



MICROLEARNING:

# The Modern Strategy for the Modern Workplace

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# This Is the Modern Workplace

If you've read a recent report from any of the key players in Learning & Development, you won't be surprised to hear that modern workplace dynamics are changing. Organizational designs are evolving to become less hierarchical while both employers and employees are placing higher priority on learning. As the corporate landscape changes, it is incumbent upon the learning practitioner to respond with an appropriate strategy that aligns to these shifts in both speed and agility.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN EVOLUTION**

As companies pursue the path to digital transformation, they will be tasked with reckoning their shifting priorities against established hierarchical infrastructure, opting instead for flatter, more nimble, team-based models.<sup>1</sup> This means that traditional organizational design must evolve in response to the speed of an increasingly global, technology-driven economy.

Skills required for employees in flatter organizations:

- » Work across teams to get work done
- » Do more with less
- » Influence without authority

This organizational shift can leave employees unsure in the face of daily change and ill-equipped to meet the goals of transformed companies. There is a critical need to upskill employees, emphasizing readiness, competency, and more agile skill sets.<sup>2</sup> This is especially true for small to mid-market companies, where employees are tasked with multiple roles and expected to work cross-functionally.

## PRIORITIZATION OF LEARNING

Compounding these trends is the shift in employee populations. By 2025, experts predict that millennials could represent up to 75% of the workforce population.<sup>3</sup> And more than any generation yet, this group places a premium on learning, ranking it higher than traditional retirement programs and even spending their own money to get it.<sup>4</sup> The perception of learning has shifted from *nice to have* to *need to have*, with employees viewing learning as critical to their professional development.

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The shift makes sense. Studies show that today's professionals move between jobs more frequently than previous generations, with only 22% of millennials and 21.8% of Gen Xers remaining at a job for over five years.<sup>5</sup> Abbreviated tenure combined with accelerated turnover places tremendous pressure on the L&D practitioner to correctly identify opportunities for learning, rapidly create engaging collateral, and deftly deploy it in a manner that aligns with the employee's day-to-day workflows.

Whether you're ready or not, your employees expect that you will equip and prepare them to thrive and compete in this fast-paced and changing environment. Traditional approaches are not as effective, and in some cases are misaligned with the new workplace. As a result, there is a renewed interest in establishing learning strategies that integrate with daily work and equip employees with the cross-functional skills they need.

# It's Time for a New Strategy

To maintain competitive advantage, today's organizations require practical and actionable learning strategies that respond to these shifting dynamics. Companies need solutions that will catalyze impact and promote curiosity, delight, and engagement.<sup>6</sup>

Enter a Microlearning® strategy.

Despite a plethora of myths and misnomers, Microlearning isn't just about brevity. With roots in cognitive science, it's a transformative approach to workplace learning that reflects the best theory and design. A Microlearning strategy is the catalyst companies need to develop their employees as individuals, not just as individual contributors. Traditional learning strategies can take too long, protracting development timetables with outdated design methodologies (ADDIE, anyone?) and producing learning that doesn't keep pace with the changing needs of employees. A Microlearning strategy is flexible, targeting single concepts that influence critical employee behaviors and uploaded organizational goals.

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# A Microlearning<sup>®</sup> Strategy in 3 Steps

A Microlearning strategy is a modern, effective approach to workplace learning that offers employees targeted and focused lessons right within their workflows so they naturally learn new behaviors over time. Follow these three steps to successfully identify, design, and deploy your Microlearning strategy.

## 1

### Start Small

Every learning strategy begins by spotting behaviors that help or hurt your company's goals. Many "first time" learning initiatives fail because the scope is too large. Set yourself up for success by first narrowing in on a set of specific employee behaviors that will support your company's business goals. Then craft a strategy around that.

#### **IDENTIFY A PROBLEMATIC BEHAVIOR**

What's holding your company back from achieving its goals? Look for pain points that illuminate the breakdown of communication and difficulties between cross-team functionality. To substantiate a Microlearning strategy, these problematic behaviors don't have to be wide-spread, but they should be persistent enough to identify and target. Ultimately, a Microlearning strategy should dovetail with a company's broader L&D strategy, targeting specific behaviors with solutions rooted in learning design fundamentals.

## SEEK OUT THE ROOT CAUSE

It's not enough to spot problematic behaviors. The challenge comes with validating that you have correctly identified the primary cause. There are many reputable root cause analysis exercises, but the "Five Whys," made famous by Toyota as part of its lean manufacturing approach, is perhaps the most well-known. While you don't always need to use five whys—sometimes two or three are enough—the exercise prompts you to validate the root cause through the persistent and sequential questioning of "why." Persisting in finding the root cause of problematic behaviors will ensure that your solution addresses the most critical problem.

## ALIGN WITH A COMPANY GOAL

To create a valid and credible Microlearning strategy, you must align the targeted behavior to a company goal. As the L&D practitioner's role has become more strategic, so must the proposed initiatives align with the company's strategy. Ensure that the identified behavior is mission critical for your organization and make the case plainly when you pitch the initiative.

### QUESTIONS

» What recurring pain point have you identified?

### TO CONSIDER:

» What steps have you taken to validate the root cause?

» Why is this issue more critical than others?

» How does this issue align with larger business goals?

» What will improve on account of targeting this issue?

# 2

## Stay Focused

Now that you've identified the target behavior, you'll need to stay focused to maximize impact. Be mindful of the "also rans" – those similar yet different initiatives that divide your focus and weaken the impact of your initiative.

## IDENTIFY COMPETING PRIORITIES

Once you pitch this idea to management, make sure that you're aware of other ancillary goals that might try to hitch themselves to this training and distract you from the objective at hand. Spreading your efforts across a laundry list of priorities is a recipe for weakening your impact. When competing priorities pop up, be prepared to defend the discrete business impact of the original solution you've proposed and suggest keeping the solutions separate from each other to maximize their effects on employees.

### QUESTIONS

#### TO CONSIDER:

- » What's your approach to resolve the root issue?
- » What competing priorities do you anticipate will divide attention from this strategy?
- » What steps have you taken to ensure that you stay focused on this strategy?
- » In what ways are you ensuring new learning is offered in context of real work?

# 3

## Make It Stick

Deploy content to employees in the context of their work, with clear areas of application and opportunities to transfer their new knowledge and skills in their day-to-day activities. By increasing the stickiness of your learning strategy, you will more successfully change employee behavior.

### FOCUS ON TRANSFER

Learning that is immediately transferred or applied to a real-work scenario has a significantly greater chance of sticking. This is the power of a Microlearning strategy. Real learning that takes place in real work.



## IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WON'T (NECESSARILY) COME

Architecting a strategy is one thing. Successfully deploying it is another. A solid Microlearning solution should be deployed in context. This means you must surround the strategy with appropriate communication, making explicit connections to your employee's work, and tasking your managers with appropriate follow-through and follow-up.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- » How might you enhance your employee's connection between learning and daily work?
- » In what ways are you providing your employees meaningful opportunities for transfer?
- » How will you create meaningful context for your employees?
- » In what ways does your company promote a learning culture?
- » What are the limiting factors to your company's continued growth as a learning culture?
- » What are the ways you might positively influence your company's learning culture?
- » How are you maximizing employee retention of new learning?

## Final Thoughts

A successful Microlearning strategy, like all learning strategies, must be aligned to company goals, anchored in relevant context, and adherent to solid learning design principles. Its greatest impact comes when it is positioned as a component of an overarching learning strategy, utilized to target and improve critical employee behaviors. There will always be a place in corporate learning for instructor-led training, peer learning, and blended, even flipped, classroom models. But a Microlearning strategy is uniquely effective in empowering the L&D practitioner with a flexible and agile approach to help employees thrive in the modern workplace.

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