Qstream®

# Microlearning: What It Is and Why It's the Missing Piece in Your L&D Strategy

# Learning Is Critical to Your Organization's Success

Organizations today are under pressure from a broad spectrum of internal and external factors that threaten their ability to execute on strategic goals.

Talent shortages persist despite the reopening of the economy. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, a record-setting 4.3 million workers quit their jobs in August of 2021 while 10.4 million jobs went unfilled in the same time frame. This long-term talent drought makes recruiting, engaging, and retaining the workforce you need to run your business extraordinarily difficult.

Another factor is the sheer speed and volume of change. Since the onset of the pandemic, entire organizations, cities, and nations have endured (and continue to endure) a tornado of technological, economic, social, and political change. New technology, economic upheaval, and ever-evolving policies are the new normal for your organization and, of course, your people.

In this environment, learning will be the keystone of a successful talent strategy. Why? Because it has the potential to close current and future talent gaps by growing your internal supply of in-demand skills and helping your organization attract and retain workers. An active, continuous approach to learning also enables your organization to adapt to change more quickly. By implementing this framework, you are cultivating new skills and knowledge in your organization *as they become relevant*.

According to recent research by IBM, the half-life of skills is shrinking in many categories of work. This means your ability to continuously develop and redevelop your people is strategically important to your business. However, current learning tools and modalities simply are not built to keep employees up to speed nor are they ready to take on the ever-shifting priorities and challenges of your business. Today's organizations need learning solutions that are flexible, highly relevant, and, above all, capable of delivering true business impact.

Microlearning is a powerful way to address many of these challenges; however, the category has become rather noisy and ill-defined in the marketplace. This white paper will clearly define what microlearning is (and what it isn't) and describe the role it plays in modern learning and development.

# Tuning Out the Noise Around Microlearning

When the topic of microlearning is mentioned, many L&D professionals nod their heads and say, "We have microlearning in our LMS!" or "We use microlearning all the time!" But more often than not, the tools and techniques they are thinking of aren't microlearning at all.

Microlearning is more than just shrunken content. A successful strategy requires a more holistic approach — an end-to-end solution that presents newly learned material and reinforces it on an ongoing basis.

When your people are under-trained or lacking in fundamental skills, it costs your organization money — at best. At worst, it puts people's lives in real danger, especially in high-stakes industries, such as healthcare. Many vendors try to claim they are at the cutting edge of learning science, but all too often, they are selling shiny objects that are ill-suited to your learning needs.

Marshall McLuhan said, "The medium is the message," and we believe that applies to modern learning. Learning technologies that rely too heavily on gamification, for example, will fail to communicate the importance of the material being delivered. When technology resembles games from a smartphone's app store rather than serious learning tools, your

employees will not engage with the content on as deep a level. This is not the way to build skills and knowledge that are fundamental to your business.

## What Is Gamification?

Gamification, or "game mechanics," uses learning challenges, leaderboards/rankings, rewards, and other intrinsic motivators that drive engagement through friendly competition among peers.

Real microlearning is grounded in science, built for hyper-relevance, made to engage the learner as part of their daily routine, and driven by metrics that demonstrate proficiency and job performance.

## Let's clear a few things up. Microlearning is not …

- ⊗ Simply distributing short videos or portions of webinar recordings in your LMS
- ⊗ Taking a larger traditional learning program and chopping it into "bite-size" knowledge morsels
- ⊗ Over-gamified mobile content
- ⊗ A one-and-done post-learning activity for previously taught information

# Addressing the Perennial Challenges of L&D

Any attempt to upskill and reskill your people for maximum business performance must contend with a variety of challenges.

The "forgetting curve" is a perennial stumbling block for learning and development. First documented in 1885 by psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus, the forgetting curve demonstrates that the more time that passes after our initial exposure to information, the more of it we forget. As much as 70% of what we learn will disappear after three months without further intervention or reinforcement.

But simply remembering new information is not enough to have a substantial business impact. What use is it if your people can regurgitate important concepts, but never apply them to their work? You need learning solutions that increase retention and build actual proficiency in new skills. Your people need realistic, scenario-based practice to build these skills and behaviors so that they can be applied to daily work.

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Another challenge common to modern learning is relevance. When your business and your people are constantly adapting to change, they don't have time for learning content that isn't relevant to their needs at that moment. Why should your people watch a webinar when only 25% of it has information they didn't already know? Why should they complete a learning module when only 15% of it has any bearing on the new regulatory guidelines they have to follow?

True microlearning addresses these challenges and increases employee performance across the board by giving learners immediate, individualized feedback while reinforcing concepts and closing skill gaps with spaced learning over time.
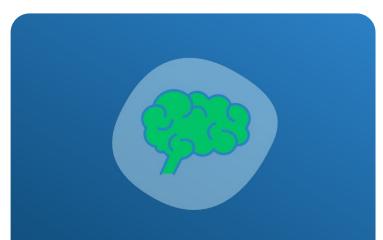
# The Spacing & Testing Effects: Flipping the Learning Model to Build Better Proficiency

Traditional approaches to corporate learning tend to start by teaching content, followed by testing the learner's retention, and then maybe asking for feedback. Instead of using passive learning (e.g., watching a short video or reading an article), science-based microlearning flips this model by using questions as the vehicle to introduce new learning content. It leverages the testing effect by deploying short, relevant challenges that jump-start learner engagement. Learners are tested first, then taught through explanations that are provided after they answer each question. This modality gives the learner immediate feedback and enables personalized, in-the-moment learning that's tailored to meet their needs.

This approach gives you a baseline of learners' knowledge and proficiency while also allowing you to build off their existing knowledge or provide more content on topics they fail to comprehend. Over time, learners respond to subsequent questions tailored to their skill gaps so that they improve their mastery of essential subjects and get opportunities to practice areas where they initially struggled.

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Another essential element of science-based microlearning is spaced education. Spaced education has your learners practice applying their knowledge over time by assessing them continuously at carefully calculated intervals. This reinforces their understanding of important concepts and introduces new material as appropriate.

Because microlearning challenges are spaced out over time, they only take a few minutes out of an employee's day. This method saves time and promotes general productivity by embedding learning "in the flow of work" instead of requiring employees to block off dedicated time for learning. By using the format of a test or challenge, employees are instantly more engaged by the in-the-moment feedback of knowing if they got a question right or wrong. This integrated approach to learning is enhanced by elements like leaderboards and visual representations of their proficiency score as they continue to engage with questions.
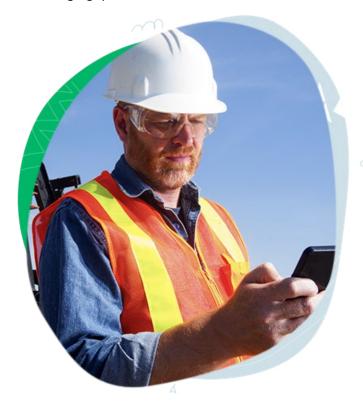
## Spaced Learning in Action

In a randomized control trial of surgical and medical oncology trainees, researchers found that when given the right amount of time between assessments, our brains internalize information more deeply and remember it for the long term.

# Data-driven Learning to Maximize Individual & Company Performance

One of the biggest sources of waste in learning is irrelevant, canned content. When your people sit through a one-size-fits-all training program on skills they already know or on subjects that aren't relevant to their work, you're making not one mistake but two. First, productivity takes a hit since people aren't actively working during this time. Second, you're missing an opportunity to train them in skills your business actually needs them to have.

Microlearning largely solves this problem because its testing approach is continuously giving your organization feedback on every individual learner's gaps in knowledge. With the right technology, your organization feeds learners individualized content that is relevant and unique to their roles and knowledge gaps.

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This continuous, real-time flow of data allows your organization to improve learning programs and reliably measure business impact over time. Where an LMS typically measures basic, high-level metrics such as how many views a video has or how many learners have completed a course, microlearning technology measures individual proficiency and aggregates that data at the individual, team, regional, and organizational level. This approach enables leaders and the L&D team to pinpoint specific knowledge gaps among employees and feed them individualized assessments to close those gaps.

The business can also use this data as an opportunity to improve its learning programs. If, for example, a high percentage of employees are struggling with a particular topic or set of concepts, L&D teams can use this insight to improve learning content in these areas and target them for more intensive learning.

Gone are the days of gut-feel decisions in learning. Microlearning analytics create the foundation for a culture of data-driven coaching by providing a view of each employee's capabilities on a real-time dashboard that identifies exactly which topics or skills they need to improve upon and which they have mastered. Rich, real-time data of this sort is used to guide coaching conversations and drive talent decision-making throughout the organization.

# Integrating Microlearning in the Flow of Work

As technology proliferates in the workplace, just making it easy to access and use learning tools is a significant challenge for learning and development leaders. According to recent research, the average organization in 2021 deploys 16.24 HR solutions. In 2020, that number was 10.23 and only 8.85 the year before that. Your people already juggle too many passwords, systems, and platforms just to perform their daily work. In this environment, logging in to yet another tool to complete a learning program seems like a tedious chore.

Integrating learning into the flow of daily work is a more efficient and natural way to upskill and reskill your people. Microlearning can be the missing piece to complete many learning technology ecosystems. It is uniquely suited to help organizations overcome system overload. Instead of a lengthy training session on new safety procedures, your employees get short bursts of learning and opportunities to build proficiency. For example, a notification on their work chat prompts them to complete a quick assessment. This automates microlearning and engages employees in learning without a multistep process to get there.

Spaced, personalized reinforcement makes learning a continuous process for employees. Integrating microlearning into the apps and systems your employees use every day has the potential to increase engagement, proficiency, and performance among learners. Bridging the gap between learning systems and everyday work is an efficient way to reinvigorate your existing learning tech stack.

When learning systems are integrated, the analytics they provide are automated and brought into one central location that tells a complete story about your workforce's knowledge, capabilities, and performance. That way, business leaders get deeper insights across all relevant systems and make more informed, data-driven decisions about their employees and the organization.

Your learners need integrated, automated microlearning that is infused across the employee technology stack. This approach increases learner engagement and adds value to your legacy systems (LMS, HR systems, CRMs, communication and collaboration tools, etc.) by connecting them with your employees' everyday tools and enhancing the learning journey.

Using science-backed microlearning technology in this way will gives L&D professionals deep insight into learning program performance and creates opportunities for continuous improvement as the data comes in. With this kind of integrated technology in place, business leaders can also use the workforce analytics they generate to make critical decisions.

### Skip the Integration Headaches

Tech integrations are a source of stress for many organizations and take a lot of time to get right. Your IT department might not be thrilled about the prospect of integrating yet another layer to your tech ecosystem. However, recent advances in enterprise technology (e.g., low-code solutions, etc.) make it possible to have near frictionless integrations between your existing L&D tech and the entire employee tech stack.

### Qstream Connect Brings Microlearning Into the Flow of Work

Want to learn more about integrating microlearning into employees' daily work? Consider Qstream Connect. Infinitely scalable, our science-based microlearning solution integrates seamlessly with the help of no-code technology. In this way, Qstream complements and extends your existing learning systems, making them more effective and increasing ROI for the business. **Click here** to find out how Qstream can close skills gaps and transform your business.

# Continuous, Relevant & Effective

Microlearning is not a mishmash of video clips and over-gamified learning software. Grounded in science and fully integrated in the flow of work, microlearning is an intentional and strategic approach to learning. Gone are the days of learning as a one-and-done event. Microlearning is designed to fast-track ongoing, almost daily development of new skills and knowledge for human beings as they actually are.

Microlearning uses small doses of continuous, scenario-based practice with immediate feedback. Over time, learners build new skills and are regularly assessed for knowledge gaps. As gaps in learning appear, learners will be fed relevant content tailored to their needs so that important skills and concepts are taught, reinforced, and put into practice on the job. Instead of guessing your employees' learning needs based on completion rates, microlearning gives leaders and learning and development practitioners an accurate picture of employee skills in real time through proficiency analytics.

Infinitely scalable and geared to any industry and learning use case, microlearning is supported by modern technology to ensure learning is accessible on any device, tailored to the needs of the individual, and highly adaptive to the unique needs of your organization.

## *Ready to discover how microlearning transforms organizational performance?*

**Contact us to enroll in a free trial.**

**Request a Demo**

Qstream is the leading enterprise microlearning and knowledge reinforcement solution proven by science and in practice to boost learner performance. Hundreds of organizations rely on Qstream to build high-performance teams by delivering a personalized and agile learning experience that delivers the highest levels of retention, engagement, and efficiency along with analytics that provide precision insights and expose a real-time view of performance readiness.