TERRABIA CONSULTING
Complex training made easy

Part 2: To Subscribe or to Fulfill, That is the Question

One of the greatest features of LMS from SumTotal is its ability to let you create pretty much any sort of learning activity structure you can dream up. SumTotal calls this ability LAA-- "Learning Activity Architecture" (or formerly, OAA--"Open Activity Architecture")--since the way you structure (or *architect*) your learning *activities* is *open*. In fact, it's so open, that sometimes it's hard to even know where to begin your architecting. Which, of course, is why this article was written.

Take Three Steps

There are three basic steps to creating a learning activity structure.

1. Determine if a structure is beneficial.

2. Design the structure.

3. Determine if you'll use a fulfillment or subscription model to create the structure.

Now, let's go into those three steps in a bit more detail.

Step 1

The first question to ask yourself if whether or not you actually need to create a learning activity structure. If you're not sure, ask yourself: What is the benefit of bundling learning activities together? Does it benefit you (for report purposes, perhaps), or does it help the learner understand the training needed to complete a certain subject?
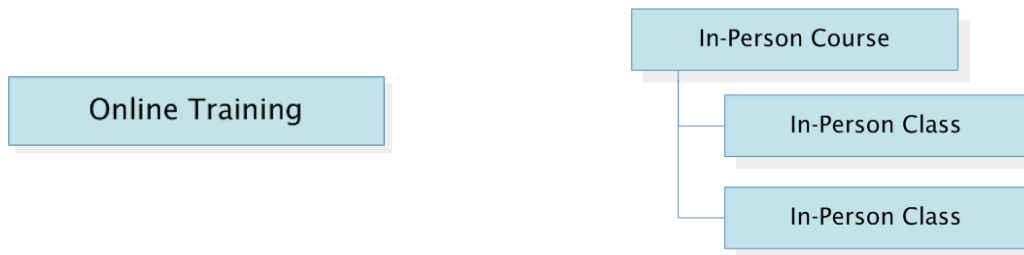
Step 2

Once you're certain you want to create a structure (or, in SumTotal terminology, you're certain you want to *give your activities architecture*), the next step is to design the structure. To do this, you need to determine what training should be included, what activities are optional, and so on. For more on Steps 1 and 2, see the article "Part 1: LAA-LAA Land" at www.terrabia.com/articles.html.

Step 3

Now that you have a design in mind, the final step is to figure out how--technically--you can implement it in the LMS. There are two potential approaches for creating a structure: subscription or fulfillment. For this article, I'll refer to the overall learning activity structure as a

"curriculum." Before you create your curricula you first need to create all the learning activities that will be used within the curriculum, such as in-person courses, classes, and online training.
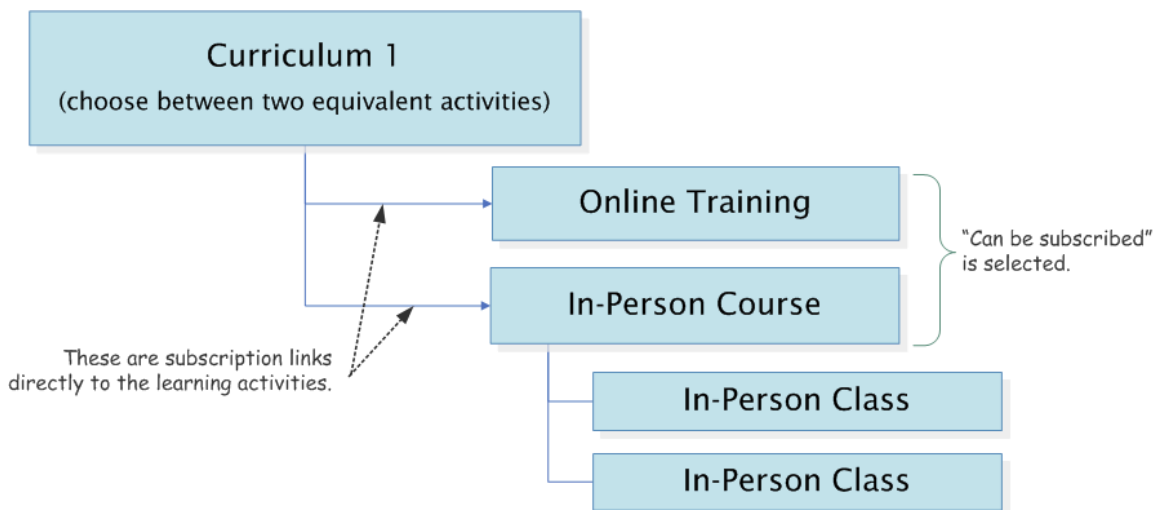

Now, once you have all of your individual activities created and ready to go, you'll need to decide if your curriculum will use a subscription or a fulfillment model.
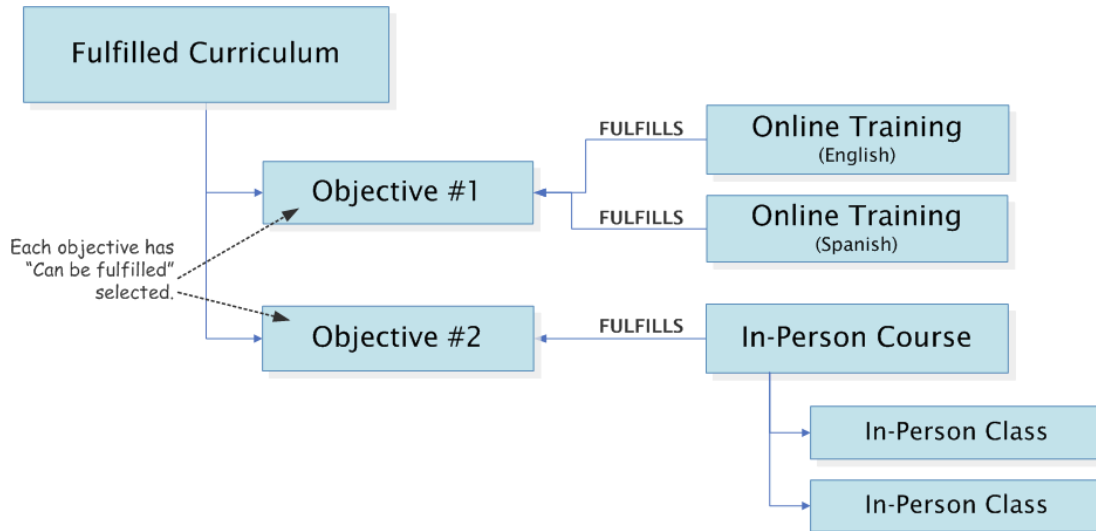
A Defining Moment

A good place to start is by defining the words "subscription" and "fulfillment," as they relate to the LMS. I haven't seen any official definitions, so I've written these myself. As you can see, I'm not exactly cut out to work for Webster quite yet. Remember, subscription and fulfillment are *technically* different ways of creating curricula in the LMS.

Subscription | sŭb **skrĭp'** shən | *n*. A way of creating a curriculum that subscribes to activities, making those activities direct children of the curriculum.

The subscribed curriculum above has two child activities: the online training and the in-person course (which itself has some class offerings). Both the online training and the in-person course must have the property "Can be subscribed" selected. You create the curriculum, and then create the Subscription Links to each of the child activities. **NOTE:** Subscription links are made to the in-person course, not the classes.

Fulfillment | fu̇(l) **fil'** mənt | *n.* A way of creating a curriculum whose child elements are each fulfilled by one or more learning activities.

The fulfilled curriculum above has two child activities: objective #1 and objective #2. In this case, these objectives (goals, concepts, ideas, things to learn, and so on) are fulfilled by individual activities in the LMS. In fact, you can have multiple learning activities fulfill a single objective. In the example above, a learner may complete the English or the Spanish version of the online training to complete objective #1. You create the curriculum and the objectives, and then navigate to each learning activity to create the fulfillment links back to the appropriate objective.

Combining Approaches in the Same curriculum

Can subscription and fulfillment approaches be used together in the same curriculum? Yes, but while it is technically possible, I never recommend it. Why? Because the registration process for learners for subscribed curricula is substantially different than that for fulfilled curricula. Blending them together in a single curriculum can easily confuse the learner.

Which Way Is Right for Me?

There is no one "right" way to structure your learning activities. What's right for you depends on the end results you want and your learners' circumstances. Naturally, there are pros and cons to both approaches … but that's a discussion for another day. For now, though, you--hopefully!-- have a better understanding of what subscription and fulfillment are.

Irene Campbell began working with SumTotal products over 20 years ago and is not holding out for any offers from Webster. Irene loves helping her clients define their unique learning activity structure, and--luckily--her years of working with LMS have made her well aware of all the pros and cons of subscription and fulfillment. In fact, figuring out the best structure is one of her favorite LMS brainteasers! Luckily, Irene's had the benefit of working with clients over extended periods and seeing first-hand how these structures work for them over time.

If you have any comments, questions or suggestions on this article or would like to be notified when new articles are posted, please consider your approach, structure your thoughts, and then send them to articles@terrabia.com*.*