



Introducing Microskills[®]

A whitepaper on game-based microlearning on mobile

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 MICROSILLS®!

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:

01

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

02

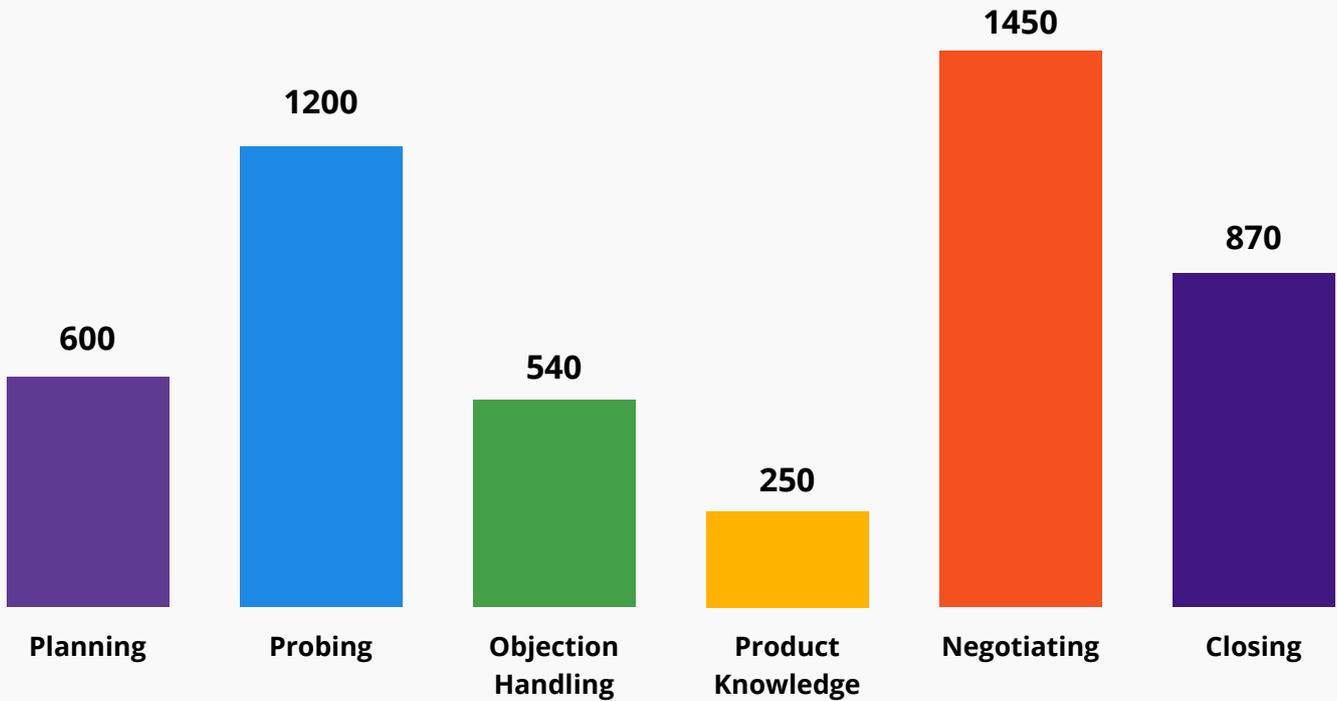
A sales rep is talked out of his product by an existing client's objection of having a superior product from a competitor

03

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:

SKILL GAP ANALYSIS



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: Believes planning is not 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 evergrowing 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 go 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.

Microskills® Library

Master-O comes with an in-built library of microlearning content in the form of 47 Microskills®.

These Microskills® can be contextualized for an organization and for various roles, based on their goals, workflows and challenges. The Microskills® are clubbed within six categories that cover a variety of critical behavioral & functional skills that are required, from the front line to first time managers and above.

Sm	Ch	Ss	Pq	As	Pb	Sp	Cr	Ci
Pr	Sv	Ao	Cd	Ne	In	Rs	Ri	Uc
Ov	Lh	Eg	Mo	In	Tr	Fe	Co	Dg
De	Tc	Ps	Et	Pm	Ue	Hd	Ma	Hs
Uo	Sa	Gs	Pp	As	Dm	Hi	He	Bl
Df	Hf							

 Customer Service	 Retail Sales Enablement	 Personal Effectiveness
 Sales Enablement	 Leadership Development	 Product Specific



Developing a service mindset

Understand the importance of a service mindset by experiencing concepts such as material or personal service, internal versus external customers, among others.



Complaint handling

Change the way you perceive customer complaints and learn how you can build a lasting impression (and relationship) with irate customers.



Service skills

Learn to apply service skills such as building rapport, problem solving, understanding body language and others to create customer delight.



Personal quality

Build a mindset of quality through concepts like AP level vs. IP level, one meter & one centimeter and how you can create your own stamp of quality.



Assertive service

Understand the difference between assertion versus aggression. Learn situations where it is ok to say "No" and how best to communicate it.



Presenting your best

Learn how managing your own emotions can help bring out the best in you. Understand the importance of empathy to better relate with people.

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Sales planning

Learn how to source prospects by planning your time and territory and learn to prioritize your accounts to maximize productivity.

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Customer research

Research about customers & competition, products & services.
Understand how to link the objectives of a sales call to the intended outcome.

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Customer interactions

Learn how to capture the customer's attention. Focus on what matters most to the customer in order to control the interaction and achieve your objectives.

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Sales probing

Learn to identify the short term and long term needs and wants of the customer and understand how to articulate stated and unstated needs.

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Selling value

Learn how to pitch and craft the most effective value proposition to the customer.

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Answering objections

Manage customer objections and align expectations by building trust in order to create customer satisfaction and take the deal forward.



Closing deals

Learn how to gain customer commitments and nurture relationships for generating long term business.



Sales negotiations

Learn about the art and psychology of negotiation, including the negotiation process and the different trading components involved.



Influencing

Understand how to adapt influencing strategies to different customer profiles to create win-win situations and build alliances.



Rs

Retail setup

Focus on optimizing parameters for the shop, staff and marketing.
Understand and articulate the teams' roles and responsibilities.



Ri

Customer interactions

Understand and apply core interaction skills with customers to better assess their needs and requirements.



Uc

Understanding customers

Operate, demonstrate & sell using a model for shop success and understand the buyer's motives.



ov

Offering value

Win over the customers by offering upsell, cross-sell & plus sell opportunities for additional purchases in a retail shop.



Lh

Last-mile hurdles

Perform by understanding buyer signals, overcoming customer objections and building urgency to act.



Eg

Experience greatness

Learn how exceptional service makes a customer grateful and receptive to professional advice.



Motivation

Learn how to apply motivation approaches like Maslow's theory of needs & McClelland need theory with your team.



Influencing

Learn how to map and identify win-win situations with peers, customers, managers and other stakeholders.



Transitioning into a new role

Manage expectations and achieve results as you transition from an individual contributor to a people manager.



Feedback

Learn how to boost the performance of your team members by providing ongoing, developmental feedback for various situations.



Coaching

Learn how to have effective coaching conversations with your team members and use a powerful technique to structure your coaching sessions.



Developmental goals

Learn how to plan your goals and match them with your stakeholders' expectations.



Delegation

Learn how to allocate tasks and resources among your team members and know how to communicate the role expectations to your team members.



Team work and collaboration

Learn how to collaborate and cooperate among team members and understand how to utilize your team's capability to drive outcomes.



Problem solving

Learn the process of solving a problem and help your team members to solve their problems quickly.



Establishing trust

Understand how trust plays a critical role at the workplace and how to use techniques to build trust with your colleagues.



Performance management

Learn how to enhance your team's performance through structured conversations.



Understanding emotions

Learn how do we experience emotions & differentiate challenging emotions such as fear, sorrow & hatred.



Handling disappointment

Learn how to describe & handle disappointment with resilience.



Managing anger

Learn about the triggers that lead to anger & how to handle them.

Get a deeper understanding of converting anger into constructive action.



Handling stress

Learn how to assess levels of stress & cope with stress at the workplace & outside (short term & long term).



Understanding others

Learn how do people express themselves & be attentive to differences by asking open ended questions. Tune in to others & suspend judgement.



Self-awareness

Understand productivity & how personal barriers can block stellar performance. Learn how to identify and overcome such barriers.



Goal setting

Learn how to articulate your goals and determine what you need to do to achieve your goals.



Planning & prioritizing

Recognize the importance of planning & learn the five principles of prioritizing to make your workday as productive and meaningful as possible.



Assertiveness

Learn how being assertive enables you to achieve more and focus more time on what truly matters for your role.



Debt market

Learn the key terms used in debt market & advanced features of debt market such as gilt funds, treasury bills.



Home insurance

Learn the benefits & features of home insurance.



Health insurance

Understand the importance of health insurance, the industry dynamics and the benefits, features & key terms used in health insurance.



Basics of life insurance

Understand the importance of life insurance along with key terms used in the industry.



Managing dealer finance

Understand how a dealer's business operates financially and how does capital investment work for their business.



Housing finance

Improve your understanding of the processes followed in the housing finance industry.

About Master-O

Master-O 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-O ensures quick learning and enhanced retention and application on the job. Make use of our extensive library of microskills ranging from sales and customerservice 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-O!

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