives discovered that a very large portion of learning takes place outside of the classroom. Social learning became a hot topic and discussions began centering on the 70:20:10 theory - 70 percent of knowledge comes from job-related experiences, 20 percent from interactions with others, and 10 percent from formal educational events.

More than ever, training professionals are tasked with showing a direct link between learning and job performance. Using a Learning Management System, or LMS, has been the primary tool to show educational outcomes but tracking informal learning adds another important piece of the learning puzzle.

The Learning Record Store was developed in recent years to track all of an employee's learning outside of an LMS - from attending a conference to watching a video or mentoring somebody else. Combining the information received from an LMS and LRS can potentially give a broader 'picture' of your workers training outcomes.

This white paper will discuss what an LRS is, why you may or may not need one and some information for beginners about how to track informal learning in SharePoint.

LRS: Learning Record Store

Just as its name implies, a learning record store is essentially a database designed to store learning records. Just as an LMS stores learning records for elearning, the LRS does the same but for informal training outside the system - simulations, games, social learning, mobile learning, quizzes, collaborative learning, or viewing documents.

What it stores is really very simple:

Actor, verb, object or 'I did this'

- 1 First, the learner records the activity by sending a "statement" to the learning record store. For example, the learner can record this type of statement: I watched a video on....
2. Then, the learning record store compiles all of the statements the learner makes, takes all of the records it receives and stores them together. Additionally, the records can be shared inside the LMS or as a standalone document.

What we couldn't track before, we now can with an LRS. Watching a video is a learning experience, attending a conference session is a learning experience, asking your social network for advice, being mentored by an expert, turning in your homework, writing a blog post. These are all examples of informal learning that can be tracked.

An LRS can be a stand-alone system or as part of an LMS. When the data is retrieved, a business can see the full picture of all the learning an employee has achieved.

How to Track Informal Learning with an LRS in SharePoint

The future holds a very promising place for the LRS, however the LMS is not going anywhere. For the moment, an LRS is not able to provide the following features that only an LMS can do:

1. Track compliance requirements
2. Competency management
3. Talent management
4. Manage users, roles, instructors
5. Skill gap analysis
6. Enrollment approval workflow
7. Forums and chat rooms
8. Calendar integration
9. Manage prerequisites and equivalencies
10. Video conferencing and,
11. Much more.

As you can see, there is a place for both an LMS and LRS – each providing unique feature sets that are important to gain a better understanding of your learning initiatives.

Now, the question is 'do I need an LRS and what are my options?'

At this point in the game, an LRS isn't mandatory for most companies but a very nice add-on to have if resources are available. There are a couple different scenarios to consider:

1. Incorporating an LRS with your current LMS

Most companies use some sort of LMS so it makes sense to incorporate the two, however it is not always available or an option.

2. Separate Learning Record Store

This is probably the most common approach companies choose at the moment. There are additional fees involved. It's also possible to build your own but it is very complex.

3. Temporarily utilizing a system, like SharePoint, that has similar features of an LRS until fully ready to commit to a formal LRS system.

For companies that just want to dip their toe into tracking informal learning, this could be a viable option with a little manual work.

How to Track Informal Learning with an LRS in SharePoint

LRS Essentials:

An LRS, in theory, sounds pretty basic – a rich database that stores learning records. But, there are a few requirements that it must have to be considered a true LRS.

If you were to build your own LRS, you will need to implement all four APIs (application program interface) which specifies how the software components should interact.

1. **Statement API.** The statement API is the way to put statements into an LRS and to get them out of the LRS. You are able to put in single or multiple statements. This is also the API that you would use to pull down statements for reporting purposes.
2. **State API.** The state API is used as a scratch space to support learning activities while they're in process. An example would be a person editing an image as part of a learning activity. They could save the image and then the LRS could pull it so that you would see the state of the edited image over time, and all the changes.
3. **Activity Profile API.** This API stores data about the activities in the LRS. A full description is recorded and it is up to the LRS to determine the best definition for each unique activity. The activity profile API is a way to store documents that represent people showing their work with the activity.
4. **Agent Profile API.** The agent API is similar to the State and Activity APIs, but it's focused on adding additional data about the agents to the LRS. The agent API is a way to connect the different ways a person has been identified across an LRS by adding the different IDs and credentials to the agent.

Security and authentication is also a requirement of an LRS. The system must know and identify who the person is.

And lastly, the LRS must be able to retrieve a collection of statements by carefully indexing the data because efficiently searching the queries can be complex.

LRS: Baby Steps Using SharePoint

We discussed in a recent blog, titled 'LMS, CMS, LRS – Oh My!' that many companies already using SharePoint for content management recognize the benefits of using a SharePoint-based LMS as well. The seamlessness and ease-of-use are huge selling points so it makes sense that incorporating an LRS using SharePoint adds to the feature set.

Due to the specific requirements of an LRS, SharePoint is not capable of being considered a true LRS. However, there is potential for very basic LRS features. In fact, a SharePoint blog had this to say:

What technology exists in your existing learning ecosystem that can quickly and inexpensively be used for gathering informal learning data? Any ideas if this can interface with SharePoint?

How to Track Informal Learning with an LRS in SharePoint

Yes, Tin Can can be integrated with SharePoint. SharePoint is an application that falls into a class of applications that can and should be outfitted with the Tin Can API. The outfitting of a SharePoint instance can be done by the organization using SharePoint.

The first thing we know for sure is that an LRS is essentially a database and that SharePoint excels at content management. With a little customization and structuring, you can create an informal learning database for each employee. Since SharePoint is tied into your active directory, this shouldn't be a problem. It can be very basic or as complex as you'd like.

At its most basic, it's feasible to create learning record 'statements' that would record 'I did this.'

Not only do you need to be able to store the records, but find them as well. SharePoint makes it easy to pull data with its fine-tuned metadata system. With the release of SharePoint 2013, they've added managed Metadata and term store functionality that makes the information contained within SharePoint more accessible, which increases the value of that information while also saving time and improving productivity and satisfaction among users.

Individual learners can also have their own 'Personal Data Locker' using SharePoint MySites in which they can store all of their informal learning data for their own personal records.

The MySite in SharePoint houses everything work-related for an employee from recent projects and tasks, about me, newsfeed and much more. Of course, it would be a great spot to include informal learning records to display. My Sites give users rich social networking and collaboration features, which enable users to explore and share interests, projects, business relationships, content, and other data with people in the organization.

During the review process, a manager could go to the employee's MySite and see a list of their informal learning that they could crossreference with formal training within the LMS.

The last piece of an LRS is security and authentication. Since SharePoint is integrated within your business model already it can easily identify users from active directory. SharePoint is highly secure and access to records can be given based on job role, department etc.

Using SharePoint as an LRS is limited but will give a nice introduction to the useful information that informal learning provides.

How to Track Informal Learning with an LRS in SharePoint

LRS = SharePoint LMS + LRS

At some point, most companies will outgrow the limited LRS abilities of SharePoint and need more functionality and/or streamline the process. This is where adding an LMS – LRS combo would be most beneficial. As mentioned in a previous section, if you're using SharePoint for both content management and training, it makes sense to utilize a system like ShareKnowledge for added informal learning capabilities.

A big part of combining the systems into one comprehensive tool is for reporting purposes. It's great to implement wonderful training programs but if you can't analyze your results, you'll be climbing an uphill battle against your boss who only wants to see results.

One of the exciting new changes in 2016 for ShareKnowledge was the addition of external courses. Workers learn in a variety of ways and sometimes that means outside of the learning portal, e.g. a community college class. In this instance, learners can still get credit by submitting their learning record as an external course in the LMS. Once submitted, the instructor or manager can approve or deny the request. If there is a certificate or proof of completion, the document can also be stored along with the external learning record.

Now, your business can store all elearning in SharePoint, seamlessly move content to ShareKnowledge LMS, conduct detailed training, track informal learning and analyze complete learning reports of your employees. You will love it and so will your employees who won't have to learn yet another user log-in and password.

For more information about training in SharePoint, please visit us on our website at www.ShareKnowledge.com