

Master-0



Modern Learning

Introduction To Microskills

Context

Personalizing learning has long been in discussion among HR and L&D executives as the next big imperative towards making learning more self directed and more effective.

As we enter the second half of the 2010-decade, this imperative will further gain momentum owing to three powerful dynamics that continue to redefine our lives and our work.



Time: In our quest for optimizing productivity, we are in a constant battle against time. In fact, statistics related to the workplace suggest employees can only invest 1% of their time in a week on training and development. On the flip side, it is said that within 24 hours of attending a training program, as much as 70% is forgotten on average by an employee.



Perception of learning or training: With time not on our side, it's no surprise that we have also changed our outlook towards learning. For one, attending a training program is viewed as more work or stealing critical time away from work. This fundamentally breaks the notion of viewing training as an enabler towards achieving our results. A big reason for this change has been that training has not kept pace with the changes shaping our lives, including at the workplace.



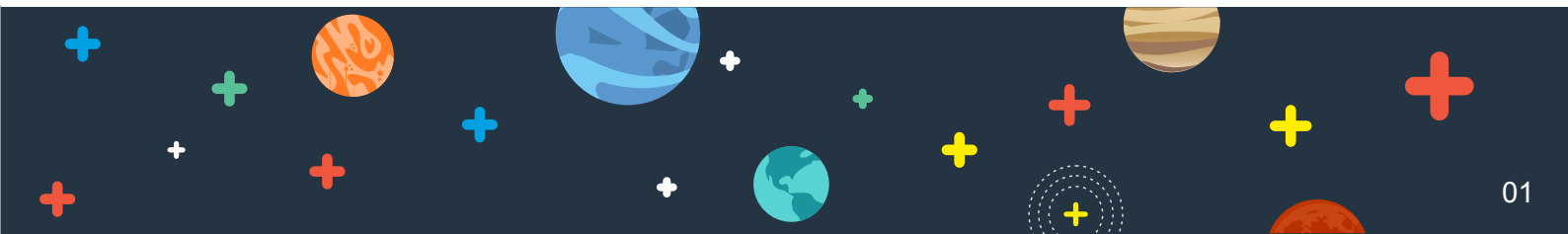
Content: To add to the above, content has exploded and become more ubiquitous than ever before. The downside to this ubiquity has been finding the right content (or curated content) has become an even bigger challenge for organizations and individuals. Getting the right content at the right time and in the right format continues to be a critical reason why personalization of learning has not reached its stated potential.

As the trend towards consumerization of technology gathers pace, this effect can noticeably affect the way learning solutions are deployed in organizations and experienced by the end user.

As an analogy, if we look at the music industry, there has been tremendous progress towards personalizing music to our individual preferences. Starting from the iTunes platform, which radically altered music and allowed us to select individual songs, we now see personalized music streaming applications, which gain an understanding on our preference for music and continue to stream new songs, based on our preference.

In a similar way, what if we could personalize sales training for a company's sales force and continue to iterate on the personalization of content to suit the learner's requirement based on her strengths and weaknesses, preferences and pattern for learning et al?

To achieve such a microscopic level of personalization in learning, it may be prudent to start with as small or specific a problem as possible.



More specifically, the ability to personalize learning for the employee and make it effective for the organization implies carefully considering the following three factors:



Start small: Don't think sales training, think sales probing or objection handling or planning and prospecting. In other words, break your training program or learning curriculum into its most basic and smallest elements, which can be learnt through standalone content. This forms the periodic table equivalent of your learning curriculum from which you would be able to deploy an iTunes like personalized experience to your employees.



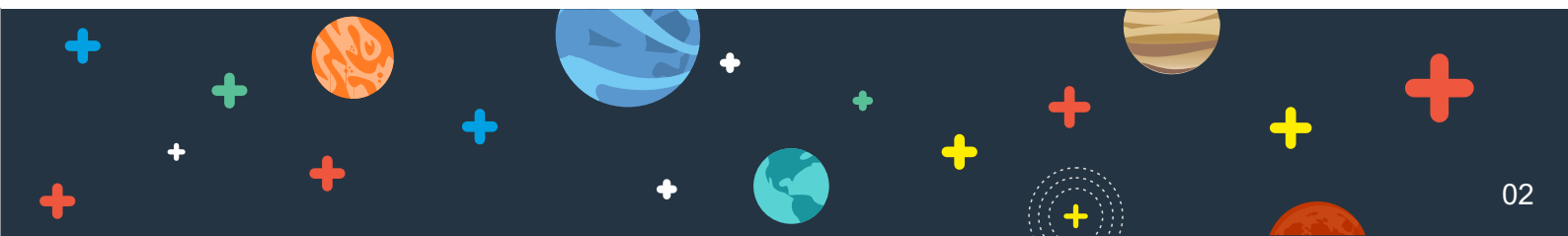
Time your content: Chunk the content for smaller time consumption that not just fits an individual's idle schedule, but more importantly allows him to apply the learning in a quick and effective manner. A key reason why employees fail to apply what they learn from a training program is because the ability to retain the specific concept (eg: probing skills) gets lost within the list of other concepts, tools and discussions that were part of the learning experience during the program. Most neuroscientists now believe that people can only hold three to five pieces of information in their working memory at one time. This, coupled with the current learning approach makes retention of learning harder and therefore more improbable to apply on the job.



Experiment and iterate: By starting small and executing fast, you have the ability to pivot from failures and iterate based on the evidence of how employees experienced the repackaged content. This approach makes learning more agile and likely to sustain as continuous iteration eventually would lead to personalization.

By following this approach, we believe L&D executives will not only personalize learning but also discover new and rather smaller skills that are easier to retain and apply.

Welcome to the world of Microskills!



Introduction to Microskills

Microskills can be thought of as an approach—one that says thinking small helps overcome some of the biggest challenges facing both L&D executives as well as employees in today's business environment.

A microskill can be taken out of any established topic, skill or module across functional, technical, behavioral or even leadership related skills. Think of them as the smallest representation or element of a skill that can be learnt independently, but also has enough depth in order to establish different levels of mastery.

As an example, let us take a look at the necessary skills required for a successful sales person. While there could be many variations or additional elements, some key skills would include:

1. Planning
2. Prospecting
3. Probing
4. Creating solutions
5. Objection Handling
6. Negotiating
7. Closing
8. Relationship Management

If an organization with 2,000 front line sales reps decides to train it's sales force, they would possibly adopt a rigorous 2 or 3 (maybe even 4) day classroom training program to cover each of these skills and effectively onboard the sales rep. However, keeping the challenges we discussed earlier in mind, what happens when:

1

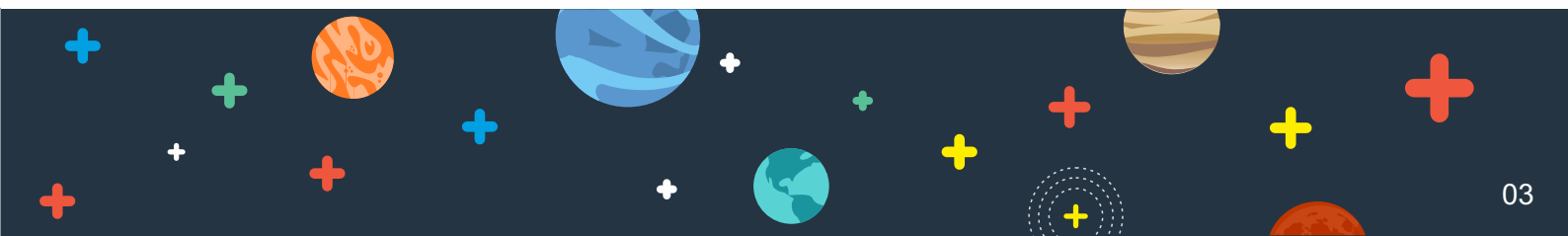
A sales rep fails to retain the four-step probing technique during a meeting a new prospect

2

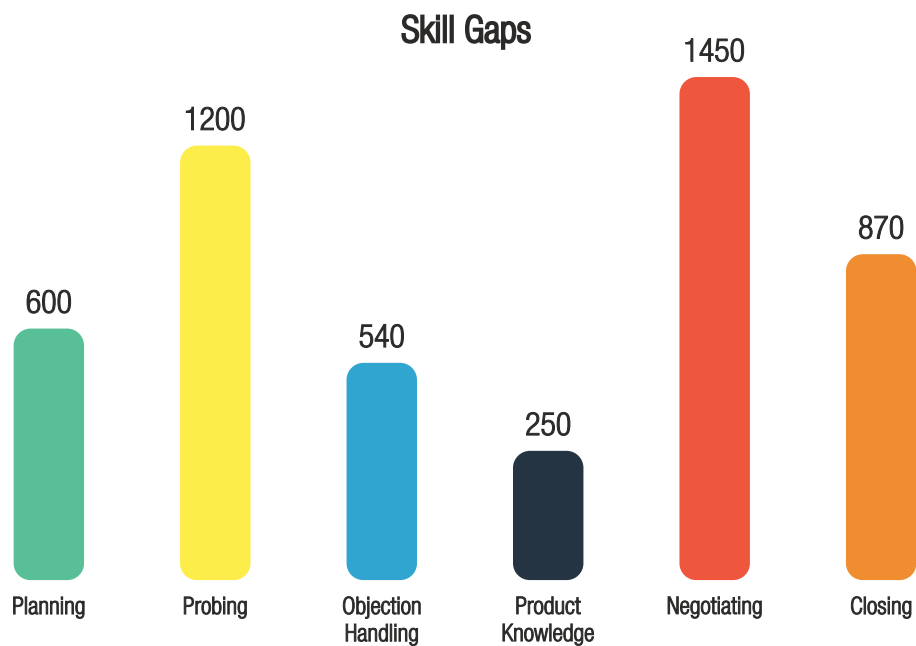
A sales rep is talked out of his product by an existing client's objection of having a superior product from a competitor

3

A new sales rep struggles to prioritize her list of prospects



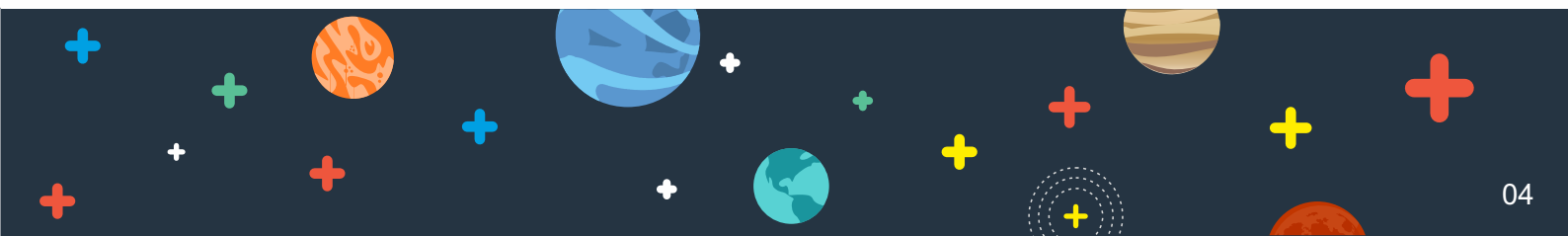
While all three situations relate to a failure to retain or apply, they are also different and personal to three different sales reps. To further elaborate the point, what happens if the distribution of challenges across the above selling skills for this 2,000 strong sales force looks something like this:



Surely the company would hesitate to bring these reps back to the classroom to either retrain them or even divide them into groups based on the above challenges. Furthermore, each of the above skill gaps would have multiple nuances or contexts in which the learners could have individual challenges. To personalize the learning, the company would need an effective and scalable approach to break down these skills further and go deep to address each of these challenges.

For example, challenges related to Planning could further break down that skill into the following microskills:

Challenge	Microskill
Poor Habits: Unable to plan	When to plan and how to plan
Attitude: Does not believe planning is important	Why to plan
Makes aggressive sales forecasts	Thorough planning
Over planning: Spending too much time	“Actioning” the plans



How can microskills personalize learning?

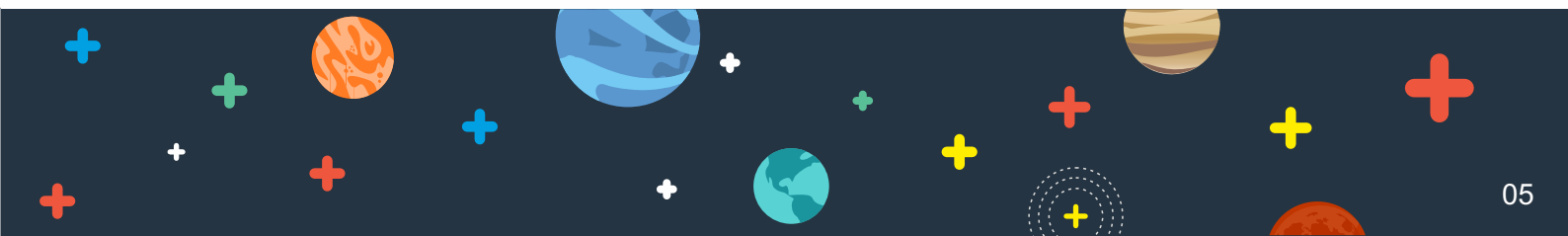
Taking the above example further, of the 400 sales reps struggling to plan effectively, we notice there are four specific nuances within planning where reps face challenges. Furthermore, each challenge has multiple contexts within which these challenges occur.

For a high performing sales rep struggling with poor planning habits, the context can be inconsistency in daily planning. While for another sales person, the inability to plan could be due to poor time management.

In each of these instances, the objective would be to improve the ability to plan. By understanding various nuances within each of the above four challenges, the organization would be able to target a more pin-pointed problem and make the microskill (and hence the learning) more personalized.

Adopting such an approach would help address the following challenges in a more effective manner as shown in the revised table below:

Challenge	Context	Microskill
Poor Habits: Unable to plan	A newly appointed sales rep with little sales experience	When to plan and how to plan
Attitude: Does not believe planning is important	A high performing sales rep	Why to plan
Hollow planning: Makes aggressive sales forecasts	Covering sales backlog from the previous quarter	Thorough planning
Over planning: Spending too much time	Poor field activity	“Actioning” the plans
Changing plans: Not staying the course long enough	Not meeting quarterly sales quota	Measuring plans & iterating
Alignment: Planning in isolation and on the fly	Identify a couple of new but unplanned sales opportunities	Validating plans



How can organizations leverage microskills?

As the example of the sales training showed us, microskills are not restricted to any specific type of learning – they are universal and can be useful across any type of training.

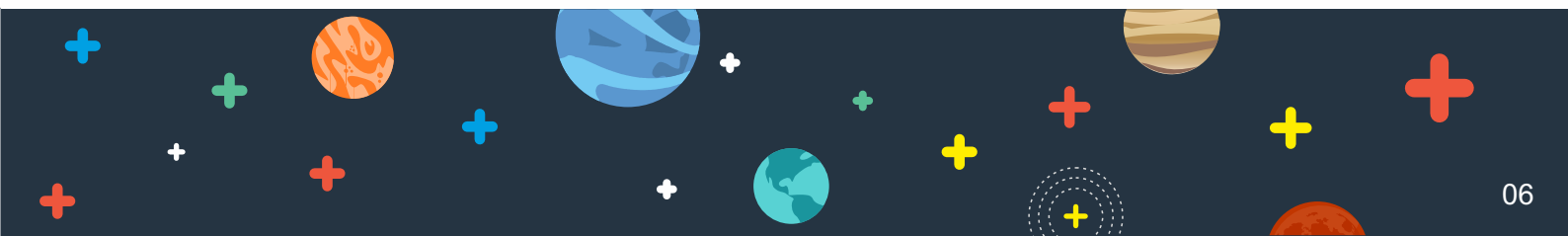
Moreover, there is no set formula that only makes the microskills effective if it is clubbed with a classroom training program or eLearning course.

The general rule that organizations should follow is to identify if the application points for a particular training requirement are specific, short and contextualized enough to qualify the use of creating a microskill. In that respect, microskills are not a replacement for existing learning methodologies. Instead they address a unique and ever-growing scenario where learning can provide instant gratification and a quick fix. In such scenarios, the cost of doing nothing can quickly bubble out of control whereas the impact of doing a training program may not be as immediately apparent.

While microskills represent a new approach to learning, it also provides a compatible approach for organizations to re-use and repackage their existing training content. That means less investment in generating newer content and more focus in understanding what are the specific areas of application in between a learner's daily habits where microskills can provide a quick fix and instant results. Hence microskills need to ensure both learning and application of learning fit within this new time schedule of the modern learner.

It's true that today's learner has anywhere between 10 to 15 instances of idle time, each lasting between 1 to 3 minutes

By building microskills that do deep into a subject (like in the case of sales planning), organizations can also build a strong value proposition for employees to build mastery in microskills and thereby increase their own employee value. This is critical as employees increasingly become inundated with work pressure and yet have to constantly re-learn in order to be right skilled in an ever-changing business environment.



About Master-0

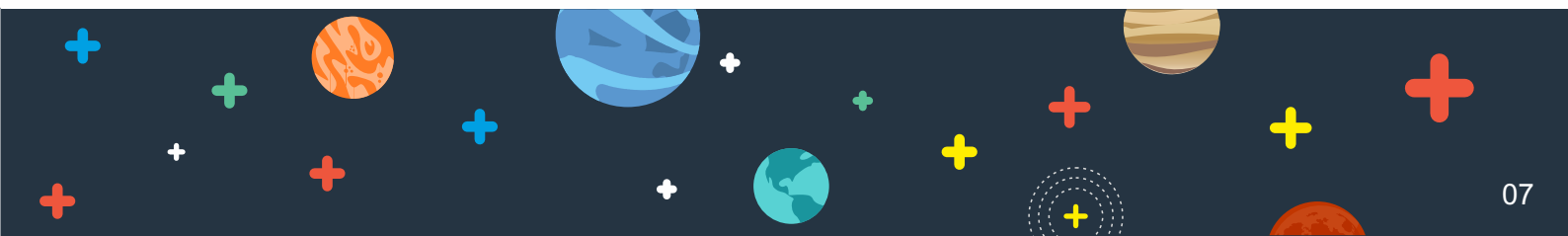
Master-0 provides a mobile-based learning experience that leverages microskills to make learning effective and enjoyable. By creating microskills that blend content with game design and behavioral science, Master-0 ensures quick learning and enhanced retention and application on the job.

Make use of our extensive library of microskills ranging from sales and customer service to personal productivity and leadership or partner with us to create custom microskills that fit your specific learning and business requirements.

Create Your Own Microskills with Master-0

Learn more:

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