

Learning Uncut Emergent Series
Julian Stodd & Rachel Happe
Making Learning More Human
Conversation with Shannon Tipton published on 21 July 2020



About the Emergent Series

This episode is part of the Learning Uncut Emergent series where we talk about rapidly changing business models, and how Learning and Development can support organisations to adapt. Exploring how learning professionals can emerge from disruption as relevant and effective. The series is co-hosted by Michelle Ockers, Laura Overton and Shannon Tipton.

Shannon Tipton:

Today I'm very excited to welcome two tremendous contributors to our community from the US and from the UK. And first I'd like to welcome Rachel Happe. Rachel is the cofounder of the Community Roundtable and works at the intersection of strategy, technology, governance, leadership and communications, and has experienced as a project executive and industry analyst. She co-authored the thought-provoking The State of the Community Management 2020 report, which was excellent. I have forwarded that to everybody I know. So thank you for your good work there.

Shannon Tipton:

And I'd also like to welcome Julian Stodd. Now, Julian is in the UK right now, so he's spending his evening with us this evening, and I really like to express my appreciation for that. And Julian describes himself as an author, researcher and founder of Sea Salt Learning, helping organizations adapt to the social age. Julian's book, The Social Leadership Handbook is actually a prized possession of mine. I have my autographed copy right here. And I'm sure many other people in the L&D industry hold this book near and dear to their hearts as well, they should. So, welcome to the both of you.

Rachel Happe:

Thank you, Shannon.

Shannon Tipton:

Thank you. Now, one of the reasons why we are here today is to discuss what is happening around us. We have this whirlwind of disruption that is happening around the year 2020 and arguably was happening before the year 2020 took place. And really, what I want to talk to you both about was the work that you have been entrenched in regards around social leadership and community building within the workplace and within organizations. So my first question to both of you right now is how has the change in disruption in 2020 caused you to think differently about your business generally, or specifically, and how will it now evolve and continue to support the broader industry? So, who would like to jump into that one? Rachel, I'm going to say ladies first.

Rachel Happe:

Sure. I don't have a specific answer other than to say that doing business in the online engagement and community space was a brilliant decision 11 years ago given what's happened in 2020 because we've always actually been a virtual company. So we work virtually, we work virtually with most of our clients. So from a personal disruption, I have more co-workers now than I did before. But from a work process, I'm traveling less so I'm actually getting more work done. The research was easier to do because I wasn't flying around. So it's probably better than it has been.

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Rachel Happe:

I think what we're seeing, when we do research, and this year in particular, we're seeing a lot of bimodal trends. So there's the group of organizations that were really visionaries and got on the bandwagon five, 10, 15 years ago. And they're fairly mature and they're kind of maturing in two different ways. Some of them have just dug really deep into one business workflow and transform that whole workflow and that's just the way they work now. Another set of those has gone upstream and now taken on a bigger strategic role in the organization and organizational transformation.

Rachel Happe:

And then there's a whole mainstream bunch of people who have had technology floating around for a while. Have been using it to just support the way they always worked. Haven't really optimized it, haven't brought the human side or the process change or the behaviour change in at all. And then COVID hits. And what we're seeing a lot of them do is just lift and shift, right? I have eight hours of Zoom calls today because I had eight hours of meetings and you're like, you're really not doing this correctly.

Rachel Happe:

And then there's people even further behind them that they're not part of our research, but it's getting them off the bench and saying, yeah, we've got to do something about this. We've been talking about it for years, it's finally time to go do something about it. So, those are the three sets of people I see. I don't know, Julian, if that's, but our business is fine because there's people finally digging in.

Shannon Tipton:

So Julian, how is your business flexing?

Julian Stodd:

My own organization much as Rachel says has been virtual from the start. So, we always describe ourselves as a safe harbor for independent thinkers. There are two important parts of that. The first is that we don't all have to agree because we're independent thinkers, which is a polite way of saying membership is not about conformity, it's about alignment. And the second is, nothing ever gets done in a harbor. So our safe harbor was a space to come together to talk, to share stories. But then we each go out on a voyage and do something, and when you're out on that voyage, you're by yourself.

Julian Stodd:

So, in that sense, Sea Salt as an organization is reasonably unaffected. But then when I think back to our early days, it really took us about three years to find that language and find that space. I think, well, we should really know what we're doing but it's a remarkably hard thing to do.

Julian Stodd:

When I look more widely, I like many people I'm sure moved from a place of traveling, I normally travel about 36 weeks a year to not traveling at all. So I used the first eight weeks of lockdown to pull together a kind of emergency book called finding your campfire, which was about the change, three levels kind of for the individual, for leadership and for culture, what does it mean.

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Julian Stodd:

I suppose the broad observations from that or the two key things, the first is that as we fled the office, we didn't just leave behind our desks and pot plants. We left behind the owned space of the office, and with it, much of the power. So power has a very close relationship to space. So, I think many organizations are now navigating new dynamics of power where the hierarchy still exists, but to some extent, voices are democratized. And our own research looking at trust shows quite clearly that trust flows differently in formal and social technologies. So, we're seeing a general upheaval in the environment in which organizations operate, the move away from the offices is about more than just space.

Julian Stodd:

And the second thing, which is a more challenging one, is I suspect we're seeing quite a strong regression of fairness. So, I have no doubt that some people are broadly enabled and empowered and thriving. And I have no doubt that many people are being disempowered, disenfranchised and left behind, and almost certainly doing so silently. And if I look at the overall trajectory, we're just coming out of a period of industrial readjustment. So, organizations patting themselves on the back because everybody has a laptop and Wi-Fi and a Zoom account. We're kind of there.

Julian Stodd:

But the next 18 months, two years, are where we're going to see waves of exhaustion, and people dropping out of, both being shunted out and dropping out of the workplace. And of course, we will see, I'm sure many organizations won't measure it, will see strong gender-based differences in that as well, because there's a strong likelihood that that disenfranchisement will be aligned with childcare provision and care considerations as well.

Shannon Tipton:

That is fascinating. And I'd like to touch on that a little bit more, and especially, when I take into consideration, Rachel, what you wrote in your state of community management. Now, you stated, the year of 2020 is the year of reinvention and organizations are already concerned about adapting to the digital and knowledge economy. And those interested in change are finding adaption easier. Those who resisted change are stalled in making investments are experiencing a forced or rapid transformation. I think that ties in really nicely with what Julian just said. So the powers that be are starting to come together, like you said, Julian, people are patting themselves on the back for, who, we got people mobile phones. And really, it's greater than that, isn't it?

Rachel Happe:

Well, it's interesting because I've been in technology for a long time, but on the vendor side, so I was a product manager for a long time. And it took me a while to realize that, and I don't know, maybe a year or two ago, I was thinking about corporate IT and how they're struggling with collaborative and communication technology. And I was like, oh, these are the guys 20 years ago who provisioned my phone. So they plug it in, and they're like, you're good. And with a lot of business systems, you can do that because like sales guys, if they don't log it in their CRM, they're not getting paid, they're not getting their commission, whatever. So you can kind of force extrinsically people to do stuff.

Rachel Happe:

With communication and collaboration, you can't force people to communicate well, you can't force them to collaborate. You have to entice them to. And almost everything we've done in our organizations is through extrinsic motivators and some kind of domination. It

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used to be physical domination way back, and then it was economic. And so we hold people through these extrinsic binds. And you're stuck in this situation where now, the world is a lot more transparent, and heck, now I can work from anywhere. Your economic force is not as powerful as it used to be. So your extrinsic force over people is diminishing. And most people have no concept of how to use intrinsic motivators to get work done.

Rachel Happe:

None of our systems from our education system all the way up to the government has operated by intrinsic motivators. And that's essentially what communities are. They're all opt in. So, how do you construct that environment such that people actively want to be involved and included? Well, you have to give them ROI, actually, at the end of the day. And our organizations don't give employees ROI and they don't give customers ROI. It's a negative ROI, which is why they keep talking about customer satisfaction and employee satisfaction because they don't want to talk about actual financial value because they extract more than they provide. And so that's problematic because your intrinsic motivators are not aligned with your customers and your employees. So, all of that is kind of colliding all at once, and more or less, blowing people's minds I guess, if I had to say.

Julian Stodd:

Yeah.

Shannon Tipton:

Yeah, absolutely. And I love the idea that both of you are such huge advocates for being change agents in communities. So now, how does, if I'm thinking about the trend of conversation here, that there is power behind community, but then also, there are those who are in power who may think that the community is going to take away power, right? So now, how then do we instill the criticality of community How do we build on that?

Rachel Happe:

I'll let Julian take this [inaudible 00:15:24].

Julian Stodd:

It's really interesting. My work sits at the intersection of formal and social systems. And historically, those two were very separate. The formal world of work and the organizations that we built and the social systems that surround it. And substantially, I position my work in the context of the social age to say that the ecosystem has changed, not just a bit, but almost everything has changed in quite subtle ways. And one of the things that important to remember is that all of the organizing principles of society are entirely made up. So, organizations, government, legal systems, religious systems in terms of the organizational footprint that they have. These are all made up and have all evolved over time and will all continue to evolve.

Julian Stodd:

I'm publishing in a couple of weeks' time a book on the socially dynamic organization, and the context of the social age. And in that book, I was doing the illustration for it a couple of weeks ago. I drew that as a sort of an organization with a shadow, but the shadow is cast into the past. So we should remember that our organizations, for all their pride, strength and success, are superbly optimized to the world that's gone by, and desperately trying to sort of forge ahead into the light. But the forces of the social age indicate that the modes of social organization of the future are likely to be substantially different from that of the past. And Rachel's already hinted at some of this.

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Julian Stodd:

So, for example, I would describe it in terms of a triangle, organizations are built on a triangle of time, utility and money. So, you give them your utility for eight hours a day and they give you \$1. And that's the triangle. And that's been the mechanism of scaling and productivity. But what if what you want isn't utility, but it's investment. And this is the point, collaboration is something you have to earn. It's not a pile of gold waiting for you to pick it up off the floor. You have to earn the right to have access to it. And you don't pay for it typically with money. You might pay for it with trust, pride, reputation, recognition, gratitude, fairness, kindness, there's a whole host of things you might pay for it with. In fact, you probably got a whole series of these triangles that overlay each other.

Julian Stodd:

And for that reason, in this book, I describe the socially dynamic organization is one that trades in multiple currencies, with the crucial difference that the central bank for money is the organization. So, nobody listening to this is likely to be able to sort of go into the office and say, you know what, I would really like an 84% pay rise and I'm pretty sure I'm worth it. It doesn't happen because organizations own the money. However, they don't own any of the other social currencies. So, like much of my work, this is probably wrong. This is an abstraction. But I hope it's a sort of semi useful one to understand that the new context of our organizations and contexts of work is likely to be sort of multi-dimensional, multi-currency. And that means the things that we generally say we want are innovation, creativity, collaboration, engagement, you could make a whole list of these things. Nearly all of them are traded for in social currencies. And that's where you hit the problem.

Julian Stodd:

In the global landscape of trust research that I've been ongoing since 2017, 54% of people said they had low or no trust in the organization they work for. In some large-scale research about communities that I did in the National Health Service, for example, in the UK, 5000 people said that they are engaged on a daily basis in using at least 17 different technologies to collaborate in order to be effective, 16 of which they're explicitly forbidden from using. They believe on average, they're a member of at least 15 different communities, that they interact with on a weekly basis.

Julian Stodd:

What you start to paint really fast is a complex social system, which kind of flows around the parameters of the organization. So, there's an easy narrative of what are challenges, and then there's probably the underlying truth of it. If we want a more effective, connected, successful organization, we will have to earn it, and we won't be able to buy it for money.

Shannon Tipton:

Right. Now, Rachel, your studies almost mimic what Julian was just saying. What did you find?

Rachel Happe:

I would say that's right. It has a little bit of a different lens and some of it's been because I've been going off the deep end into the history of organizations. And it turns out large organizations and scaled management and accounting was driven by the plantation system, enslaved people, free labour, domination. And then the boom and bust economic cycles was also driven by that so they never really paid for their production capacity and they monetized everything.

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Rachel Happe:

And so, organizations today, if you look at their accounting, if you look at their legal, if you look at everything, everything's geared toward the output and this financial measurement. And we divide it up because we want to tie and attribute money to specific people. So that's tightly bound. But when we divide up our value, it sub-optimizes our value. If we share our value, it increases its margins exponentially, if we can figure out how to do that. But our government structure is not set up for any of that. And in fact, something that's been on my mind for a very long time is that people aren't on the asset side of the balance sheet. And I'm like, until people are on the asset side of the balance sheet, they're just expenses, they're liabilities. You hire and pay them as little as possible because it just increases your liabilities without increasing your value.

Rachel Happe:

And so, for me, that governance system is absolutely critical to attack and change

Shannon Tipton:

So is this where community building helps us as people? Is, having those inlaid communities within organizations, and as you said, outside of organizations, where can we then help people when it comes to this because your average L&D person may or may not have control over this or even influence over this. So they go in and they realize and they see what you're seeing. And in their heart of hearts, they have the belief system and they know that people are important. And the humans are the centre of what we do where can we help with this movement? L&D aside, what can we do?

Julian Stodd:

I'm sort of quite fortunate in my work because I've two halves to it. I have a space where I can think and then I have a space where people nail my feet to the floor to make a difference next Tuesday morning. And between those two spaces, you can find a certain honesty in it. If it's too theoretical, you're never going to get anything done. But if it's practical without thinking about it, you're just likely to perpetuate what came before.

Julian Stodd:

So, the way I'm sort of looking at it, the way my own understanding has evolved is to add a layer into my taxonomy of understanding the social structure of the organization. So I used to talk about individual into community, community into organization, organization into society. And since during the trust research and the community's research, I now talk about individuals into tribes, tribes into communities, community to organizations. And the difference is that a tribe is a trust bonded structure. So a tribe is internally coherent. It's held together. A community maybe a meta-tribal structure. And clearly, we can be members of multiple tribes and indeed multiple communities. And of course, sometimes a community may entirely match up to one tribe.

Julian Stodd:

Now, I'm going to call them what we like, but we see this in very practical ways. So, another piece of an imperfect work to share is about culture. So, people describe quite clearly at least two different types of cultures that they join when they start with an organization. So they say, in the first hours, in fact, minutes into hours into days, they describe going in and they meet people and they see your smiles and they see who makes them tea and they see who shows them that desk and who gives them a chocolate biscuit, whatever it is. And the next day they see some of those same people and they say very quickly, they form what I'm

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calling a primary cultural alignment, which is really a tribal structure because of our innate social habits.

Julian Stodd:

Like now, I'm unlikely to start swearing because neither of you are swearing and I want you to like me. So, we are so conditioned to try to conform to a degree. But with membership of that community comes conformity. So, if you see that everybody else leaves their coffee cup in the middle of the desk at night, you're more likely to leave your coffee cup there. If everybody takes it away, you're highly unlikely to leave yours in the middle of the desk because you fear social consequences and social judgment. And people describe that about 70% of the moderation of individual activity is social consequence rather than formal rules. So a rule that says wash up your teacup is less effective than a community that washes up their teacups.

Julian Stodd:

So, we sat there in our new tribe, very happy, discovering that we belong, you can say, well, what do you belong to? So on the one hand, I belong to the organization legally and contractually. I have a place in the hierarchy. I have literally been shown my space. When they gave me my desk, they didn't just show me my space in terms of physical structure, they showed me my place in terms of the hierarchy and power structure. But I belong probably to a tribal, a socially bonded unit. But then I see that some people are highly effective at what you could call sort of geopolitical power, they get stuffed on a scale. But if you ask those people how long it took them to get that ability, which is clearly meta-tribal, meta-community, they say three to five years. And it's almost all held in relationships.

Julian Stodd:

Crucially, the interconnection between networks. So understanding that some social structures are internally coherent and therefore defined in opposition to others whilst others can cross between networks. And the interesting thing is nobody can give you that ability. So, I can say to Rachel, you've been with your group for however many years. Could you describe every relationship, every mechanism, everything you know? Rachel could take a year to tell me all those things and I would still be utterly ineffective because people would look at me and say, you're not Rachel.

Julian Stodd:

So, this is why the likelihood is, the competitive advantage is likely to come through not trying to own and control and artificially create social structures, but by having the humility to understand what the real social structures are, and to engage with them on their own terms. If we try to own and control them, we just drive it away.

Shannon Tipton:

I completely agree. There's no amount of forcing this, is there?

Rachel Happe:

So the problem is though, organizations force everything because of these extrinsic motivators, right? And that used to actually work because most organizations were production machines. And so they were driving towards efficiency. And so if you're driving towards efficiency, everything is standardized. And they've tried to standardize people, which is really impossible to do but they've tried through force to do that.

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Rachel Happe:

And now what's happening is we're facing an environment where all the problems we have to address are complex. There's no one answer. There's no right answer, there's no one answer. There's lots of answers. And it is really throwing people for a loop because they've been, again, through school and work, we've been socialized to have the answer, and that's how we build our confidence, that's how we get empowered. And I was actually chatting with a psychologist recently about this. And what's interesting, you're moving into this complex environment where you can't predict things. So you can't plan things the way people used to plan from a business planning perspective because you don't know, you have to have a lot of different options.

Rachel Happe:

And so people are very unstabilised about this, very anxious, and tend to get more controlling when they're anxious, which then kind of backfires because you can't control. Like it's whatever. But the other option for becoming empowered and confident is to know yourself and to know your values and to be self-aware about what you want. And the only way you can do that is through community, through your relationships. I can only know myself when it's reflected back on me by the impact I have.

Rachel Happe:

And so communities then become really important because it's how people in the organization know themselves and create meaning, what matters to all of us and who wants to take which part of, what collective capacity do we have and what are we going to do? Because the answer isn't what's the right thing to do anymore, it's what do we want to do to address climate change? Given our capacity and values, what's the one thing we're going to do? We're not going to fix climate change. I think that mental, until the last few years, I just missed a lot of that because I was like, oh, if we get people to behave a certain way, they'll have aha moments and they do. But you get up to that final point and that shift is so hard, but it's so important to get to. It's one of those things that takes time and I see that as one of the biggest challenges to change right now.

Rachel Happe:

And Julian mentioned that 70%, one of the reasons communities are being used to change culture is because they do a few things, they do a tactical thing very well, which is they make information transparent. And so that's good because everybody knows the same thing at the same time, whatever. You increase the speed of how you can figure out a workflow. The second thing they do is if you collaborate well, they create shared ownership. So now I'm part of the solution and it's partly mine. I'm more committed to it. But the last thing that they do that's really powerful it's how cults are managed. You socially norm a behaviour.

Rachel Happe:

There's an example recently in the United States, we've had all these Black Lives Matter protests. And the pollsters are looking at some of the feedback on policing. And they're saying what do Americans think about policing and what percentage think it's okay versus not okay. And the pollsters were totally surprised because at the start of this, about 30% of Americans said, yeah, there's something wrong with the way we police in America. In two weeks, that changed 20% across the whole country, which is like, I've never seen anything like this. And I'm like, it's because they reached that tipping point. So there's some pretty predictable tipping points in networks. And if you can kind of use that to your advantage,

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once you get to 30%, you can easily get to 70%. You've kind of got the momentum and the energy to push it over.

Rachel Happe:

And actually, from a business perspective, if you invest at that point, that's critical. And a lot of companies, that's where they fail because they're like, oh, we got 30%, good, we're good. And they ease off and that new behaviour recedes back. And so you really, when you get to that point, that's when you want to push it all the way through. But that's a fairly, I don't think business people know it, it's fairly standard social research.

Shannon Tipton:

That's interesting. So now, are you saying then, that as a greater community, there is a need for that social construct, for us all to come together and be the change that we want to see. And then on the flip side of that coin, in order to achieve this, we also do need a strategic approach. Go ahead, Julian.

Julian Stodd:

I think I would have agreed with that a couple of years ago. I find quite often my work diverges, which means I've become more confused about things and then sometimes it converges and I feel I found an answer. Now I've realized that's probably a false answer. And at the moment, I'm feeling quite strongly this is a point of divergence in my work. One of the reasons is because, when I wrote the Social Leadership Handbook in 2014, I wrote communities are entities of shared value and shared purpose. I really strongly felt that was true.

Julian Stodd:

And now I sort of don't. I think some of them are. But the definition I'm using in the new book is the community the entities of exclusion because the only thing that makes a community coherent is almost because somebody isn't in it. So, part of the broadest lens that I'm trying to look for is to understand how is it in wider society that we have multiple groups of people who believe conflicting things, all of which is true to them in their local community, in their sense. One way of looking at it is just for me to judge them as idiots and say they're wrong, which is a very satisfying thing to do and is also a behaviour that will be validated within my community.

Julian Stodd:

But as we know, that peace is rarely won through dismissal and outright conflict. It's usually through negotiation, and the problem is it requires me to deal with idiots. And this is the problem is realizing that also, I'm the idiot. We're going to have to negotiate some kind of consensus. So, I have been playing with that language in a couple of ways. One is to understand organizations as entities of story and belief. So, I use the language of dominant narrative, which is a different way of describing the same thing, describing a dominant narrative is just how things are. So at the moment, we're all home working, so that's a dominant narrative.

Julian Stodd:

And dominant narratives are interesting because they're not just descriptive, they are deterministic to a degree. So, they can be used to control people and we are controlled because our thinking is limited within those dominant narratives. So, to change an organization or a society requires the fracturing of a dominant narrative.

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Julian Stodd:

One of the really interesting things about the Black Lives Matter protests is the way that we're seeing the rapid iteration of rituals, artefacts, behaviours, to rehearse how we do that. So for example, the tearing down of statues has become a ritualistic behaviour through which dissent is expressed, which largely contributes to some of these kinds of shifts that Rachel was describing. So the funny thing about dominant narratives is they can change just like that, if people choose to believe in them.

Julian Stodd:

So by using that language, an organization is an entity of story and belief. You can rewrite the story all you like, but if people don't believe in it, you're going to go precisely nowhere. Conversely, if you try to hold on to an old story, a society, or communities or individuals rewrite your story around you, you can find yourself losing power and slipping. And a core feature of the social age in this democratized space, in this radical connectivity is precisely that. These flashpoints act as points of aggregation and amplification through communities.

Julian Stodd:

And in what I call my 1% work, which means 99% of it is almost certainly wrong, I started trying to think about, well, what is leadership as a social movement. So, a leader who leads not through any application of power whatsoever but purely through an ability to interconnect, to listen, actually, which was one of the hardest things to do. And to help other people like those narratives. Maybe that smaller space we're moving to.

Rachel Happe:

I don't see what I said to conflict with that though necessarily, meaning it all depends how you define the community, right? And I do agree with you, I've been working with a group that doesn't want to accept that absolutely fundamental tension of communities, which is, you can't be completely inclusive. You have to define or you're never going to get belonging, inclusive within the boundaries but there has to be a boundary. If there are no boundaries, then who are you? If you're everything, you're nothing. So there has to be that meaning. And sometimes it's implicit, sometimes explicit. Sometimes it's co-created, sometimes people are kind of attracted to it. All of those dynamics kind of happen differently depending on the circumstances.

Rachel Happe:

When I talk about those inflection points, I'm talking within the bounds of whatever you've defined that community space to be.

Julian Stodd:

What it indicates is that organizations want to change, organizations are full of good people who want to change. We're all held within containers and those are containers of our own knowledge and understanding and the containers of our community and the containers of existing culture and existing narratives.

Julian Stodd:

Almost certainly the only ways we will be able to change are by becoming more interconnected and becoming more comfortable with stories of difference and dissent. For as long as we try to colonize, own, control and direct, all we are unlikely to do is feel better about things, which is nice. We can feel validated, we can feel vindicated and we can feel morally superior. But we're unlikely to actually change anything. So, the humility of social

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leadership in my language, humility of leadership is to engage without power almost. To engage, to listen, to learn, to connect, to ensure that no one is left behind.

Julian Stodd:

In that language I used in finding your campfire, I think I said, leadership is about listening to the voices, celebrating success, and having the first instincts to reach out into the places of silence because right now, back to your sort of opening question, right now people are struggling and failing because organizations are failing to be fair. And I don't mean bad organizations, I mean, really good organizations full of really good people who would be mortified to realize that they are causing pain to other people but doing so because they are failing to hear their authentic truth. And so, learning to listen is kind of one of the most important things to be doing right now.

Shannon Tipton:

Pardon me. Just a quick follow up question to that. So then how does your average person listening to you today after this airs and listening to this, it would be easy for them to say, I can't, this is just way too much, this is over my head. I cannot influence or impact this. So how does a person go into the workplace thinking about how they can impact and influence strength and community?

Rachel Happe:

We have something, we have a channel in our Slack instance as a team. Let's flip that sh't. And I will say one of the best exercises you can do as a human is every time you're anxious or every time you get defensive or every time you get frustrated, feeling your feelings, understanding that they're telling you something, and then saying, how can I perceive this to be great? I perceive this situation to be threatening. What if I'm wrong. What if, or how could I ship this to my advantage? How can I use this opportunity for something else that, starting to get your brain more flexible about seeing potential different outcomes rather than just kind of blindly accepting or assuming what somebody else means or just trying to see things in different options is probably the best thing you can do as an individual in my book.

Julian Stodd:

I think that's a great, great answer that. Rachel will have to forgive me if I sound a little American in what I'm going to say next. I recognize in advance how this will sound to some people for which I'll apologize. There's something about effecting change, which is that it's held through the actions of every individually in every moment. I wrote a piece a little while ago about the behaviours, actual behaviours of social leadership. And one of the behaviours that I talked about was leaving every day with less.

Julian Stodd:

So broadly, it's something like this. If you have a day when you're winning, a day which has been great, a day when you've succeeded, then the last thing you should do on that day is to give something away. And it could be anything, it could be resource, it could be your time, it could be access to your network. But when you're winning, you should give something away. But when you have one of those days when you are losing everything and when you're right down and you're on your knees and you've been beaten up and you get to the end of the day, you should give something away because community is something that requires us to invest in it. And when you have nothing left to give, you should invest in kindness or gratitude so that probably the single most important thing that we can do is just reach out in kindness. Just reach out to somebody to say, you did this thing and I'm grateful for it. You did this thing and it's impacted me in this way. So it's kindness and context.

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Julian Stodd:

It's like a society. If everybody picks up one piece of litter, then our environment is better. If we are kind, it might not solve everything but it might give us the foundation upon which we can solve anything.

Shannon Tipton:

I like that a lot. I don't think that that's especially American. I've travelled and I see that in other cultures too. It's that take a penny leave a penny kind of thing.

Rachel Happe:

Have you been to Boston? [inaudible 00:51:01] the smiling type.

Shannon Tipton:

But I think that there's something to be said with that, even regardless of your cultural affiliation. So whether you are from Boston, who are a little rough around the edges, perhaps. Or you're a southerner who might be a little softer around the edges. Or Canadians, the nicest people on the face of the planet, it would seem. And everything in between. That's something that anybody can do because I believe that grows.

Rachel Happe:

In complexity theory, it's the fractal that impacts the behaviour you get back, which then impacts the behaviour. So it's the opening salvo of behaviour which is the fractal of culture, which is then the fractal of society and our economy if you want to abstract it that way.

Shannon Tipton:

Is this how organizations piece by piece can nurture communities of practice, or communities in general?

Rachel Happe:

I think it's a start. I see a real problem. So, infrastructure will eat communities a lot. And this is where I talk about the 30%. When you get to a certain percent change, you've got to then reinvest a lot more to change the foundational structure, because people drive on the roads, right? And if the roads don't go where you want to go, it will last through one or two leaders and then they'll change, and the whole culture will revert again. So, you've got to work from the ground up and then realize that there is a ceiling created by your governance structure, that if you do not change that, you'll just revert, you'll revert to stasis if you don't change the whole system.

Julian Stodd:

This book on the socially dynamic organization, the subtitle is A New Model of Organizational Design, which I think is right. We have to rework our organizations to be fit for the environment we're in. And you can spot, we might not understand the details of that yet, but some trends will be clear. So our legacy organizations are domain-based. They're sort of vertically divided as pillars of productivity and performance. And they will need to be more lightweight, they will need to be reconfigurable.

Julian Stodd:

That will almost certainly involve different mechanisms of engagement rather than the models of hierarchy and contract and utility. They will need to be deeply fair because they

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will want to gain an invested type of behaviour from the people that work for them. They'll probably be highly permeable both to people and for expertise. They will certainly invest as much money in offboarding people as they do in onboarding them. They will have superb discipline in taking apart system and process rather than just building more system and process.

Julian Stodd:

It's not really hard to create the perfect type of organization. It really isn't that difficult. Most of the challenges we face aren't that hard. The thing that's important to recognize is that we're constrained by some very predictable things. The first thing we're constrained by is ourselves. So, the ways that we are invested in the systems that exist now. The second thing we're constrained by is the people we love around us, who are the people who through the way they hold those dominant narratives, prevent us from thinking and acting differently or damp down and silence some of those voices. We're certainly constrained if we don't reach beyond the boundaries of those communities into areas of difference and dissent with a humility to recognize that the peace will be negotiated.

Julian Stodd:

It's easy to describe organizations as monoliths and to talk about how change takes time and all of these other things. But it really doesn't in some ways. If you look at things, which is important to remind ourselves of, gender pay gap and structural inequality in organizations, it would be solved very fast if people went on strike about it. But we don't. And we don't because we don't care enough about it to solve it. So, most organizations have very elaborate systems of reporting and structures and plans in place to rectify these things, and very few have actually solved it. And you have to look no further than that to understand the nature of constraint. We stop ourselves doing the things which just should be done.

Shannon Tipton:

Can a community change a culture?

Julian Stodd:

An individual can change a culture, of course. Culture is the aggregated action of everybody in the moment. If you are kind to me, then my experience of our culture here is kindness.

Shannon Tipton:

Then through that, if we say that building communities of caring and recognition and awareness within our organizations can build upon each other, and then that in of itself, not totally, of course, but that can help generate a movement to change an organization. Could it?

Rachel Happe:

But you're still limited by Julian's issues of like limit ourselves, right? So you've got to have some centre of gravity that wants to do it. You got to have some pocket that wants to, it can't be one person because that one person will eventually just get spit out of the organization if nobody else is with them.

Shannon Tipton:

Sure.

Julian Stodd:



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You talk about sort of aggregation and amplification. One person may form a point of aggregation because, of course, I was working with a group of, in the UK, BAME, so Black and Asian Minority Ethnic group, who were looking, change agents in their organizations trying to drive equality and fairness. And we spent a really fantastic day together down in Bristol. And then they said to me, well, what should we do? And I said, well, it's not about what you do, it's about the price you're willing to pay. So, I said, I can look at your organizations, I look at your situation, I can see it's unfair, and I'm not paying the price.

Julian Stodd:

So, the only question really is, are you willing to pay the price to affect the change because one of you has to stand up first, somebody has to stand up. And if nobody is willing to stand up, then nothing is going to change. The second person to stand up carries less risk than the first. And that's really the question I would always ask myself. Anybody can affect some change. Rachel's right, it has to be the start of something. You cannot affect change unless you act as a point of aggregation. But the price is disproportionately high for being first.

Julian Stodd:

I spoke to, it's always stuck with me, a few years ago now, a woman who had been fired from her role in a global organization because she was going through fertility treatment and couldn't travel and they wanted somebody in that role of travel, and they fired her through an elaborate process. They knew it would go to court, they knew they would settle out of court, they just decided quarter of a million dollars is a price worth paying to solve this problem.

Julian Stodd:

And she said to me, I had somebody with me as I went through this process, and they, he was really nice. He said, "I can't believe the way that they're treating you, it's really disgraceful." She recounted the story about her ally and friend. And I said, I just don't want to hear it because he made you feel better and the only thing, he didn't do was go into them and say this thing you're doing is wrong. And you either make it right or quit, which of course, is a heavy price to pay. But if we rationalize inequality, we perpetuate it. But that's really hard because, of course, I'm sure he had family, I'm sure he had [inaudible 01:00:34] 1000 reasons, 10,000 reasons why he wouldn't do it, which is exactly the same reasons why I live a comfortable life and don't make the world much better because of lots of other good reasons. It's always that thing. You should ask not what you want to achieve but what price are you willing to pay.

Shannon Tipton:

I think that that's a great segue into where I'd like to wrap up to our conversation. At the end of every conversation, Michelle, Laura and I, we try to ask what are the next steps? If you were going to give advice to the L&D community right now in regards to helping lift up these communities within their organizations, what would be the first thing that you would tell them to stop doing? What would be your piece of advice?

Rachel Happe:

When we work with community managers who are leaders, they manage the system, not the people and the knowledge, right? So I think L&D often gets caught up in the content. People can help each other. They need the city plan or the environment or whatever you want to call that for that interaction to help take place. They don't need to tell anybody what to do, they don't need to provide any information. They need to manage the pub or the room or the whatever that place, whether it's digital or in person is going to be so that it's conducive to the conversation that they want to engender.

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Julian Stodd:

I would say, stop trying to own spaces.

Shannon Tipton:

Yes. Yes. I especially like what you're saying there, we do have a tendency to try to think, how are we going to track it, how are we going to manage it and all of these things. And it's just, we're talking about humans, we're talking about people. So maybe that shouldn't be the first or even last consideration.

Rachel Happe:

Have you read The Art of Possibility by Ben Zander?

Shannon Tipton:

Yes.

Rachel Happe:

He's a conductor of the Boston Philharmonic, but he's Australian I think. He has a really pointed view of life. You want to see the light in their eyes. Forget everything else. If you've got people together, we're having an energized conversation. You can feel whether you're doing it right or not. You don't need the metrics, and you don't need to know exactly what's going to come of it because there's no answer anyway.

Shannon Tipton:

That's very true. So now that leads me then to, what should L&D then start doing?

Julian Stodd:

Should start and continue to be evidence-based practitioners.

Shannon Tipton:

In regards to?

Julian Stodd:

Everything.

Shannon Tipton:

Everything. That's absolutely true. Now, how is this going to help building their communities, nurture, not really building them, but nurturing them.

Julian Stodd:

Kind of in all sorts of ways. So if the research tells you that people don't trust your technology, then you need to find ways of allowing people to use their own technologies. You might not like it, there might be all sorts of reasons why you have to come up with a compromise situation, but you need to do something about it. Just all sorts of things.

Julian Stodd:

I have been failing to complete a book about learning science, which is supposed to tackle some of the underlying question. In it, I talk about how you need to construct a hyperbole filter. You need to have the tools at your disposal to listen to what someone is telling you and

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take it apart and ask them why. Is that demonstrated in our space or are you transferring the findings from another space into this space? What was the size of the study? What are the conditions of it? So that's really the gist of it is don't just do something because it seems like a great idea or it's always been done or people tell you it's right. Dig down into it and look at the evidence, the validity behind it.

Rachel Happe:

I would also say, think more about matchmaking and understanding people's motivations. What will trigger them? What will prompt them to act or to do something? Who are the people they care most about? What are the topics they care most about? And start there. If you can't sit on the same side of the table with them, you can't bring them along with you. So, hurling content across the table at them and telling them to learn is not very effective.

Shannon Tipton:

Never has been.

Rachel Happe:

So, figuring out where they're at, what they care about and who you can introduce them to that will take them on that journey from where they're at to some place ahead of them, I think is one of the best ways to get people to change.

Shannon Tipton:

Great. Now, Julian, you started to answer my next point here, which is what does L&D now need to accelerate? So, you had said, the evidence-based actions. And so, do you have anything that you would build onto that as far as the things we need to accelerate?

Julian Stodd:

Things we should accelerate I think would be social and collaborative models of learning. That's pretty much the spice I'm interested in is how do you tap into the tacit tribal wisdom of your communities. So, accelerate that.

Rachel Happe:

I would say one of the things I used to say and people would look at me cross-eyed and less people do now is I'd say all management is going to be community management. As communications get networked, we're all going to have to operate in this intrinsic motivation. People need retraining, I don't like that word. People need to understand how to do that because management is still critical, but not the micromanage, it's the enabling and validating people, encouraging people, challenging them to be their best selves. It's that personal relationship type management, not the management of things.

Rachel Happe:

I think, again, back to the governance, if we can create governance where diversity is a feature, not a bug, and we have that kind of management that is enable and pushing and not molding because it's not theirs to mold, but helping people do what they already want to do. I think that's a role that L&D can play.

Shannon Tipton:

I think that those are all very important pieces of guidance we all can take to heart. I agree that creating that ecosystem of community and discovery and sharing and helping managers understand this type of leadership and this type of value is going to be critical to where we

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go next. So your insights today have just been mind blowing. I've been trying to listen and I'm taking all of these notes to be able to go back and hopefully communicate and share with the others that are within my circle. And I'm sure that the people who are listening here will have a desire to do the very same thing.

Rachel Happe:

You can see even with us, it's joyful if you do it well because you're just exploring together. You're not forcing something.

Shannon Tipton:

It's all about the joy and it sounds superfluous but it's not. It really is, it is a critical feature to being able to drive these conversations forward. And as you said, be able to sit across the table. And even though we don't agree, we can find out what together we need to move forward. So thank you very much. And Julian, thank you again for your time this evening. Really appreciate it. And thank you for sharing your wisdom. Do you have a date on any new writing?

Julian Stodd:

The Socially Dynamic Organization book will be out very end of July or beginning of August, and its partner, it's a twinned book, comes with the Social Age Guidebook, which will be August into September.

Shannon Tipton:

Great. We'll look forward to that. And we'll be putting details of that into our show notes. Rachel, do you have any new research that's coming out we should be reading?

Rachel Happe:

I'm working on a book but I've been working on a book for a long time. So, I don't have a date yet. But yeah, my next, I need to actually pitch and find a publisher because if I don't have a date.

Shannon Tipton:

Right. We'll be sure to gather all of your information and we'll also put that into the show notes for people to be able to access you and find out all of the great research that you've been doing. So once again, thank you both. I really do appreciate your efforts and your time today. Are there any parting words?

Rachel Happe:

It was nice to meet you both.

Julian Stodd:

Great to meet you both, yes.

Shannon Tipton:

Yeah, it was. It was a lot of fun and I look forward to carrying this conversation on in the future.

Julian Stodd:

Absolutely.

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Shannon Tipton:

Have a great evening and have a great rest of your day.