

Module 1

Launching a Microcredential Design Process

Topics explored in this module:

1. Refresh on context
2. Stackable credentials
3. Gathering input from stakeholders
4. Developing personas
5. Backward design for microcredentials

Note: Additional detailed information is available in selected slide notes

1. Refresh on Context



What are microcredentials?

Microcredentials are:

- shorter, specialized units of training, with the credential serving as evidence of accomplished learning demonstrated through the assessment
- often self-directed, shorter courses that offer flexibility to learners
- frequently focused on value for the current labor market as learners may show they have **specific competencies** needed by an employer.

[See: 1. Intro to Microcredentials](#)

Our context

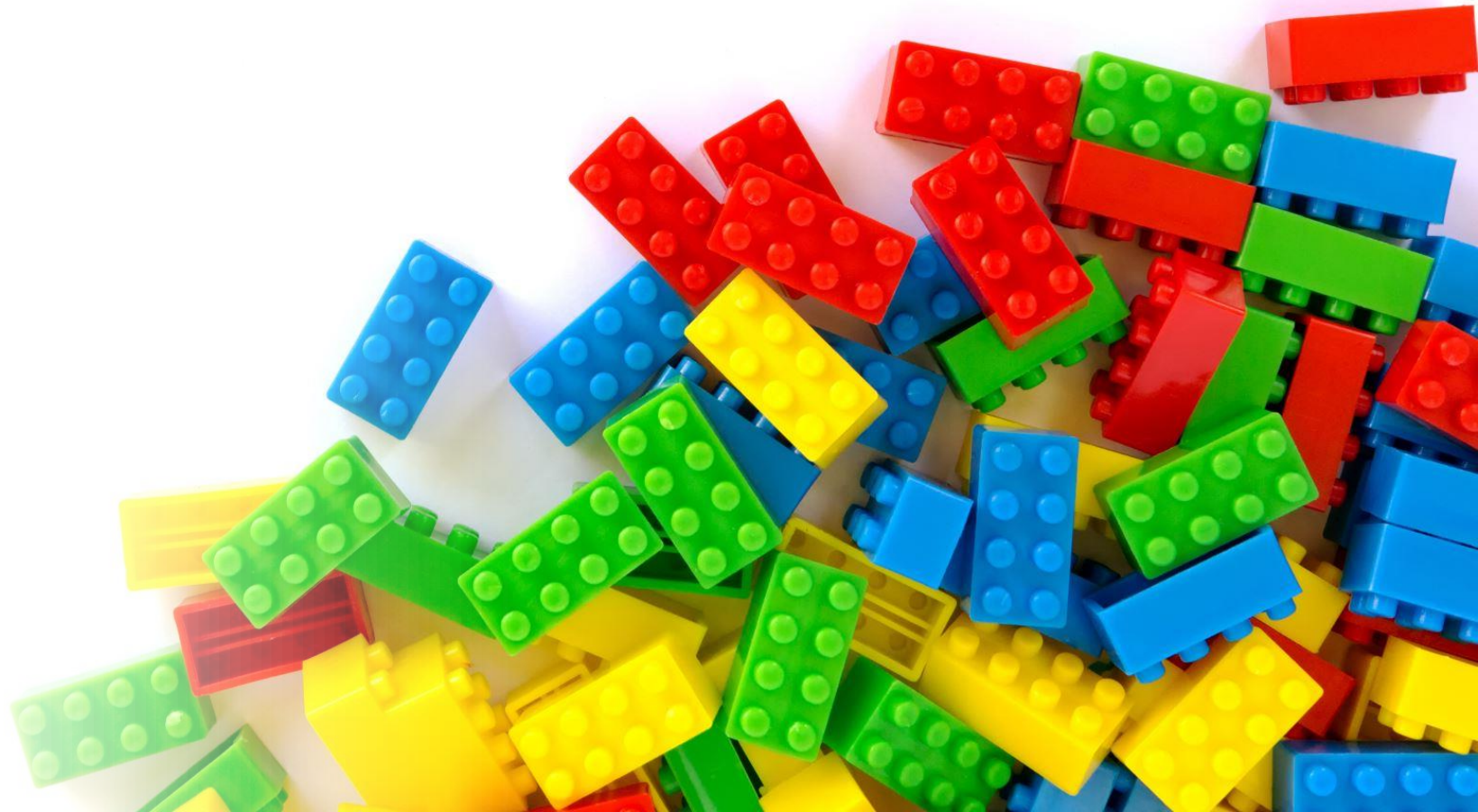
A microcredential is a representation of learning, awarded for completion of a short program that is focused on a discrete set of competencies..." according to [*Making Sense of Microcredentials*](#) (Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2021)

Typically, they focus on the idea of labor market-relevant competencies, with discussions of “up-skilling,” “re-skilling,” “retraining,” “transferable skills,” and “technical skills” according to [*Why faculty need to talk about microcredentials*](#) (University Affairs, 2021)

Unique considerations

- Microcredential learning outcomes are generally **very specific, applied skills or knowledge**.
- The number of learning outcomes to be addressed by a microcredential are generally **very few per course segment**.
- The **time required to complete a microcredential "course"** is greatly **reduced**, with total learning activity hours of as few as 6-8 hours, or with a series of modules, perhaps stacking to 20-30 hours in total.
- Learners value recognition of incremental structure, with an "**earn as you learn" model** that shows credit for each step on their learning journey.

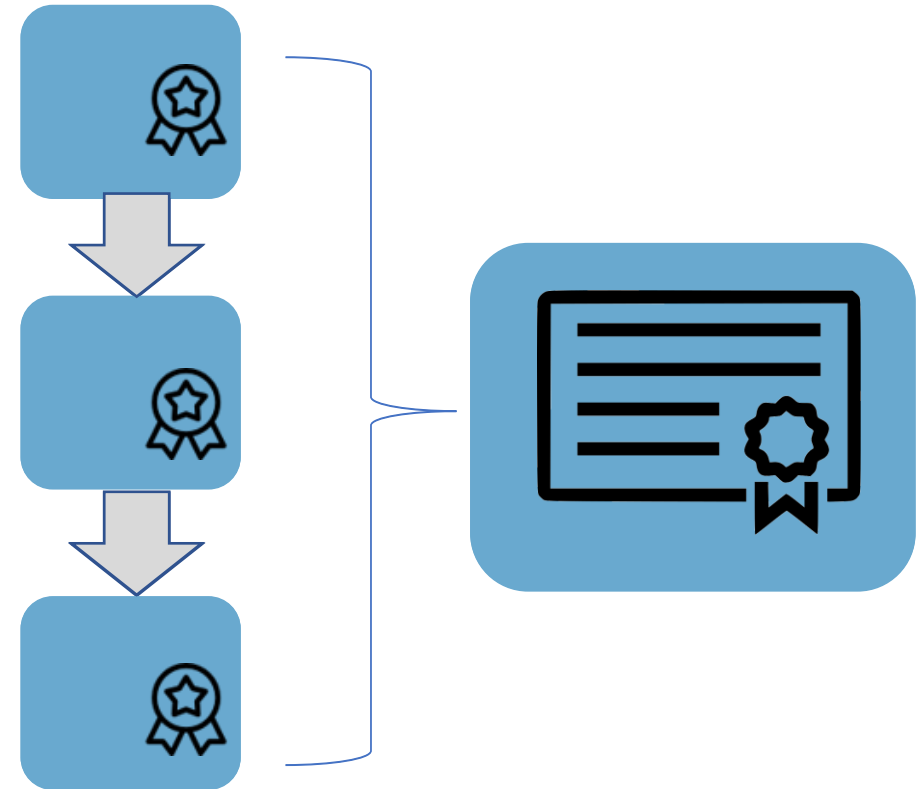
2. Stackable Frameworks



"Bite-sized" learning

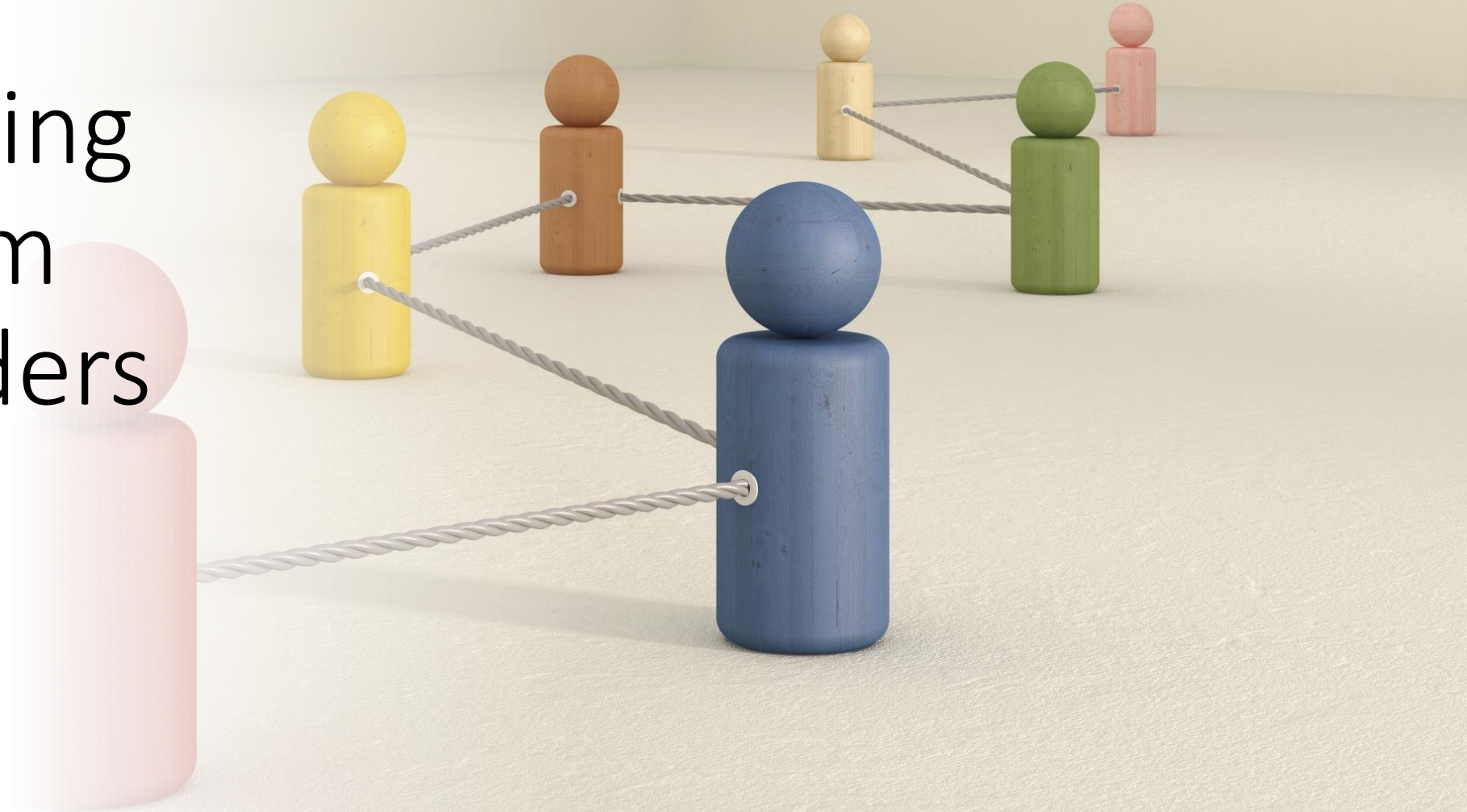
Enables learners to gain new skill sets incrementally at their own pace:

- A stackable microcredential within a series of related microcredentials, when completed, may provide a path to a higher-level certification.
- A stack of microcredentials can also be designed to achieve an employer or industry-endorsed credential.



[\(Kryterion, 2022\)](#)

3. Gathering Input from Stakeholders



Gathering input from stakeholders

- Collaborative effort supports the identification of suitable learning targets for your microcredential learning initiatives
- Stakeholder groups suggested for consultation include:
 - learners
 - instructors
 - employers
 - other professional or advisory groups

Gather input from learners and instructors

- Consult or survey learners and instructors to identify their priorities:



Learners

Current skill needs

Challenges faced

Learning motivation, preference, & conditions

Prior learning evaluation, & focus groups



Instructors

Gaps in the field in relation to current program offerings

Feasibility to fill the competency gap with the microcredential(s)

Gather input from community partners

- Consult or survey employers and other relevant stakeholders to identify their key considerations:



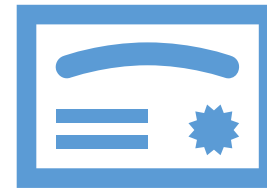
Employers

Performance criteria

Needed knowledge, skills, and attributes (KSAs)

Work conditions

Current needs

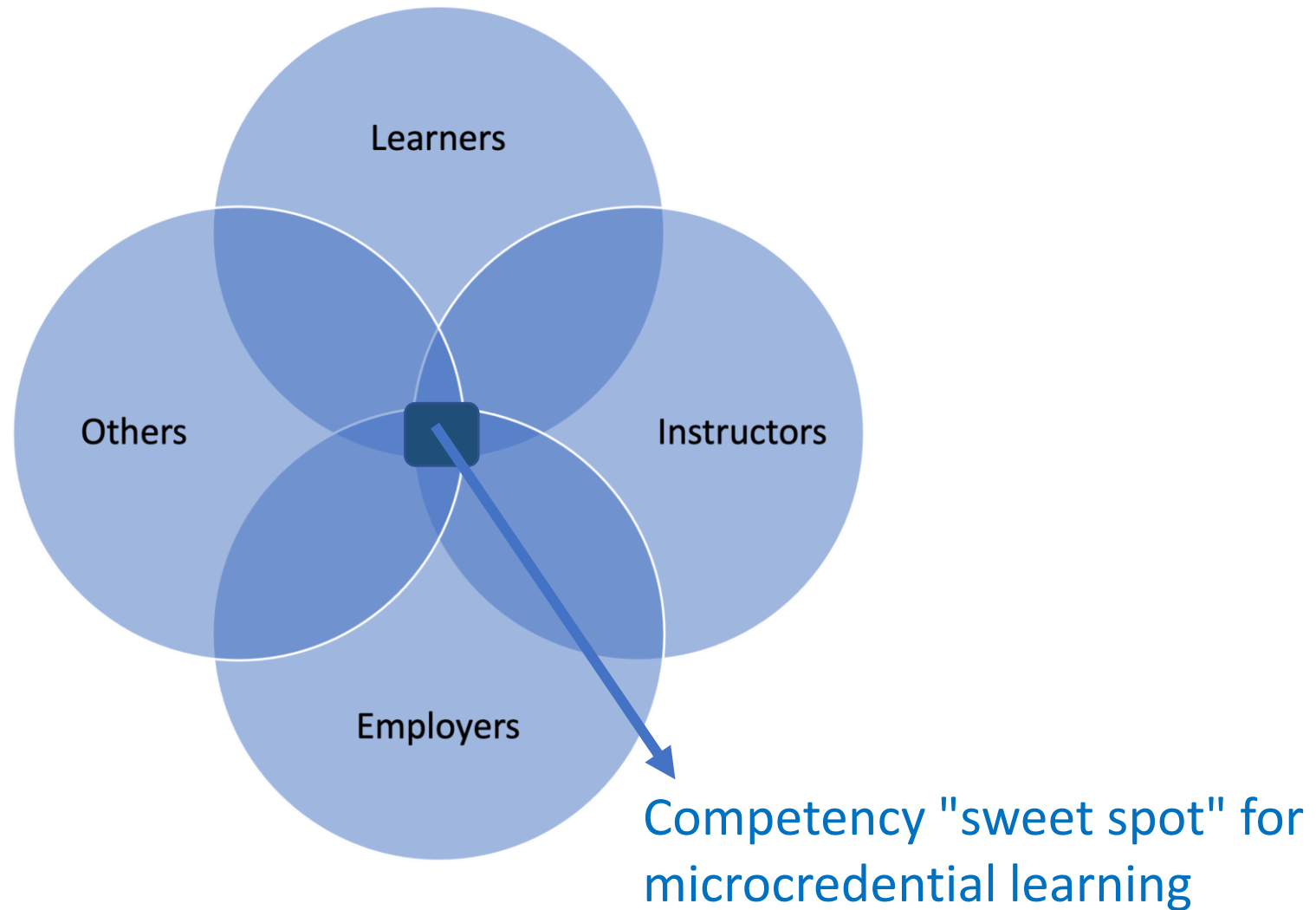


Other Professionals

Input from professional associations, third-party consulting groups, program advisory committees, etc.

Advice from microcredential design leads

Collaborative effort can surface shared goals for microcredential course or program development:





4. Developing Personas



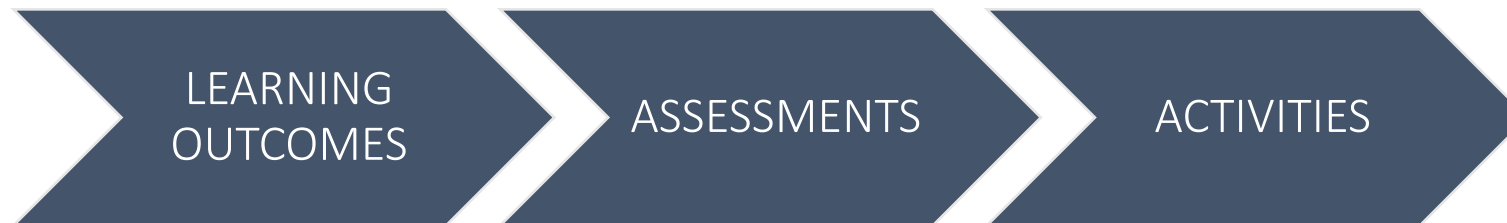
The background features a light blue and white geometric pattern of overlapping squares and rectangles. A single orange sticky note is placed on the right side of the image, partially overlapping the blue shapes.

3. Backward Design for Microcredentials

What is backward design?

It is helpful for any course design process to "begin with the end in mind."

- Articulate a small set of **learning outcomes** describing the target skills for each credential or module
- Then design **assessments** that authentically reflect progress toward those expected learning outcomes
- Work backward to design learning **activities** that provide opportunities for active learning and engagement to build needed skills to succeed



Design process for microcredential courses

Backward Design

OUTCOMES

ASSESSMENTS

ACTIVITIES

Microcredential

Define Learning Outcomes:
Q1. What should learners gain or take away from this short course?

Feedback & Assessment:
Q2. How will I know if they are learning what they need to know?

Teaching & Learning Activities:
Q3. Which learning activities will lead to the desired outcomes?

Course Design?

Select Texts &
Write Syllabus

Write Lecture Notes &
Create Slides

Prepare Problems & Write Tests

Backward Course Design

Learning Outcomes:

What should students learn or take away from this course?

Feedback & Assessment:

How will I know if students are learning what they need to know?

Teaching & Learning Activities:

Which learning activities will lead students to the desired outcomes?

Effective microcredential design

This learning format is characterized by:

- Scaling down content into small segments (modules or short courses)
- Careful articulation of learning outcomes
- Focus on practical application
- Well-aligned practice activities
- Formative feedback that supports learning
- Assessment methods that demonstrate applied skills

Who is your target learner audience?

Following gathering of information overall context for development of the microcredential learning program, an additional step may be development of “**learner personas**”

A **learner centric approach** is increasingly important in instructional design as we craft a learner experience, sometimes referred to as LX design.

Personas are **hypothetical archetypes representing learners** that may potentially participate in the program you are offering.

What to include...

Think about the type of learner who might be interested in this microcredential. Typical considerations include:

- Goals, both long-term and short-term
- Needs
- Attitudes, beliefs, and opinions
- Skills
- Context and background information

Use the personas to inform your design process.



Summary

Key takeaways for launching a microcredential design process

- Plan the overall framework to organize multiple microcredential modules or courses for your program of learning
- Begin with the end goal in mind, using backward design to guide the process.
- Consult with key stakeholders early to establish goals that will meet the needs of all and bring focus to the "sweet spot" for microcredential learning.

Contact information for microcredential design support



Digital Learning Innovation,
Information Technology
Services



Contact:
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References

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Resources from the University of Toronto

Introduction to microcredentials:

- [Intro to Microcredentials.docx](#)

External resources

Conducting needs analysis:

- [Skills gap analysis: A how-to guide for learning & development](#)
- [How to conduct a training needs analysis: A template and example](#)