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From macro to micro: breaking down online courses into small courses

Discover how to transform macro competencies into targeted and accessible content with microlearning pills

Microlearning is an increasingly effective methodology for training staff quickly and in a focused way. By breaking down competencies into specific modules, it allows for precise response to needs, improving retention. In this article, we'll explore how to break down a traditional course, oriented towards macro competencies, into training pills that focus on specific and immediate micro competencies, optimizing their use in an **LMS platform**.

What is a macro competency and how can it be broken down

A **macro competency** is a **complex and articulated skill**, composed of theoretical, practical, and transversal knowledge that takes time to assimilate. In an LMS context, macro competencies are often the basis of traditional courses, which include long modules dense with information. However, this format can be challenging for learners and cause a decline in interest and retention.

The first step to making a course more agile and accessible is to divide the macro competency into **micro competencies**. For example, in a course on effective communication, a macro competency might be "conflict management". Breaking it down, we can create **training pills** focused on more specific topics like "active listening techniques" or "conflict resolution strategies", each addressed in a single brief and concrete pill.

The advantages of microlearning and training pills

Creating brief and specific training content offers several advantages, both for the company and employees. Here are some.

1. **Ease of access and flexibility:** pills are accessible at any time, allowing employees to engage with training based on their needs.
2. **Increased retention:** learning content in reduced and specific doses allows for better assimilation of information and easier recall.
3. **Adaptability to changes:** training pills can be updated and replaced more easily than an entire course, for up-to-date and timely training.
4. **Increased productivity:** since learning requires less time, employees can immediately apply what they've learned in the workplace, improving their productivity.

"Episodic memory" applied to training pills

A lesser-known aspect of microlearning is the use of **"episodic memory"** to promote content retention. It allows us to remember specific experiences and is particularly activated when we do something stimulating or unusual. In learning contexts, training pills are structured as **mini episodes**, that is, brief content with a beginning, development, and end, stimulate our episodic memory, making it easier to remember what we've learned.

For example, a microlearning pill might include a simulation, a short story, or a challenge, promoting an experience that the brain perceives as meaningful and thus archives more durably. The use of elements like narration, visual storytelling, and real settings in microlearning has shown to significantly increase information recall, transforming learning into a sort of episodic experience.

How to structure a course in training pills: practical guide

Transforming a course based on macro competencies into a microlearning path requires a strategy that combines pedagogical design and content optimization. Here are some key steps to create an effective mini course.

1. Analyze macro competencies and break them down into targeted micro competencies

Identify primary learning outcomes and break them down into well-defined **sub-competences**, each representing an autonomous learning unit. For example, in a "business leadership" course, a macro competency like "conflict management" can be divided into micro competencies like "active listening", "team empathy", and "mediation techniques".

- **Operational tip:** if macro competencies aren't clear, evaluate with sector experts what practical skills participants should acquire. This collaboration helps focus the content, ensuring that each training pill is directly applicable to the work context.

2. Design brief, targeted, and multimedia content

Training pills must be concise and designed to address a specific learning need. The **brief and multimedia format** helps maintain high attention and facilitate learning, especially if pills are accessible on mobile. Content like **video tutorials**, **infographics**, mini simulations, and case studies prove particularly effective.

- **Tip:** each pill should last between 2 and 10 minutes and use a mix of media like video, infographics, and audio to create an interactive experience. For example, a module on "how to give effective feedback" can include an illustrative video and an infographic on key points of constructive feedback.

3. Introduce brief and interactive quizzes to reinforce learning

Quick assessments are essential for monitoring progress and reinforcing the learning of micro competencies. **Brief, interactive, and practical quizzes** at the end of each pill allow learners to consolidate newly learned information and receive immediate feedback. On an LMS, these assessments can be integrated in various formats, such as multiple choice questions, brief simulations, practical exercises, or matching tests.

- **Tip:** use detailed feedback for each answer provided in the quiz, thus helping learners understand any errors and improve quickly.

4. Create a progressive and customizable path

Structuring training pills in a **logical learning path** is crucial for guiding the learner towards **gradual skill acquisition**. The sequence of pills should reflect a natural progression and start from basic concepts, then develop advanced skills.

- **Tip:** modern LMS allow personalizing training paths based on initial knowledge level or learner progress. You can set prerequisites for each pill, allowing those who have already completed certain modules to skip directly to more advanced content.

5. Monitor results and continuously improve training pills

Data analysis collected from the LMS allows evaluation of each training pill's effectiveness and optimization of content over time. Monitoring tools like completion rates, quiz results, and learner feedback provide valuable insights to identify areas for improvement.

- **Tip:** leverage information on learner performance to make improvements. For example, if a training pill on "negotiation techniques" has a high dropout rate, it might be necessary to simplify the language or introduce additional explanation before moving on to subsequent topics.

Storytelling and AI in microlearning

Incorporating **narrative elements** can make learning more memorable and impactful. Creating training pills that tell stories or real-life situations, in which the learner recognizes themselves, helps root concepts. Moreover, with new technologies, pills can be transformed into immersive experiences, where the learner is an active protagonist in simulated scenarios. Thanks to recent technological developments, training pills are becoming increasingly interactive and personalized. Nowadays, it's possible to create custom learning paths for each learner, adapting training pills based on their responses, completion times, and feedback. Furthermore, the integration of **artificial intelligence** and virtual reality allows creation of **immersive experiences**: training pills where the learner finds themselves in a realistic scenario, like a client meeting or crisis management, which they can explore and manage firsthand.