



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.

Michelle Ockers:

Hello, this is Michelle. Thanks for listening to the 8th episode published in the Learning Uncut Emergent series. It's an absolute pleasure to be collaborating with Laura and Shannon on creating the series. We see the discussions we are having with guests as part of a collective sense-making process to figure out how we can anchor ourselves in current business reality and what we can do in the learning profession to support organisations to adapt to the changes created by the pandemic response.

Learning Uncut has always been about keeping it real. The overall mission of the podcast is to help learning professionals identify practical actions that they can take to be more effective. The Emergent series is no different. We have another nine guest episodes planned in the series. Then we want to reflect on all that has been discussed and figure out the 'so what' ... what actions can learning professionals and learning teams take to emerge from this disruption as more relevant and effective than ever before?

And we're going to invite you to take part in figuring this out. We're planning a highly interactive community event. It's not a conference. You won't be spoken at. It will be more like a hackathon as L&D professionals come together, focussed on a series of business challenges, to generate practical ideas and actions that can be taken away and applied in organisations. As the event takes shape we will share more on Emergent episodes and in social media channels to let you know how you join in.

Michelle Ockers:

Welcome to today's episode of the Emergent series. We have two guests that I'd like to introduce before we get into today's topic, which is all about physical spaces for working and learning. David Shirley is our first guest. He's a partner at Flex We Are, who are an Australian consulting business that focuses on embedding and normalising flexibility in the modern workplace. I'm sure we'll get into what that means soon David, the whole idea of normalising flexibility - we've gotten used to that quickly haven't we?

David Shirley:

Yep.

Michelle Ockers:

So David is an expert in the optimisation of technology in flexible work design and has a background of over 30 years in the tech industry in Australia and the U.S. and he also has extensive experience facilitating training and workshops and coaching. So welcome from Sydney, David.

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David Shirley:

Thank you, Michelle. And good to be here.

Michelle Ockers:

It's a delight to have you here. Anne Bartlett-Bragg is the founder and managing director of Ripple effect Group who consult on smarter ways to connect people through technology. So there's a common thread here between the two of you, which is technology. Anne also researches new ways of working with technologies and has specialties in digital workplace design, organizational learning, and human-centered design. Anne is also on the steering committee of the digital disruption research group at the University of Sydney business school.

Michelle Ockers:

And, Anne you're actually joining us, although the word Sydney came up in there, Anne, I know if people look on your LinkedIn profile, not only will it say Sydney, but they're all going also to see Barcelona. And you're joining us from Spain where you now live. Welcome Anne.

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

Gracias, buen dia, good morning, good afternoon and hi.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes. Have we covered everyone around the globe with our welcome there? Let's start with you David, and just start on more of a personal note. We're all having to go through an experience, a shift in experience as a result of managing the global pandemic at the moment. What has changed in disruption mean to you in the last few months?

David Shirley:

Michelle, it's been a huge change for us. Prior to this really all of the programs that we delivered was all face to face that we would turn up to our clients now partners we would, would, would work with, and it was all face to face – workshops, one-on-ones. But since this has happened and this enforced work from our homes occurred, we've had to transition our business from 100% face-to-face to 100% online. And that's been a very quick and big challenge to do that. I'm a bit of a people person. I'd probably say I'm an extrovert in the fact that I get my energy from being around people. So I've found this quite a challenge. I've spent a lot of time trying to encourage people “Just please turn your camera on so I can see you.” I get all those nonverbal cues will mean a lot to me.

David Shirley:

So it's been a huge change. It's something that you've got to learn to work out where to get your energy from to carry on. I don't think this is changing any time soon. A lot of the clients we're working with are in this transition period of transitioning back to the office. I know a lot of people say, “transitioning back to work,” but we hope everyone's been working from home and they're transitioning back to the office. I think this period will be, you know, six to 12 months and we're not transitioning back to what we had. It will be a new environment that we're going to end up in. But in the moment, it's a big flux of this dance of going back and not going back as we see this pandemic sort of reach new levels around the world.

Michelle Ockers:



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And of course, David, you and I are both sitting in Australia where I've got to say, we've gotten off in terms of the health impacts, we've gotten off pretty lightly in Australia compared to many other parts of the world. But, Anne, you're in Spain. Now, Spain is probably at the opposite end of the spectrum compared to Australia from, from the health perspective and what happened with the pandemic and what that's meant for daily life. Give us a feel for you, maybe even at a personal level, at what this period has meant in terms of change and disruption.

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

Spain in a word was grim. We were blind-sided along with Italy. This thing hit us. Nobody knew what had hit them. It was a tsunami is an understatement. We went to bed, there was a couple of hundred cases. We wake up the next morning in Barcelona and there's 1200. No, no, no, that's a mistake. What happened? No, it's not a mistake. We didn't know what - we didn't have equipment - we didn't know what to do. It became quite terrifying. I admit to a couple of meltdowns with fear over it. Everything changed when we went into confinement. You guys talk about lockdown,

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

and I look at it and think "that's not lockdown." Confinement us was total and extreme. You weren't allowed out. So even people with children, everyone was home. And in Barcelona, in

these European cities, you tend to live in smaller apartments. And the kids were all at home. I had friends with families or three or four kids, and everyone's at home. The parents are trying to work. They also need to school kids and, you're not allowed out. It's really scary outside. See some of the things - like noise was really weird. Traffic stopped. There's no cars, no traffic. It was eerie outside. It was like 28 days. It's like the movie. You walk out into the street and go "Woah." Then there's that constant ambulance noise. And you think, "Oh God, there goes another one." And that has a sort of fear factor to it. I mean their level of cases day in, day out was just phenomenal. And it was just like, how do we stop this thing? Then in the middle of all of that, I had to go to hospital to have skin cancer treatment that couldn't wait.

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

And I was in hospital for a week. And that experience was the most terrifying experience I've had. You had to sleep in masks, you took your clothes off at the door and they got bagged. You were in hazmat outfits. The nurses couldn't touch you unless they fully geared up. It was something you wouldn't want to go through, but something you learned to cope with. And I think our ability to cope with things is bizarre. Remote working was not normal either. There was a lot of conversation around "this is what remote work is like." No it's not. Remote working is not like this at all. As a business we've always been flexible and had remote working. We were geared up for it. We were fine. This is normal for us. But sharing bandwidth, trying not to gate crash someone else's zoom meeting, just noises and things like that. This is not normal remote working. And I think we need to understand that in context as well. And to David's point, I love that "we're returning to work." Actually, we were all working already. We're transitioning where work occurs. I think one of the other profound things here that you notice is there's an enormous sense of community and care for others. So I sit here as an Aussie, looking at Australia hoarding toilet paper, and I go "What is that about?"

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

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We had no problems with it. You leave things for other people. We create community. We went out onto our balconies every night at eight o'clock and you checked in with the people across the road, on their balcony and other balconies. We celebrated the health workers. We had songs going and people were dancing to the song. Who got to choose the song each night. That connection thing that David, you said you missed, there was a real sense of recreating that with what we had from kids putting signs up and holding up signs to celebrations, to Spotify lists that were going around our block. All those sorts of things. It's amazing the innovation to keep the sense of community strong.

Michelle Ockers:

I think we'll pick up on that, that fact, that the idea of connection and community and what do physical spaces do for that versus virtual spaces. I think that's an important thread.

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

Yes. Well, I think that's super interesting.

Michelle Ockers :

What's happening with work in Spain at the moment Anne? Are people talking about going back to offices? Is it being considered or is it completely off the cards for a period of time? Where are you at with that?

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

Yeah, super interesting again. Remote working and teleworking was just not on the radar here prior to confinement. They had that strong sense of community. They work well in teams - as David was describing that sort of need to be together. So this was really hard. They didn't have technical setups. We were put into lockdown - we were told at Friday night at about 8:00 PM that as of midnight, so you had about four hours. So there was no opportunity to go to the shops and buy equipment. That was it. What you had was what you had to deal with. They call it telematic work, but remote working, tele working, is not normal. They struggled. But now about 35% of people are remaining on teleworking indefinitely. The government has now legislated that it's recognized and supported, which is interesting in itself. It was not supported as a form of work before.

Michelle Ockers:

What does that mean, Anne? Can I ask you to elaborate - when they say it's recognized and supported? Does it mean, for instance, I heard in Germany they're considering legislation that people have the right to work from home.

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

Essentially. That's right. Yes. That sort of thing. Flexible working the way we have done in Australia was just not recognised as a form of working. You are probably slacking off or not working. It's just not in their mindset. So yes, legislation is coming in that you are equal to people who choose to go to the office. So there's no pay cuts. The organisation will have a responsibility set you up with equipment, that you are in a safe environment. You know, all those sorts of things are now considered. There is strong labour laws here as well. There's been a lot of support. 50% of the population, working population, in Barcelona were

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furloughed and will stay furloughed until September. The government is paying 50% of their salaries. So nobody's going to fall through the cracks here.

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

There's a really strong emphasis on that. And of course, tourism though is such a big aspect. A lot of jobs can't work from home. So then we had to break down who worked where. You had to get authorities. The businesses had to get clearance. How are they ensuring people are safe? The processes now to go into any shop, business, whatever, is extraordinary.

Michelle Ockers:

What are your thoughts David, as you're listening to what Anne is describing there?

David Shirley:

So, you know, I think back to what I would say to, to CEOs and C-level suites and people leadership forums when I'd get in front of them, convincing them of the benefits of flexible work, which includes remote working. We try hard not to say working from phone because that's got all the connotations of being slack and not doing anything. Part of that dialogue we would have talking about, you know, the pin-up star of Denmark and Finland and those Nordic countries that were right up there with, you know, written into the legislation 20 years ago. And then you have countries like Japan that was really right down the list of organizations that offered flexible work arrangements. It's incredible how this will all change now that has been forced upon us.

But Anne's right. This is not normal flexible work arrangement. This is reactive, enforced. immediate work from home. Wow, I'm shocked when I hear about four hours to get to the shops and try and sort yourself out at home.

David Shirley:

We did in Australia have those same problems of couldn't get an external keyboard, couldn't get an external monitor or those things, but that went on for weeks. So we had the opportunity to go and buy them. The stores just simply ran out.

Michelle Ockers:

I think if we backtrack a little bit and perhaps David talk about the best and worst of physical workspaces pre COVID, because there's a cynical point of view that this whole push to open plan spaces for instance, was driven largely by driving down real estate costs and that organisations pushed it. And that maybe it wasn't the best thing to do in terms of productivity. And it didn't live up to some of the promises. when you think pre COVID, you know, what, what do you think of the common patterns you would have seen with physical workspaces at that point in time? And what would you hold up as the best and worst of that?

David Shirley:

So I agree with you that, that experiment of an open plan office space to reduce or cram more people into the same amount of space is a failed experiment. You look at our kids graduating from universities now, and the many different forums and ways that they're being educated and get that graduate and say, "Welcome to the organization. Here is your desk. It's in an open plan environment, and you're going to sit there from nine to five or eight till six and do all of your work in this one space."

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David Shirley:

I'm sure they'll think they're in trouble or they did something wrong. It's just a crazy way to do it. So that's the bad side of things because we need these different spaces to work in. Part of our work will be that I need to quietly read a report, or I need to quietly write a report or mark it up. Or I need a space where I can be collaborative with someone else or somewhere private where there's some security around the material I'm working with. All these different types of spaces. So what we saw is this sort of flexible work or an agile workspace where we were creating all these different types of physical spaces in our buildings to cater for the different types of work we were doing. Layer on top of that flexible work arrangements where I now can choose what times I come to the office space to do those things.

David Shirley:

And even where I don't come into that office space and not necessarily working from home. I might go to a library. I might go to a cafe. You know, I've always said to people "If you have an employee that is delivering on everything you've asked of them, they're delivering on the work content and the work product is good. They're engaging with their supply chain. They're engaging with their suppliers or whoever their stakeholders are, and they are delivering a hundred percent of what you're asking -do you really care where and when and how they do their work?" And the answer is always, no, I don't care. They're delivering everything I'm expecting of them. So then let's let people work where it makes the most sense to do those pieces of work. As far as what's going to happen now, I think it's really interesting. I could always see the sort of glint in a CFO's eye as he's thinking, "Wow, this

flexible work arrangement. I'm going to be able to shrink our floor space and save some money."

David Shirley:

And now we've had COVID kick in. And we are in that transition phase where some companies, organisations are going back to the physical office space. Yet this idea of a shrinking floor plan is not the case because now we've got this distancing we have to adhere to. Or if you want to get really complicated and think about these big towers we have in the CBD of Sydney and how many elevators there are, and two people per elevator. You do the maths on some of these towers, and it's pointless to go back to that office. You can't get into the office, do some work, get out for lunch, get some food, back into the office. It's just not practical with what they're putting in place. So I'm also seeing a lot of talk around, rather than having that one head office of having distributed offices around a metropolis.

David Shirley:

So what's going to happen is we're going to go back to an office. And we have all of our team in one floor of a building. And if someone else in the building contracts the virus the whole building empties. We've seen this happen at school that, you know, one child in Year seven - yet the whole of the high school has to empty and be cleaned. We're putting all our eggs in one basket to have that one physical head office now. And I think we're starting to see, particularly, if you then start bleeding into the idea of public transport and people aren't very happy about wanting to be on public transport, let alone the fact that there's, you know, what used to be a 50 or 70 seater bus now has 16 or 20 seats on it. It's quite difficult to get on a bus.

David Shirley:

So now traffic's worse because everyone's commuting in cars. Well, commuting was a big problem in a lot of big CBDs around the world. So people are going to want to work more

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closely to home. So if we can have that office that used to be one big three floors of the building. And now we're going to have three different buildings geographically located around the city that is more accessible to the general population of that organisation. That's how we're going to start to see things play out. I'm not sure I'd want to be a property investor building big towers in CBDs right now.

Michelle Ockers:

So I think what I picked up from where you started that train of thought was that flexibility was probably the best aspect and at their very best physical workplaces were set up to provide a variety of locations for people to go and do different types of work and to have choice. So this idea of being up at the zone, I think is very important. Flexibility is very important.

David Shirley:

It's not just that physical space at home. But if you think of flexible work arrangements, who they have to work for. Of course they must work for the individual, or why would you want to do it? It's got to work for the leader or the manager. It's going to work for the team. It's got to work for the organization. And the one everyone forgets is it's got to work for the customer. And if we satisfy those five stakeholders, we get a real win. Well, we've just introduced the sixth one now. It's got to work for the family. If we're working from home, if I've got a private conversation and we've only got two spaces in the home that I can speak privately, that's got

to work. Maybe there's a part of the house that the internet's not very good and I've got a really important video call to do, and I need strong internet that will, I need to do it from there.

David Shirley:

And, you know, depending on what your living arrangements - I've got three children at home now - one university, one working, one in high school - and then needs all need to be met with the different types of work they're doing at what types of day. The college university age child is actually at college in California so her time zones are all different requirements to my high school age child. So we do have to include the family if we're going to, I hate saying this, I feel like the corporate world has seconded our homes to be part of an extension of the office now.

Michelle Ockers:

How long do you think this is going to last for, in terms of, do you think there are permanent shifts here underway? And if so, what will workspaces physical workspaces look like in the future given that it's no longer about just workspaces provided by organisations.

David Shirley:

I think without a doubt, there'll be a permanent change from this. If we think where we were before COVID and where we are now, we're now in this transition phase. It's probably different for different parts of the world. You know, when I thought about your intro and what you were saying was happening in Sydney. And then I listened to Anne talk about what's happening in Spain. I'm like these are polar opposite experiences of this pandemic. So I could comment what I think is going to happen in Australia, and I sort of nearly am frightened to pick a future of what will happen in the U.S. or Spain or the rest of the EU. But in Australia, the way it's ticking, I think this transition period will be six to 18 months before we sort of settle into a normalcy of whatever that new thing for work looks like.

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David Shirley:

As far as the future of the physical space of offices, look you think of how many Zoom calls are made or Teams calls or WebEx or whatever that technology is. We need to do this well, right? I think the biggest laggard in all this will be international travel. So the idea of international travel for a meeting or to win some business or talk to a partner, wow, that's going to be years away.

David Shirley:

And there'll be a lot of that that will never come back. You know, we've got the idea of why would we send you to Hong Kong for four days or a week where you can do that the way you did it during the pandemic. And we can use this technology to do it. So the physical workspace of the future, I think there'll be more privacy involved. I'm not thinking this from a virus perspective or a cleaning perspective, but you know, instead of having that meeting room, it's now going to be a mini studio. We're going to have nice lights in there with good microphones and good cameras where you go in there because you need to influence really well. I think about the format of these Zoom calls where many people are just using the built-in camera and the microphone, or maybe a headset. The difference between having an internal team meeting or possibly you're interviewing for a job, like how much different do you want that experience to be?

David Shirley:

Or I'm pitching for a big piece of business you know, what's my background. Am I thinking about that? Am I thinking about how good I sound? So I often think, and I'm going to do this. If we got that Martin Luther King, I have a dream speech and we made it crackling. We couldn't really hear him. You know, here's one of the best messages we've ever heard, but I couldn't quite hear it. What happens to that? And I think if we're pitching for business and trying to influence, and we haven't got all of those things in place, that's how I think the office will change as well. We'll have mini studios all over the place with really stable internet, great cameras, great lighting, make us look really good, beautiful backgrounds that have been designed. Maybe you put all your company awards in the background while you're pitching for new business, the books you've written, whatever, whatever that looks like.

Michelle Ockers:

I already see a bit of that. Interesting. Isn't it? Anne what are your thoughts when you listen to David describe some of the shifts he potentially sees. And in particular, when you talk about culturally how different a place that Spain and perhaps other European countries are compared to Australia with the experience of flexible work and the significance and importance of community and care for others in your culture.

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

I think I'm going to come from a people-oriented perspective, which of course is always my focus - a sort of human centered design issues. Hearing what David's talked about, we had coworking space in Sydney, which I let go actually before COVID because it was just not working for us, the noise levels, and it was just not working. I see coworking as not a business I'd be investing in anymore because for me, I'm also looking at the health issues with that. Now, would you get me back into an office anytime soon? No chance. I, no matter how much space I've got, it's surface cleanliness. It's, who's touched what – the kitchen, oh my God, imagine those break rooms. I think to David's point, the sort of flexible working with

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activity-based working is, has always been important to us and what we talk about when we've been using technologies.

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

But I think the culture that we're going to have to deal with, and I don't know that we understand this yet, is a lot of people have got anxiety and fear and it's around health issues at the moment. And again, here is if I'm exposed in the office and even though I might be a fit healthy person, I could take that home to grandma who I share with, and that's not unusual in the European context, and I'm going to make her sick. So the anxiety there is high. There's mental health stuff for people that are used to so much sociability, having that drawn away. How do we support the company culture to bring that back? We are getting better at Zoom, but it's not just about delivering business things. We've got to think about video connection. How do we connect? How do we replace that connection, David, that you even mentioned that you needed?

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

How do we reinvent that serendipity of innovation and dropping by? I think we're in the early stages. Well, there probably still are organizations that had all this surveillance stuff on people's computers to check what they were doing because they might not be working. Yeah, you're right. Because they've got kids in the house and they've got all the stuff. The

hours of work here are changing as well. So 9 to 5, well, actually we don't work 9 to 5 – it's 10 to 8. That's going to change because people need to not all be in the office at the same time. There's booking arrangements. Do you want to come into the office? You need to book a space. That space has to be cleaned. It has to be authorised as cleaned. Commuting here is mainly public transport to them. More people are using their scooters and cars.

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

So I just think there's some really complex people-oriented issues that we're going to have to deal with. And I'm not sure how the physical spaces will need to adapt to help us with that. It's very new. As to how long it lasts, is it, you know, forever? I think so, because if you read everything, this isn't going to be the last pandemic. We're going to have to deal with. So I think now we have had a realisation where the changes have to be made. I don't think it's a bad thing. They talk about a new normal. I think we need to rephrase that and reframe and just say it's reality. So stop trying to shape a new normal. Go with the flow, and this is what reality looks like.

Michelle Ockers:

We're not saying the office is dead. That physical workspace is dead, are we? We're just saying that our experience of them is going to have to be very different and that our homes and other spaces, third spaces, where we might go to work - they're not just virtual spaces, they're physical spaces as well, right?

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

Yeah. And what are they going to look like I think it's also rethinking when we do get together as a team, when we do all go back to an office or a workspace, what is it that we need to do together when we're physically together that we can't achieve effectively through technologies? Then we'll be more effective in our use of time. That could shape how we use the space. So it's kind of rethinking our ways of working and then asking people like David, okay, these are the ways we envision now, David design us something amazing for that.

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Michelle Ockers:

Let's move into the discussion about what all this means for physical spaces and for learning. Face to face learning of course, was more common than you might expect still, as we moved into 2020. There's an interesting piece of benchmarking research from Emerald Works who used to be called Towards Maturity. They've been doing longitudinal benchmarking of L&D globally for about 16 years and their most recent report, which was early 2020m showed that a full 55% of learning was still being delivered in organisations in place to face in classrooms, which I was a bit stunned about when I actually dug that figure up. Anne, how would you rate face-to-face spaces for learning pre-COVID? Is there anything we should fight to keep from the way we were using face-to-face spaces for learning?

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

No. Get rid of the lot, because a classroom is an artificially constructed learning space that doesn't take into account, which adults - so we're talking organisational, adult learning. Let's push kids aside because I have much more fun than we do. It's just such a contrived space that you put someone in and say, "When you're in this space, you will learn." And we know they don't always do that effectively. A lot of it's back to the trainer. It's time to move on and

this is the time to move on. And what does that look like? David, we need you. This is where we need to really rethink. And a lot of it was around real estate and floor space. I can remember when I was lecturing at UTS back in the early 2000s, and I had three computer labs that I used to "teach" in.

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

They were kind of pretty little islands and they were pretty funky, but I just kept saying, "The labs are only used a couple of hours a day. This is such a waste of classroom space. You know, we could do so many other more interesting things with then tablets were just coming in. Why don't we do this? Why don't we do that? And the technology dean was like, "Oh no, you can't do that." Why not? Now it's a time to sort of say, why can't we all sit under a tree in the garden with iPads or do something you don't, why do we need to be stuck in a classroom? And yes, I saw that figure, Michelle. I was horrified. Not shocked – horrified. That's just wrong.

Michelle Ockers:

So I'm going to push back a little bit Anne. Do you think there's nothing that a classroom is the best place to do? I'm thinking for instance, I know of someone who leads the IT training team at a hospital. Hospitals are busy places. There's patients in the workspace, it's a customer space basically, so they are actually, they never stopped doing face to face IT training for some of the new systems that we're rolling out during COVID. Can you imagine a scenario where that, where you wouldn't need to use, or it wasn't a viable and reasonable thing to pull people into a classroom to do something like that?

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

If you need to train people on IT systems, the system is flawed. These days that is an inexcusable user experience design error that we have to train people. We are so digitally fluent now, and there are so many patterns of behaviour that teaching me where to click a button, and when I'm sitting there saying "I can't find how to submit this." This is just poor design from a software perspective. So that's my first argument there.

Michelle Ockers:

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But it's still the reality of some systems.

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

Then I would redesign and have online tutorials. So I'm in the system, I'm trying to use it. And I have either a chat bot that is going to support me with that or rollovers or popups, or I develop short microlearning, high quality micro learning that allows you to investigate how to do something. This is how I used to do it. And the thing says, no, you do it like this now. You could reduce that sitting in a classroom, being shown how to click buttons. So much better. What will this system do for me? What do I need to know to get started? Could take 15 minutes max. Then all the support pieces that go around that. I don't like to see people put together. I mean, there's a classic example of occupational health and safety training for construction workers that every time they go on a site, they have to sit in a shed and go through a video, talks about occupational health and safety.

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

They know their stuff. They've done it 150 million times on every site. company that we've done work within Australia turned that upside-down years ago. Gave them all a little digital camera and told them to go out on the site, take photos of good examples, bad examples, come back together into the shed and share that. Then they started posting them online and writing examples of good and bad practice. You're tapping into what people already know. You're acknowledging their expertise and you're not wasting anyone's time and boring them to death. Rethink our design. Rethink how we're teaching people.

Michelle Ockers:

I think some of that gets back to our basic mindset. What we think our role is as learning and development professionals and how we actually think learning happens.

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

Totally. And that's where we've got to start thinking, "Well, when COVID was on people were doing a lot of learning themselves." People learnt languages, people do philosophy courses just because they were at home and, you know, they needed to do something because I they were stuck at home. other than watch Netflix and all those other things. And they suddenly realized that they actually did quite well. Now we've still call it formal and informal. And you know, there are aspects of formal learning that we'll have to somehow get our heads around. Like exams that require authenticating that you are who you are and that you actually sat exams. You know, there's a few things that can't be done, but I think we still need to reflect on what is the best way we can do this back on what David was talking about, with the best spaces.

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

How do we think of that treatment? Treating us like battery hens, all in a little coop, all lined up doing what we're told. Control and command went out the window during confinement and lock down. Why are we even considering going back to it?

Michelle Ockers:

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So David, you're looking very thoughtful. There's something going on in our head.

David Shirley:

I like a lot of what Anne is saying, but I want to add to that. There's still that need, I believe for that face to face stuff. But if we treat learning exactly the way we treat how to do our jobs, then let's use this as the call to say, how can we have the richest environment for learning, of which some of it I still believe is face to face if that's the right thing for that material and that learner, there's some learners that are require that face to face.

David Shirley:

They want to see your facial expressions, or they need you to show them physically what to do. But of course that's not a hundred percent. There is so much wasted time. That's a great example Anne of going on site, you know, why we just boring people with this over and over again? I look at this as a bit of a call to action and say, let's look at the broad range of, of alternatives or capabilities to deliver training.

David Shirley:

Where are the interactions of, how do we engage with the students? I mean, we've sat on these things for long enough to know that it's really difficult from a human to keep our energy up using this forum. I know if you said to someone "you've got the choice of four hours face to face or four hours online" the people who would like the online might like the flexibility of where and when, but it's an exhausting medium, and we've got to change the way we do it. We can't simply say, "Here's the material we use in the classroom. I'll share my screen, look at my PowerPoint and listen to my voice for four hours." I can imagine the knowledge transfer would be in the toilet if we tried to do that. So on a big standard,

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

They should be taken out and damaged, both courses. I've always said that. You know, you put a PDF on my phone and expect me to read it. I will hunt you down and I will do damage.

Michelle Ockers:

There was something you said earlier, David, which I think is relevant here. You were talking about, from a work perspective, setting up spaces to create different experiences. Then you were talking about in the virtual environment, if you're sitting in your home office that maybe the way you set yourself up for different kinds of interactions, different kinds of meetings, and so on, is going to shift. And it strikes me, we should be thinking about the same thing both in terms of physical and virtual for learning.

What is the experience we're trying to create and what is going to serve that based in terms of the environment, be it a physical or virtual environment, right?

David Shirley:

Yeah. And also, what is the content? You know, what are we trying to teach? I'm not musical, but I can't imagine what it would be like trying to, maybe this is a terrible example of, , to learn guitar or learn drums, or piano. I mean, maybe once you're over the hump, then an online would work well.

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

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It's so achievable David, seriously. It is. I've done cello online. That goes back to the creativity of the designer to think about it. You could learn to surf online, but at some point, you actually have to get in the water on a surfboard. But you can actually, musical instruments - they're very clever.

David Shirley:

Yeah, actually then that's a much better example. Like, how can you learn to drive a car online. I know they've done this with the SIM racing. They get the best SIM racers in the world and they stick them in a formula one car and they're hopeless. It translates much better the other way around that. If you're in the physical world, you're very good at racing the car, that you typically do quite well online, but not in reverse.

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

What about pilots?

Michelle Ockers:

I was just going to say, ultimately you have to get into the real workplace, right?

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

A pilot – a 747, well they're not 747s anymore, they've all been retired, but you know, like Qantas would never let a pilot into an aircraft until they had done their hours in the simulator and path and part, because that's a simulator is a full experience. We just have to keep reframing and keep questioning what we're looking at a screen and trying to learn how to do a motor skill or something, how do we create that? And with virtual reality now, and, you know, the ability to 3D touch, it will change a lot of things. I'm just being a devil's advocate.

David Shirley:

No, I understand that. And I think that, you know, no, we wouldn't let a pilot in a plane unless they had got those hours up. I think the reason we use Sims is it was a much cheaper way of getting those hours up. I mean, we wouldn't let them in a plane unless they got their hours up, whether it was in a cockpit of a real plane or the, a cockpit of a simulator, we want that experience. But that is a great example of how we transitioned something. We probably could go back and ask a pilot of the 1930s, "How do you train a pilot?" And they would have said, well, the only way you can do it is by to put them in a plane. But we've worked out a better way of doing it that's more effective, it's more efficient, it's broader. I can come back to it if we get this right, this technology and how we use it right.

David Shirley:

The best thing that I've looked at when I said at the very beginning, we went from a hundred percent face to face because for that, we found that was the most effective learning because it was quite interactive bringing people together. Now we're a hundred percent online and finding it as effective. You know, it's been a real learning experience for us. Now, our addressable market just exploded. You know, whether before it was, where could David physically be? Could I be in Melbourne or Sydney or Hong Kong? Now my addressable market is everywhere and it's just a time zone sleep issue for me to navigate.

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

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I think that's a good point David because what that's also done is it's demonstrated to people that actually having David physically in the room isn't essential now. We've had to learn to accept that. And we've actually gone "Well, that was pretty good, actually. Thanks, David. We enjoyed ourselves. That was good." But you know, they're saying now here that 45% of jobs can be done from home. 45% of work can be done from home. So then my question is how much learning can be done differently. So back to that, 55% Michelle. You look at how much of that actually can we reshape? Don't get rid of it, don't just put it online. Like David said, don't just dump it all online. Reshape what that is. People have learned to be autonomous. How do we help them? Our role is not to teach. It is to facilitate and to enable and to create learning environments and learning contexts that get people from A to B in their different ways.

Michelle Ockers:

I think we haven't spent enough time thinking about the environment as part of enabling people to learn with, or without a subject matter expert present. Both the physical environment and the virtual environment. I think that's the call to action here, regardless of

what the environment is. And I suggest we're not necessarily talking about reducing that 55% down to zero. Although that's your call to action Anne, is kill the classroom altogether. Maybe the physical space is not the classroom that's needed. Maybe there's some residual that needs to happen in a space where people are physically together. David, how do we create working spaces and flexible spaces for people to gather for different purposes? And they're not necessarily dedicated learning spaces, not dedicated classrooms where, because learning is happening all the time as we work. So do you get many requests for, you know, when you're designing spaces, how do we ensure that the space is a space where people can learn together?

David Shirley:

So I think it will change from months ago until now and what we'll see in, in the near future. The companies that were building these new office spaces and having very agile spaces for activity based, what am I going to do? Where's the best for me to do that? Even that was a little statically set up to. Say well that left hand corner of this floor will be quiet space meeting rooms. And literally you walk around some of these offices and when you cross this threshold you are not allowed to utter one word, one noise. It is the quiet zone. You get to another part of the office and it's quite collaborative. But if you look at the physical setup of it, it's quite static still. I haven't yet seen how are we going to make this more flexible.

David Shirley:

I mean, we've seen it in training rooms and we talk about the learning spaces, where there are dividers that can chop up a bigger room into two smaller rooms. I don't think we've seen that in the greater part of the offices where we can be more flexible. I don't think we've quite got there with that thinking yet, but I don't think these things are far away. I think everyone is quite open to some very new ideas of how we'll shape this future.

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

How do we add social distancing to that? Until we get a vaccine or we have rapid testing, and I know that the people who are in the area with me are negative or don't have the virus, how are we going to create spaces that also where we learn typically together we're sort of huddled together and you know, I think of those interactive workshops where we're here on a table and Everybody's huddled over, they're sharing pens, you're doing all this stuff. Whoa,

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I am so not in that environment. And again, that's from my experience here in Spain. There's no way. You are distant. Even people we know well. They say, you know, do you bump elbows? No way, that's too close. If I can bump someone's elbow, I'm too close to them.

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

So, also in that design, how do we do that? Because then that distance also creates a distance for collaboration and connection. So we've got a kind of double whammy challenge, haven't we. We've got, how do we create distance and safety for learning because we've always talked about safe learning environments, which were often psychological. I need to be really sure that you're not going to infect me. How do we do that? And then how do we transition that into - let's say once we've got a vaccine or some kind of testing or that we're confident that we're safer, closer. So we're going to have those transition periods too.

David Shirley:

I'm continually floored in a shocked way of how you're thinking from your experience in Spain compared to my experience here. I mean, we watch global news, but it seems the gravity of those little nuances of the way we live our life just hasn't hit us here in Australia. You talk about, you won't even elbow bump someone. I think most people have given up on elbow bumps here and, you know, back to giving you a hug or shaking your hand. So it's incredible how different these experiences these lived experiences are. And of course that in itself will change how we forge a future ahead.

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

Yeah, I think so, David and I think the young ones haven't adapted to that either again, this is a very high touch society. So I do see that let's say under 25s or still hugging and giving each of the two kisses, whereas the adults are like "Whoa." We are very, very aware of that. And it's the lived experience I've had. If you could see me in my hazmat outfits, you would probably laugh, but it has certainly impacted how I think of space and the way we work and learn.

Michelle Ockers:

I think that's a nice note to wrap up and move into our rapid round of final questions. What I get out of this discussion is that we have a long way to go with our thinking about spaces where we work and where we learn - both physical and virtual spaces. And, and I think there's a real opportunity just as we've sort of set up this specialisation around learning technology and some of the bigger corporate teams have specialists in learning technology. I think something that has been neglected is this whole idea of learning environment design, like proper learning environment design, rather than just technologies for different purposes. We do it a bit with virtual ecosystems, but I think there's more opportunity there than we have previously leaned into.

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

Yeah, absolutely. It's definitely made me think differently being in confinement and then how we engage with that. I think there is a big piece that we need to address in context. And I guess it just comes back to rethinking our whole approach to learning design, approach to autonomy, to cognitive load, to David's point, you know, it's intense. How do we manage cognitive load for them yet encourage people be independent autodidactic learners? And then there's a digital divide because we still need to address, the hardware people have access to, the bandwidth people have access to, or not, who does or doesn't have the right kit and then their digital skills and capabilities then kick in. So it's just such a complex

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dynamic that will have been thrown into. We could get it very wrong if we don't just take a moment to think more deeply about what we're going to do next.

Michelle Ockers:

On that note, we are at a certain point in time in terms of navigating and how far into the future we can see. There's still clearly like a lot of uncertainty, a lot of questions to be answered in different parts of the world about the future of spaces and the way we use physical spaces, But in terms of what that means for learning and development and what they should stop, start and accelerate, I'm going to do the rapid round now. David, we might start with you for the first one. In terms of advice to Learning and Development professionals in the context of today's topic what should they stop?

David Shirley:

They should stop developing material for the classroom. That's a definite. What they should keep doing. I mean we need to keep engaged and we can't have this void of holding our breaths and we won't educate anyone until we get through this and we can take another breath. So we've got to keep continuing to educate people. That's what we must do. Then the future bit of what must we change to make that better? Let's look at what we've learned from this experience and incorporate that into a future learning model and use all the different elements of education not be so myopic about this is the only way, because this is the way we used to do it, it's the only way to do it. Be a bit more open about what will work for different people.

Michelle Ockers:

I think we almost don't have an option in that at the moment. Anne how about yourself - What do you think L&D should be stopping, starting and accelerating?

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

I love everything that David said. Stop doing what we've always been doing. This is a huge opportunity to rethink that. Challenge it. I'm not saying it's wrong. Just challenge your assumptions. Start really building empathy and deep understandings with human-centered design. Actually look at examples of that and really think deeply about that because we've got to address fears, challenges, mental health, and all those other things. And accelerate, get out more into understanding people's contexts and what it is they've got to learn and shape the context, which goes back to the physical space and how we use the online. So it's all really that empathy and understanding people. Just do more of it. Sooner. Challenge your assumptions. Think differently. Stand on your head.

Michelle Ockers:

Fantastic. Thank you so much, Anne and David for joining us on Emergent and for contributing to this whole sense making process we're going through at the moment.

Anne Bartlett-Bragg:

Thanks, Michelle.

David Shirley:

You're very welcome. Thank you for having us.

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