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How to Plan and Design Microlearning

The Elearning Coach podcast

Connie Malamed, Karl Kapp and Robyn Defelice • The Elearning Coach © 2019

Human Resources / Learning & Development

Take-Aways

- Microlearning units help participants engage with and apply traditional learning content.
- Microlearning supports knowledge retention.
- Microlearning can stimulate thinking or motivate action.
- Microlearning lessons are effective when they are well-planned and concise, but they are never a substitute for deep learning.

Recommendation

"Microlearning" is a trending buzzword among L&D professionals, but it remains a poorly defined and ill-understood concept. In a podcast discussion with *The Elearning Coach* host Connie Malamed, guest speakers Karl Kapp and Robyn Defelice, the authors of the first comprehensive guide to microlearning, debunk misunderstandings and offer tips for putting microlearning into action.

Summary

Microlearning units help participants engage with and apply traditional learning content.

Microlearning is a short instructional unit with a clearly defined learning outcome. It isn't time-bound and usually forms part of a broader curriculum or learning program. Developers design microlearning units to engage people and help them immediately apply new content to tackle a specific challenge.

> *"Karl [Kapp] and I described microlearning as an instructional unit that provides a short engagement in an activity intentionally designed to elicit a specific outcome from the participant." (Robyn Defelice)*

One example of a microlearning campaign is iLookOut, designed to help child care workers identify suspected cases of child abuse. The caseworkers learned how to identify potential cases of child abuse in a conventional, video-based training class. In the following weeks, they received a series of microlearning lessons via their cellphones. The weekly lessons served as learning content reminders and nudged the caseworkers to watch out for signs of abuse during their daily interactions with children. Another example is the Elevate app, which offers daily exercises to help users train specific areas of their brain.

Microlearning supports knowledge retention.

Repeating information at regular intervals encourages knowledge retention. Microlearning lessons help participants refresh their memory about previously acquired learning content. Mobile apps are an ideal way to deliver the lessons at set intervals.

> *"Now that we have a computer in our pockets, we're able to have that learning anywhere." (Karl Kapp)*

Moreover, turning content into little games keeps the content interesting and motivates participants to engage with it. Such games help to keep learning playful. Microlearning is particularly effective at prompting participants to practice what they have learned, including basic math skills and presentation skills. In this sense, microlearning fits well into existing learning programs.

Microlearning can stimulate thinking or motivate action.

"Pensive" use cases of microlearning deliver prompts to help participants evaluate experiences they have been through and to draw appropriate lessons. This kind of microlearning is particularly well-suited for self-directed people and works as a coaching tool. Pensive learning in a question-and-answer format can also be a great tool for brainstorming and troubleshooting. Meanwhile, "persuasive" use cases of microlearning remind people of the value and purpose of a specific task and help them turn it into a habit. One organic restaurant, for example, attached explanations to each of their differently labeled trash cans to explain what kind of trash goes in and how the restaurant will recycle it. The knowledge the guests acquire may motivate them to become more conscientious recyclers themselves upon leaving the restaurant.

Microlearning lessons are effective when they are well-planned and concise, but they are never a substitute for deep learning.

Variety and conciseness represent two important guiding principles when designing microlearning units. It's beneficial to let participants engage with the content in various ways, such as by listening to a podcast or playing a game. Moreover, the content must be concise and to-the-point, with regard to both the individual units and the overall learning product. After all, each microlearning piece should have only one or two precise learning outcomes for the end user.

Keep in mind, though, that microlearning should never be a substitute for deep learning. The tool doesn't allow participants to acquire a deep understanding of a subject matter and engage in the type of deep reflection that is necessary to master a specific area of expertise.

About the Podcast

On *The Elearning Coach* podcast, host **Connie Malamed** interviews designers, developers, authors and professors about learning trends, offering fresh ideas and actionable tips for creating online and mobile learning experiences. **Karl Kapp**, PhD, is a professor at Bloomsburg University's Institute for Interactive Technologies. **Robyn Defelice**, PhD, is director of training at Revolve Solutions. They've co-written *Microlearning: Short and Sweet.*

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