Leveraging Micro-Coaching for Busy Leaders

Learning development design and practices have changed. There's not only a significant mindset shift towards continuous learning, and a slew of new technologies to assist with that, but our preference in "how" we learn is also evolving. Think: gamification, immersion experiences, peer-to-peer knowledge sharing, and micro learning. The latter, as the name suggests, is characterised by consumable, concentrated, shorter-duration content, which focuses on engagement and retention. It's a generational adaptation for time-poor consumers, and ideal for on-the-job learning. The principles of micro learning are simple - bite-sized chunks of information, spaced and repeated/reinforced. In other words, energised, little and often learning with feasible short-term goals.

These same micro-learning principles can also apply in other arenas: specifically, micro-coaching. Micro-coaching is a way to maximise leadership development for busy leaders, while overcoming one of the biggest challenges for learning, i.e., the forgetfulness curve (how our information retention declines). Regularly spaced micro-coaching that is prompted by questions, can counterbalance our tendency to forget what we've learned, and facilitate the transfer of necessary leadership skills into the workplace.
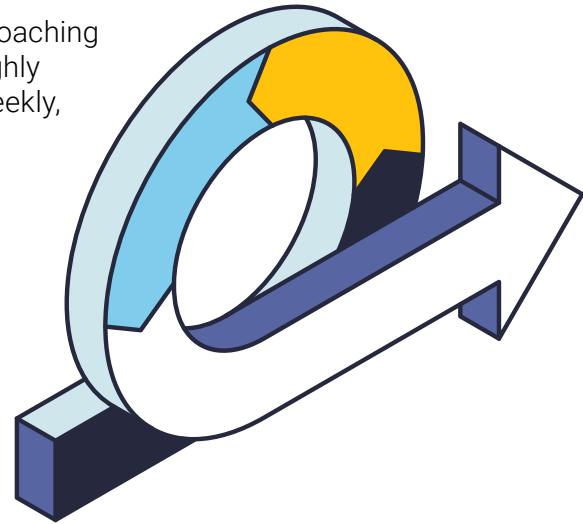
What is Micro-Coaching?

In broad strokes, micro-coaching looks like short and frequent touchpoints - as little as five-minute prompts or fifteen-minute conversations, and as often as needed. This regular cadence optimises the coaching/guidance factor for leaders by staying tapped into real-time issues.

We all know how quickly the work landscape can change, and micro-coaching offers the benefit of consistent and timely feedback that can target highly relevant matters. This might manifest as fortnightly check-ins; or bi-weekly, tailored prompts; or daily nudges in the form of voice notes or texts. Nudges are an efficient and effective way to influence behaviours and are useful in motivating the coachee by fostering alignment between their personal development and organisational goals. For example, if your nudges aim to improve decision making, they might consist of a series of texts that read:

1. *"If this turns out to be the wrong decision, how reversible is it?"*
2. *"What's the strongest argument against the choice you're leaning toward?"*
3. *"Who's making this decision… and who's just influencing it?"*

Micro-coaching also offers a highly responsive feedback loop to reflect how leaders are handling situations as they unfold. This is a different kind of support to traditional, long form coaching. Micro-coaching's flexibility and immediacy are its greatest strength.
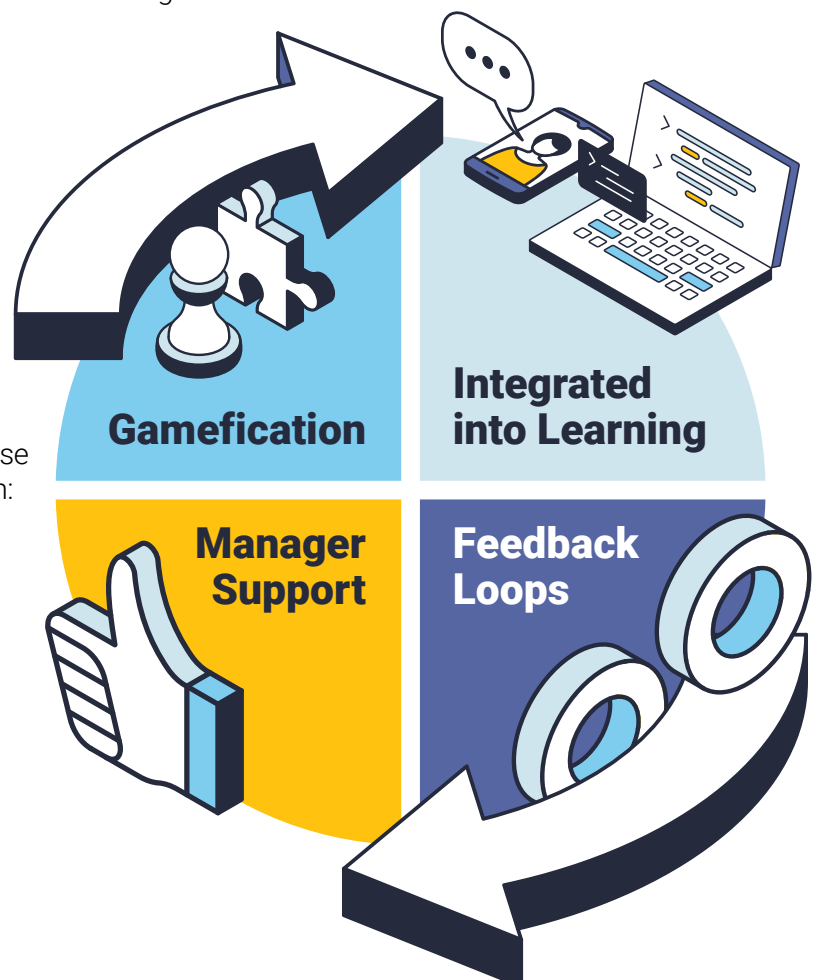
Micro-Coaching in Learning Design

So, whether you are an independent executive coach, or a leader wanting to employ micro-coaching for your team members, there are certain learning design factors to consider when planning touchpoints.

One model by Michael Leimbach suggests using these questions to kickstart your micro-coaching approach:

1. How are your leaders/you supporting the coaching?
2. How is the coaching being gamified for engagement?
3. How are the coaching activities being integrated into the flow of the organisation's learning development?
4. What (automated) feedback loops are set up to support micro-coaching?

Credit: Michael Leimbach – Wilson Learning Worldwide

Gamification

Integrated into Learning

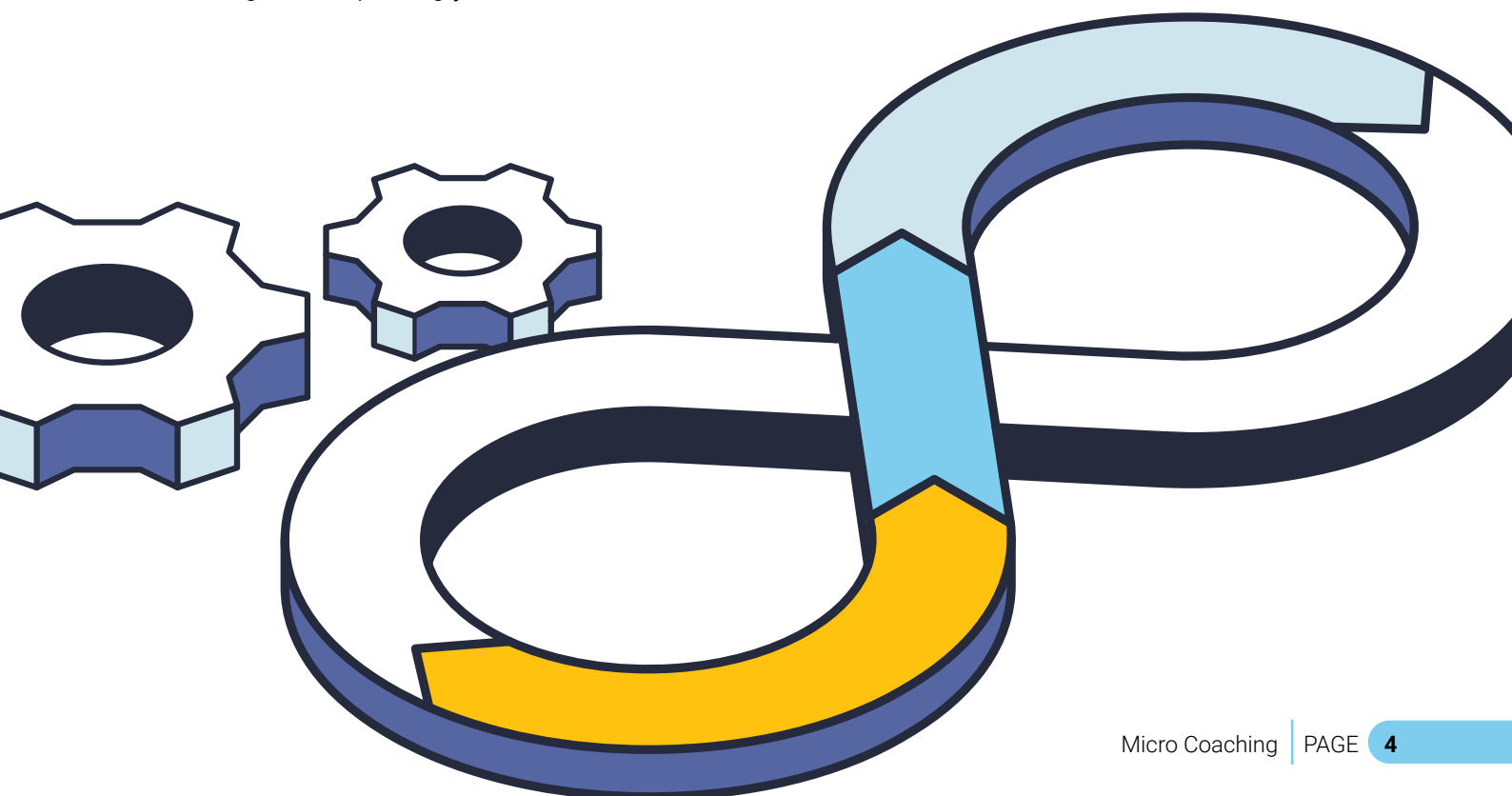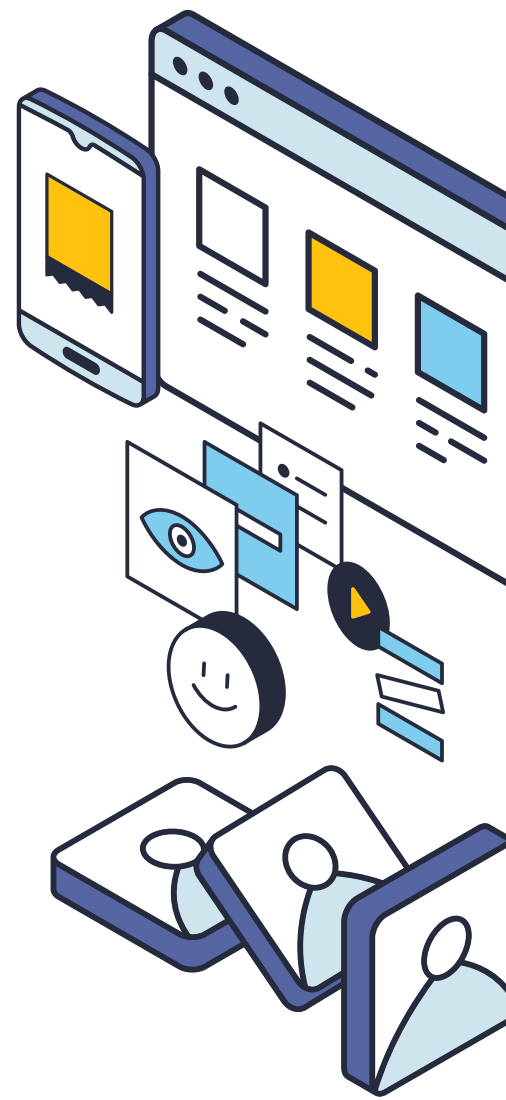**Manager Support**

Feedback Loops

Micro-Coaching at Work

Once you've considered the larger design questions, Leimbach recommends applying the following process to each individual skill your coachee wishes to develop:
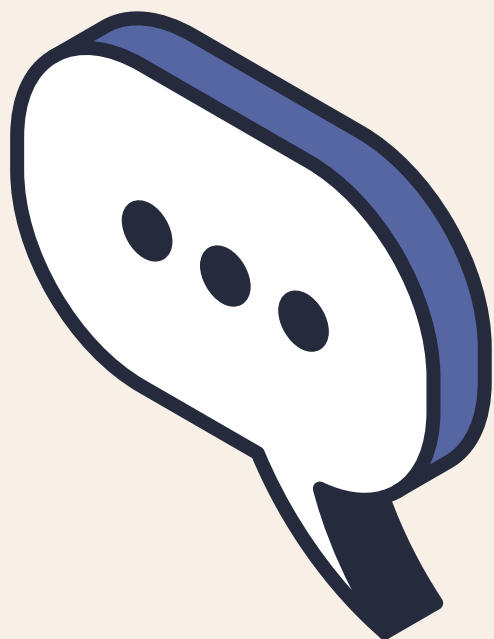
- Identify the value of a skill/its importance/the intention behind it

- Do the skill development – what are the behaviours you are looking for?

- Practice/test it!

- Set an application challenge for the learner

- Seek their leader's coaching feedback

At the implementation level, there are a number of delivery conduits you can use to help land your coaching guidance.

- Instant assists – these are on the spot supports and guidances that can be delivered in person or digitally. They could consist of problem-solving ideation, positive reinforcement, clarity, behaviour modelling, or actionable advice.

- Active feed-back loops – asynchronous, automated, iterative responses to coachees needs

- Self-guided reviews - allows the person to assess their own development in a structured way, promoting self-awareness and accountability. These can be activated through questionnaires and prompts.

In a climate where technology and AI are re-shaping the work landscape, and upskilling and re-skilling are the words *du jour*, micro-coaching makes a lot of sense. It's quick, engaging, responsive and flexible; a hack that might end up being your coachees best survival skill.