

A STANDARD WORTH HOLDING TO

The 90/10 rule.

A well-run learning platform runs itself about ninety per cent of the time. Here's what the ninety should cover, what the ten legitimately is, and how to work out where yours actually sits.

THE RULE

Ninety per cent should be automatic

Every learning platform sold in the last fifteen years can automate the repetitive parts of its own operation. Very few are configured to.

The standard I hold any platform to is simple. **About 90% of what it does should happen without a person involved.** The remaining 10% is human work, and always will be.

It matters because it changes the diagnosis. A team drowning in platform admin looks under-resourced. Far more often the platform is doing a fraction of what it's capable of, and people are filling the gap by hand — every week, indefinitely, without anyone asking why.

If your split is worse than 90/10, you have a configuration problem, not a capacity problem.

THE NINETY

What should be running without you

Platforms name these differently and do them with varying grace, but this is the shape of what should be automatic.

People

Joiners, leavers and role changes flowing in from the HR system. Accounts provisioned on first sign-in, access removed the day someone leaves, group membership maintained by rule rather than by hand.

Assignment

Training allocated by role, department, location or competency — so a new starter in a given job receives the right training on day one without anyone deciding. Learning paths that unlock in sequence. Refreshers scheduled the moment the previous completion lands.

Time and chasing

Deadline reminders. Escalation to a line manager when a deadline passes. Certification expiry tracked and recertification triggered ahead of it, not after somebody notices.

Evidence

Certificates issued on completion. Compliance and completion reports built once and delivered on a schedule to the people who need them — not rebuilt by hand each quarter.

Housekeeping

Waiting lists, session reminders and cancellations for instructor-led events. Dormant accounts. Licence usage visible without anyone counting.

THE TEST FOR ANY INDIVIDUAL TASK

If a person is doing it on a schedule, or doing it the same way every time, it should be a rule. Human judgement is for exceptions, not for repetition.

THE TEN

What stays human, and should

The 10% isn't waste. It's the part where the value is, and it never goes away.

THE WORK	WHY A PERSON
Maintenance checks	Confirming the automation is still doing what you think it is. Silent failure is the real risk with rules-based systems.
Integration work	The systems either side of the LMS keep changing. Someone has to keep the joins working.
Reporting	New questions need new reports. Building the report is human; running it should never be.
Courses and content	Adding, updating and retiring material. Judgement about what's still fit to publish.
Promotion	New content nobody knows about achieves nothing. Someone has to tell people.
Issues and tickets	The genuine exceptions — the cases the rules were never going to cover.

DIAGNOSIS

Eight things usually done by hand that shouldn't be

Tick anything your team does manually. Each one is a rule waiting to be written.

- ☐ Enrolling people onto training because they joined a department or changed role
- ☐ Chasing overdue training by email, individually
- ☐ Rebuilding the same compliance report every quarter
- ☐ Issuing or re-issuing certificates
- ☐ Deactivating leavers, or discovering months later that nobody did
- ☐ Re-uploading a spreadsheet of users because two systems disagree
- ☐ Assigning annual refreshers when they fall due
- ☐ Answering the same access or password question over and over

Four or more, and the gap between what you're doing and what the platform could be doing is costing you real time every single month.

MEASURE IT

Working out your own split

You don't need a consultant to do this. You need one month and an honest log.

For four weeks, ask whoever touches the platform to note every task and roughly how long it took. Then sort each line into one of two columns.

COLUMN A

A rule could do this

Repetitive, predictable, same steps every time.

COLUMN B

This needed a person

Judgement, exception handling, something genuinely new.

Add up the minutes. Column B as a share of the total is your real number.

WHAT THE ANSWER MEANS

Around 10% — your platform is working as intended. Protect it, document it, and make sure the knowledge doesn't leave with one person.

20–30% — drifting. Usually a handful of specific rules that were never set up, or were set up and quietly stopped working.

40% or more — the platform is being operated manually. This is a configuration project, and it will pay for itself faster than almost anything else on your list.

The shortcut, if a month is too long

Three questions get you most of the way:

1. When someone joins or changes role, does their training assign itself?
2. Does your compliance report arrive, or does somebody build it?
3. When a certification is about to expire, does the system notice before a person does?

Three noes and you already know your answer.

THE LIMIT

Why it isn't 100%

Chasing total automation is its own failure, and I've been called in to fix the results more than once.

Automation nobody can explain is a liability. Rules built by someone who left, undocumented, firing on conditions nobody remembers setting. Everyone becomes afraid to change anything, and the system calcifies. Automation you can't explain is worse than a manual process you can.

Automating a broken process just breaks it faster. If your competency framework is wrong, rules-based assignment distributes the wrong training to more people more reliably. Fix the process first, then automate it.

Some things genuinely need judgement. Whether content is still accurate. Whether an exception is reasonable. Whether a manager's concern is a system fault or a training design problem. Nobody should be trying to automate those.

Which is the real point of the rule. The 10% isn't the leftover — it's the part that improves things. Every hour spent doing work a rule could do is an hour not spent on the work that actually makes the platform better.

WHAT TO DO

Turning the number into a conversation

If your split is poor, the useful move is to stop framing it as a resourcing problem.

TWO WAYS OF ASKING FOR THE SAME THING

"We need another administrator." A headcount conversation. It will probably lose.

"Our platform is doing 40% of what it should automatically. Here is what the other 60% is costing us in time each month, and here is what it would take to fix." A different conversation entirely, and a much easier yes.

The second version is also just more accurate. That's usually what's actually happening.

FINALLY

Who wrote this

I'm Marc Denman. I've spent more than fifteen years administering, configuring, rebuilding and connecting learning platforms.

That's included Totara, Moodle, Learning Pool, Docebo, LearnUpon, Absorb, Cypher, Learning 360 and Unifyr, for charities, government bodies and private companies, on estates ranging from 300 learners to 45,000, in the UK and overseas. I've built the integrations between those platforms and HR systems including Workday, SAP SuccessFactors and HiBob, CRMs including Salesforce, HubSpot and Zoho, and identity providers including Okta and Microsoft Entra ID.

The 90/10 rule is the thing I say most often, because it's the thing most often missing. Almost every organisation I've worked with was doing by hand something the platform would have done for free.

Red6 sells no software. No partner badges, no licences, no vendor commission — so there's no version of this paper that ends with you being sold a platform.

Want to know your number?

The Red6 LMS Health Check is free: a scored review of your platform across experience, operations, compliance and reporting — including an honest view of how much of it is running itself. Written summary, no obligation, and no sales call unless you ask for one.

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