



LEARNING AS A SERVICE:

A Governance Framework for Buy-in, Adoption,
and Ongoing Success of Learning Shared Services

sumtotal³⁷

WHITE PAPER

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As many Chief Learning Officers (CLOs) have realized, a single Learning Management System (LMS) that operates as a shared service across an organization provides significant benefits:

- Easily accessed, centralized learning hub for all employees, customers, and partners
- Increased learner engagement and satisfaction
- Elimination of learning silos and content redundancy
- Simplified tracking and reporting of organization-wide learning metrics
- Reduction in technology, administrative, and learning costs

When creating a learning shared service, the biggest challenge is often getting Line of Business (LOB) participation and adoption – especially in situations where LOBs can easily purchase and independently manage their own LMS. Without full LOB participation and support, the value of the learning shared service to the organization is significantly diminished, and can jeopardize its long-term survival.

Often LOBs are reluctant to participate in a shared service because they fear losing autonomy associated with centralized resourcing and decision-making. Establishing a robust governance model is a critical mechanism for winning and maintaining LOB trust and active participation.

This guide provides an overview of the core components of an effective learning shared service governance model and practical steps you can take to put this gear in motion.

SumTotal research shows that mature organizations that align on control processes (i.e., governance) gain a stronger handle on decision-making, forward-looking planning, resourcing, and cost.

MANAGE YOUR LEARNING SHARED SERVICE LIKE A LUXURY APARTMENT

With the proliferation of SaaS-based LMS platforms, learning shared services frequently battle “shadow” LMSs independently purchased and run by LOBs along with training administered manually without the use of an LMS. Since a learning shared service program’s success is dependent on organization-wide adoption, demonstrating the value of your learning shared service to LOBs is critical for their participation. Think of it as the equivalent of convincing them to move from a standalone home they own to a luxurious apartment complex that you manage.

In a standalone home, owners enjoy total choice and autonomy to do as they like. The size and amenities are only limited by their budget and imagination. In contrast, they also own all of the headaches and costs associated with maintaining it. In a luxury apartment complex, tenants get access to a larger set of amenities shared by all residents than they could afford in a standalone home (pools, theaters, fancy playground equipment, etc.) and have limited or no responsibility for maintenance. However, these added benefits come at a cost. When compared to homeownership, apartment tenants forgo some autonomy and freedom. The apartment complex’s management makes many decisions on behalf of all residents.

Your learning shared service is the luxury apartment complex, and you are the manager. Not only must you attract and keep tenants, but you must also ensure their satisfaction and provide a smooth day-to-day operation. To get LOBs to agree to move from their standalone homes, you must clearly demonstrate that the benefits of your learning shared service outweigh the cost of lost autonomy. Although in most organizations, the advantages of a learning shared service far outweigh the trade-offs, some LOBs might not immediately grasp this. Instead, they may wrongly overestimate the scale of autonomy loss and underestimate the value of the service to their business.

You must convince them that your learning shared service provides high business value with low autonomy loss due to collective decision-making, well-defined processes, and procedures. When done successfully, you will be rewarded with widespread adoption.

Governance is how you get there.

According to Deloitte, “Moving to a centralized or federated model, standing up shared services, and establishing governance can optimize operations and create accountability and transparency.”¹

¹ “Deloitte, Learning Transformation, 2014”

SEVEN COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

At its simplest, learning shared service governance is about the right people in an organization working together to make collective decisions on how to drive maximum organizational and LOB business value from the service.

Based on experiences working with thousands of customers, we have developed a conceptual governance framework comprising of seven essential elements.

SHARED SERVICE GOVERNANCE		
<p>VISION AND STRATEGY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision/Mission/ Strategy • Living, continually updated roadmap for achievement of vision that sets program direction • Recurring review/update on defined frequency (yearly, etc.) 	<p>OPERATIONAL STANDARDS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clearly defined, transparent model for prioritizing and working requests: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content • Configuration changes • Issue resolution • Roadmap enhancements (features prioritized by steering committee) • Technical updates • Ongoing, detailed program plan • Program roles/responsibilities • Delegated administration model <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permissions • Standards • Processes • Monitoring/auditing 	<p>TECHNOLOGY ALIGNMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous communication/ alignment with LMS vendor • Develop expertise on existing/new LMS capabilities • Ensure program roadmap alignment with LMS roadmap • Drive productivity/ efficiency through process automation and external tools
<p>COMMUNICATIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent communication to stakeholders and learners (changes, education, etc.) • Recurring communication with executive leadership • Communication of success and failures • Solicitation of feedback from stakeholders/ executives/learners 		<p>MEASUREMENT & IMPROVEMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measurement model • Ongoing measurement • Continual improvement based upon feedback • Risk assessment and mitigation
<p>STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive support • Support across all business stakeholders (owners of learning/ talent development in each distinct business entity) • A fair, transparent and structured process for making decisions based upon feedback from stakeholders • Powerful/effective steering committee model for decision-making 		<p>RESOURCES & FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forecast work demand against team capacity • Adjust program capacity based upon forecasted work • Improve productivity/efficiency

1. VISION AND STRATEGY

As the champion for your shared service, you must lay out a plan for the future and secure buy-in. What is your learning shared service's purpose, and why is it relevant to the business? Where do you want to take it?

Develop your vision with input from key executives and all LOBs. The service's mission and strategy must represent a common vision of all constituents and carefully align with the business's overarching strategic goals. As you solicit this input, focus on finding executive alignment and developing value propositions that are salient to your LOBs.

Once determined, create a detailed strategic plan. It should clearly and concisely outline the service's vision, align with key business goals, and your plan for realization.

Your strategic plan should include:

- Program mission and vision
- A phase-based, 24-month roadmap for vision achievement with key milestones
- Anticipated resource needs (LOBs, your shared service team, etc.)

This living document should be your learning shared service's north star. It is a plan that you routinely consult to ensure proper alignment, is freely distributed to executives and LOBs to win program participation, and aids in difficult strategic decision-making in the future. It should be routinely updated and adapted to reflect changes in the business.

2. COMMUNICATION

Communication with executives and LOBs is critical for learning shared service success. It must be formal, frequent, and two-way. A common mistake is wrongly assuming executives recognize the service's value and LOBs remain bought in and satisfied. To avoid this, develop a formalized plan for two-way communication:

- **Outbound** communications (email, newsletter, etc.) to keep executive leadership, LOB stakeholders, and learners updated on your learning shared service. To that end, communicate updates on status, achievements, roadmap, and other important developments. Be transparent about what is and isn't working.
- Solicit **inbound** feedback from your LOB stakeholders, executives, and learners to create a feedback loop. Host recurring meetings, phone calls, surveys, etc. Remember, constituents want to see that you are open to improving and making changes. With that in mind, encourage feedback and suggestions.

3. STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT

Your learning shared service must satisfy the needs of stakeholders—namely executive leadership and LOB leaders. To do this, create a formal steering committee that includes key stakeholders. This governing body, led by you, should meet regularly to help set and update the program’s direction and collectively make strategic and operational decisions. This ensures all stakeholders’ voices are heard, and they feel a sense of ownership. Before seating the steering committee, develop a clear, structured process for leveraging the committee and how it will make decisions. Example uses include:

- Determining which new LMS features to use
- Prioritizing work of the learning shared service
- Determining roles, responsibilities, and permissions
- Delegating LMS administration capabilities to LOBs
- Selecting learning content providers
- Agreeing on LMS’s look and feel changes
- Reviewing and approving organizational-wide communications
- Updating policies and procedures

4. OPERATIONAL STANDARDS

Operational standards are the policies and procedures you will follow to ensure the smooth day-to-day operation of the learning shared service. These standards define how your team responds to and manages requests from LOBs while balancing growth and value creation activities, as defined within your strategic roadmap. How you manage requests, prioritize, and balance strategic versus operational work is critical. These policies and procedures must be clearly defined and well understood by your LOBs to avoid frustration. Allocating time for strategic roadmap activities becomes increasingly important as your service matures. With maturity, the number of operational tasks, requests, and day-to-day issues disproportionately increase, consuming large amounts of time. To accommodate this growth, your team must have clearly defined roles and responsibilities, be properly sized to meet the demand, enforce formal processes, and when appropriate, consider delegating some LMS administrative responsibilities to LOBs.

Delegated administration grants LOB owners control to administer elements of the LMS on behalf of their employees, allowing them to take ownership of some operational tasks, freeing your team to focus on strategic work. However, this model also comes with risks and must be carefully planned to avoid unintended consequences. As in an apartment complex, a fire started in one unit can quickly spread to others, which must be prevented. Leverage your steering committee to determine the safe level of delegated control. The amount of responsibility delegated to LOBs is typically driven by the available capacity of the learning shared service team, the capacity within LOBs, and the significance autonomy plays within your organization’s culture.

To ensure smooth operations, it is also important to define and enforce a clear, transparent process for prioritizing requests from LOBs. Like a help desk, consider prioritizing requests based upon the level of effort, impact to the business, and the number of LOBs the request benefits. Services with large quantities of requests or LOBs may also consider developing parallel fulfillment queues based upon request size

“Since SumTotal’s LMS has been implemented, we have seen turnover in branch assistants decline to our lowest rates ever. We believe having a training resource that is interactive and allows them to complete various phases of the training in segments has helped decrease that turnover.”

— KEN DUDE,
HR PRINCIPAL,
EDWARD JONES

(example: small, medium, large). With parallel queuing, small changes get done rapidly and are not slowed down by larger requests. In addition, providing LOBs the option to co-fund their request to skip the queue is a good idea for large-scale, mature services as it funds shared service team capacity increases. And, like a help desk, when possible, leverage ticketing software for LOBs to easily submit and keep track of their requests and for you to prioritize them. Your organization's IT department likely has software that can be used for these purposes.

However, even the most regimented and efficient learning shared service (even ones utilizing a delegated administration model) will struggle if the demand of the LOBs outweighs the capacity of the shared service team. This can become a serious problem that may result in struggles to execute strategic program elements on time and slow responses to incoming requests. Thus, it's critical to have the right headcount to support anticipated demand.

5. TECHNOLOGY ALIGNMENT

Forming a close partnership and staying in frequent contact with your LMS vendor is important to ensure roadmap alignment and maximize the return on your software investment(s). Since many SaaS-based vendors have multiple updates a year, staying aware of functional changes is important, and, without close communication, can be difficult.

A strong partnership with your LMS vendor will ensure you are:

- Provided advance awareness of, and are leveraging, new product features
- Influencing the vendor's roadmap to ensure upcoming features meet your needs
- Efficiently addressing requests and resolving issues of your users and stakeholders
- Identifying opportunities to add additional value via vendor tools and resources
- Continually provided with best practices and the latest product knowledge
- Connected to a community of likeminded customers

To ensure effective partnership, coordinate quarterly reviews with your LMS vendor to align on business objectives, technology changes, and to address challenges that need to be explored. Other concrete steps to take should include:

- Frequently communicating with your vendor's customer success manager (if provided) to ensure continuous alignment
- Spending time with, and educating your customer success manager (if provided) on your business and your service's vision/mission and roadmap
- Participating in customer committees (design partnership programs) to help influence their product roadmap
- Soliciting advice when contemplating how to tackle a business challenge or opportunity
- Requesting to be introduced to other customers or participating in user groups
- Soliciting best practices that similar customers have found beneficial
- Attending product conferences and meetings

6. MEASUREMENT AND IMPROVEMENT

To prevent atrophy, your learning shared service's performance should be routinely measured, and, based upon the results, improvements made. These results, along with the concrete improvement actions, should be made public. Transparency is critical as it gives you and your stakeholders visibility into what is working and what needs to be improved.

A robust measurement model will allow you to:

- Set clear expectations and goals for both your team and LOBs
- Demonstrate accountability to LOBs and the overall business
- Continually improve to ensure continued LOB satisfaction and buy-in

Measurement of learning strategy effectiveness is complex and will vary by organization. However, measuring a learning shared service's operational performance is more uniform. Develop operational metrics that assess the interaction between the learning shared service team and the LOBs, the effectiveness of the steering committee, and roadmap progress. Example metrics include:

- Request response times
- Quantity of requests by LOB
- Quantity of new features deployed
- LOB and learner satisfaction levels
- On-time roadmap milestone achievements

Ensure these metrics are specific, measurable, actionable, relevant, and timely (SMART). More importantly, they must be measured routinely and consistently so that you can discover and act upon trends. Your organization's IT department likely has software to aid in the measurement process.

7. RESOURCE PLANNING AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Establishing a learning shared service requires careful evaluation of resource need. Since a shared service team will be responsible for both strategic work and operational requests from LOBs, having the capacity to balance multiple workstreams is essential. If the workload outweighs capacity, your team will underserve either operational or strategic needs. You must either increase capacity or reduce work by enhancing productivity or efficiency, slowing timelines, or delegating more responsibility to LOBs.

To properly size your team, leverage both historical LOB or executive request data (if applicable) along with anticipated future work demands to develop a realistic resource forecast. Ensure this forecast includes contingency to account for unanticipated requests and unforeseen business changes.

From the forecast, develop a resource plan broken down by role and skillset. This will help ensure your team is properly staffed and you have no resource bottlenecks. If additional roles or capacity is needed, they should be added to the plan. Cost-effective solutions for increasing capacity include use of internal staff or external hires on a part-time basis. Some consulting firms and LMS vendors also offer flex services that allow you to add additional resource capacity during high demand periods.

**METRICS
SHOULD
BE SMART**

**Specific
Measurable
Actionable
Relevant
Timely**

Due to hurdles frequently encountered by managers when requesting additional headcount and because hiring part-time personnel is fraught with challenges, many organizations find engaging independent consultants, consulting firms, or software vendors as a good, but temporary, solution.

Once you have completed your resource plan, share it with your LMS vendor and peers in similar organizations to get feedback. After you’ve incorporated their feedback and have finalized your plan, socialize it with your LOB stakeholders. Make sure they feel comfortable that the team is correctly sized and can support their needs. Their support will pay dividends if your plan is scrutinized by executives.

Once finalized, incorporate your resource plan into your learning shared service budget. In addition to headcount, be sure to account for software and consulting service costs.

GOVERNANCE ARTIFACTS

The number of artifacts needed to govern a learning shared service will vary by governance complexity and your needs. The following are a superset of “living” documents frequently used as part of shared service governance. Not all documents may be applicable to your organization.

STRATEGY	DECISION MAKING	COMMUNICATION	OPERATIONS	MEASUREMENTS
Mission/vision statement	Decision-making process	Learner communication plan	Intake/prioritization process	KPI dashboard/reports
Long-term strategic roadmap	Feedback process	Stakeholder communication plan	Ongoing project plan	Measurement methodology
Roles & responsibilities		Executive communication plan	Delegated administration model	
Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed (RACI)			Risk log	

THE FIRST SEVEN STEPS TO BUILDING A GOVERNANCE MODEL

Now that you understand the conceptual framework for governance, here are practical steps to get started.

1. CONDUCT STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS.

Ask all stakeholders (i.e., executives and LOB stakeholders) what they want from a learning shared service. From these conversations, define a program mission and vision, and circulate to get buy-in.

2. DEVELOP A PROGRAM ROADMAP.

Lay out the concrete actions and key milestones for fulfilling the program vision and mission in a phase-based 24-month roadmap. Document and circulate this with stakeholders for feedback.

3. PUBLISH AN OPERATIONAL MODEL.

Create a program charter, so everyone understands how the shared service will operate. This will include defining and publishing your processes, standards, key roles and responsibilities, and how decisions will be made.

4. DEVISE A COMMUNICATION PLAN.

Write and publish a plan explaining how you and your team will regularly communicate with all constituents (executives, LOBs, learners, and partners).

5. CREATE A MEASUREMENT MODEL.

Determine the KPIs for measuring program success, the measurement method(s), and their frequency.

6. IDENTIFY AND ACQUIRE SUPPORT TOOLS.

Research and acquire tools that will help execute your governance model.

7. SELECT AND SEAT A STEERING COMMITTEE.

Invite select LOB stakeholders and executives to participate in your steering committee, schedule them regularly, and hold an inaugural meeting.

“UC Health’s Compliance Program is the cornerstone of our organization’s commitment to business ethics and compliance. Without SumTotal’s partnership, we would not be as successful with our annual compliance training.”

— **SUZANNE BURGEI,**
DIRECTOR,
HR DEVELOPMENT &
TECHNOLOGY,
UC HEALTH

RECOMMENDED GOVERNANCE STAND-UP ACTIVITIES

	ACTIVITIES	DELIVERABLES
STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business owner and executive interviews • Creation of mission statement and program vision based upon input • Share vision back to business owners and get feedback • Share finalized vision with executives and get feedback • Finalize mission and vision statement 	Mission/Vision statement
PROGRAM ROADMAP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based upon interviews/vision, whiteboard session, etc., create a program roadmap for the next 24 months <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timeline based upon resource availability, major events, etc. • Share with business owners and executives to get feedback and finalize 	24-Month Roadmap
OPERATIONAL MODEL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop operational model that includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steering committee model/process • Decision-making process • Request submission and prioritization process • Delegated admin standards • Vision/Roadmap revision process • Risk tracking and mitigation process • Shared services roles/responsibilities 	Program charter
COMMUNICATION PLAN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process for communicating updates to learners, stakeholders and executives for events such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roadmap revisions • Major product enhancements • System changes • Program health (success metrics) • Program updates 	Communication plans
MEASUREMENT MODEL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a set of KPIs to measure program performance that are salient to business owners and executives • Determine data and method to use for measurement 	KPIs and targets Measurement methodology
SUPPORT TOOLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research and determine tools use to support newly created governance model such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Request intake and prioritization • Communication/training • Issue tracking 	Tool recommendations and plan for procurement (if applicable)
EXECUTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seat steering committee • Facilitate first steering committee meeting • Ensure compliance with operating model • Make process/standards improvements, as needed 	Working steering committee Operational model compliance

ABOUT SUMTOTAL

SumTotal provides a unified, comprehensive Learning and Talent Development suite that delivers measurable impact across the entire employee lifecycle. With SumTotal, organizations can build a culture of learning that is critical to growth, success, and business sustainability. SumTotal's award-winning technology provides talent acquisition, onboarding, learning management, and talent management solutions across some of the most innovative, complex and highly regulated industries, including technology, airlines, financial services, healthcare, manufacturing, and pharmaceuticals.

Skillsoft and SumTotal are partners to thousands of leading global organizations, including many Fortune 500 companies. The company features three award-winning systems that support learning, performance, and success: Skillsoft learning content, the Percipio intelligent learning experience platform, and the SumTotal suite for Talent Development, which offers measurable impact across the entire employee lifecycle.

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