



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.

Host Shannon Tipton:

Hi, I'm Shannon Tipton, owner of Learning Rebels where we help you reimagine your learning strategy to reflect the modern workplace. I am proud to be the host of Learning Uncut Emergent Series where we will be discussing learning from failure. I'm so excited to welcome two gentlemen, one from the US and one from the UK, who are known for their transformative thinking. First, I'd like to welcome Brian Murphy. Brian is the head of learning and enterprise capabilities at AstraZeneca who is an unapologetic advocate for transforming the face of corporate learning, moving from order taker to value creator.

Jeff Mariola, here in the states, who is the chief development officer of Mariola Unlimited and Jeff has led both multinational companies and entrepreneurial start-ups as CEO. He is on a mission to give executive leaders and business teams the tools for sustainable success. Welcome, gentlemen and thank you for joining me today.

Jeff Mariola:

Good to see you, Shannon.

Brain Murphy:

Our pleasure. Great to be here.

Shannon Tipton:

Let's start with this. It's been several months since our daily lives have been radically altered in response to the pandemic. As restrictions start easing around the world, it's clear that there is going to be an enduring impact on how we work and live. Based on that, what has changed in the last few months, Brian I'll let you start as I imagine change and disruption has really had a different meaning for you over there at AstraZeneca.

Brain Murphy:

Thanks, Shannon. It's such a great question. Certainly at AstraZeneca, we've been in the sake of COVID, and in particular, trying to help with finding a solution and a vaccine for COVID. We're very proud to be part of that challenge and our scientists are doing some great work in that regard. In terms of what it's meant for me personally, I think there's some personal reflections. The first would be, in a way, nothing's changed and everything's changed. What I mean by that is, as learning folks, we're always talking about digital disruption and the pace of change. The fact that really to address that, we need to double down on what makes us human in terms of focusing on the things that are innately human about us because that's something which we will continue to need to focus on irrespective of the change. In a way, that continues to be true, right? We have to rely on our empathy, our curiosity, our ability to adapt in that regard. That's not something that's going to be automated anytime soon. That's something that we taught, our leaders heavily at

Learning Uncut Emergent Series
Brian Murphy & Jeff Mariola
Accelerating Learning from Failure

AstraZeneca, for quite a while. I guess the COVID situation, the same applies, but just even more so in the sense that we are social animals as humans and this period of lockdown has proven to us once again that we need to really focus on what makes us human and what makes us as a human organization. Focusing on that is something which just has come home [inaudible 00:04:00] again for us to make sure we continue to focus on that. The second piece would be, which plays right into our wheelhouse as learning professionals, we're having to adapt on the go every day as all of you guys are, I'm sure as well. I personally have had to really challenge and unlearn a lot of things over the last few months and continue to have to adapt every day. Those are two things, double down on what makes us human to deal with the disruption, but also really trying to work that learning muscle every day so that we can continue to just make this normal. A new normal I think is going to be a continuous change. That would be my opening thoughts on that one, Shannon.

Shannon Tipton:

Well, thank you for that. Those are some really powerful thoughts and I'm certainly going to touch back, especially when we talk about our topic of the day and doubling down on what makes us human. I love that. We're certainly going to reach back and talk about that a little bit more. Jeff, I'm curious as to your answer to the question.

Jeff Mariola:

Well, I look at it through the lens of, one, myself and my business that we really created in the last two years which is consulting, working with managers and leaders of companies to transform them, to get them to higher levels of performance, but it also forced me to look at our business and I think it boils down to the choice that you're going to make around how you're going to look and respond to a crisis. It's classic crisis management and you have three choices. You can actively cope with it, which means I'm going to jump right in there, Shannon.

I'm going to fix the problem, that all my effort is focused on the problem or what I choose to do is to really more reappraise what's happening. That's not going into denial about what is happening in the marketplace and the impact that it's having on me, it's having on my colleagues, it's having on my customers, but that requires that you block time for deep, inner emotional and cognitive work to try to see where the opportunities lie. The term you're hearing is silver lining. If you look at the entrepreneurial spirit, the companies that are led, that have learning development programs, that are forward thinking, they are looking for the opportunities in this crisis to reframe, re-strategize, repurpose their business.

The third strategy is avoidance and I've seen some companies avoided, thinking this was going to go away. My learning for myself and for my clients is that we need to spend adequate time reappraising our business to allow the impact of this from an emotional level shift to where we're using our executive brain to think about what's next and what that looks like. Unless we, as a team, as a company, as a learning organization take time to strategize around that, all we're going to be doing is fixing the problem in hand. It's that if the rate of change is faster outside your business than inside your business, you won't be in business in three to six months.

Learning Uncut Emergent Series
Brian Murphy & Jeff Mariola
Accelerating Learning from Failure

That's pretty much how I've tried to deal with it with Mariola Unlimited and how I'm working with my clients to look out six months, 12 months, 18 months to what's going to be needed to support the new business model.

Shannon Tipton:

That's great and I love you've broken it down into these three very important parts. I believe this is important for any business in any industry, is to be able to identify where your strengths and weaknesses might be as it applies to coping or choosing or avoiding, right? Then again, you're putting human in the centre of all three of those. Jeff and Brian, your thoughts aligning here almost by happenstance. I love the direction this is going into.

Opening up the conversation around learning from failure, in previous episodes of The Emergent Series, we've talked about rapidly changing business models and how learning and development can support organizations to adapt and how learning professionals can emerge from disruption as being more relevant and being more effective or in some cases even thriving in these situations. Of course, all of this is dependent on taking note of the lessons learned, both good and bad, and adapting, right?

I ran across this interesting piece in Fast Company where they were talking about start-up companies when they fail, when they shut down their businesses, that it's customary to write a post-mortem of failure and sharing what went wrong with the greater community. What struck me is that there appears to be this really huge pressure to keep up the facade of success when things are falling apart around you until things do fall apart. We know that learning from failure is anything but straightforward. It's not riding that post-mortem because that's, rear-view mirror thinking.

What then can we do to take learning from failure and use it more as a construct for organizational success? Jeff, I'll start with you. What are your thoughts?

Jeff Mariola:

Let me start with a personal failure as a manager, as a leader of that international organization that you were talking about. Shannon, you're very well aware of this. You go back to 2007-2008. We had an international company based out of London and 18 different countries, doing interior landscaping. We knew, we could see that there was a bit of a recession coming in. Like all companies, what do you do? You plan. You put together a three-tiered plan that says, "If we lose 10% of our business, 20%, 50%, what would we do?" Just disaster planning.

We decided, because we had a lot of good thinking on the leadership team, to start building out some brand extensions to help support our core service because we knew that if we had those, it would offset some of the potential losses. We were looking at 25%, 30% decrease in our business which would translate into layoffs and furloughs and just a lot of nasty things. We came up with a strategy, but when I look back, why we weren't successful in launching those brand extensions, is that what we didn't do, because we really had mediocre success, I have to take ownership of that, what we didn't do was what you said earlier, Shannon, that inner emotional work with the entire team.

We never gave the core business which was highly successful in a very good economy. The men and women that were the day to day, that were on the ground, performing the business

Learning Uncut Emergent Series
Brian Murphy & Jeff Mariola
Accelerating Learning from Failure

that they were passionate about wouldn't accept a lot of what we were trying to do with the brand extensions. I pin that on us as a management team, as a leadership team because we never gave them the why. From a learning and development perspective, we never gave them the why. We didn't start with their hearts. We didn't start with the emotional reasons why it was so critical for us to be able to pivot into some of these other, to protect the business, to protect the core, which we all passionately loved.

That was real learning for me, so now I flash forward. In 2017 and '18, I was brought into a highly entrepreneurial staffing business, accounting and finance. At that point, we knew a recession was going to be coming. Thinking back on some of the mistakes that I had made before, I look out at my team, we had 90 colleagues that I work with. 75% of them were under the age of 35 which meant none of them have ever worked in a recession. They didn't understand things like there would be potential hiring freezes, downsizing, one-up decision making.

We were in a 10-year economic bubble. Things were so good they could get appointments with about almost anyone to talk to them about our services. What we decided to try to get ahead of that, create through learning and development. Remember, this was a Millennial group for the most part. We decided to gamify a mock recession. We called it Armageddon. We literally gamified it. You could follow it and execute on it and co-accountability on an app.

What do I mean by that? Well, what we did is we put scenarios. We had our learning and development team create modules, scenario plans, that would put us in real situations of working through a recession. Let me share with you, it was really challenging. We set that recession out for six months, but what we did proactively is prepared those colleagues for what their new normal was going to be six months from now. To me, that was a great example of preparing your team on the back of learning and development in a really ground level with each and every individual on supporting them.

Interestingly enough, we sold the company a year ago, year and a half ago, but now that COVID came on, I still check in with the managers and I know because of the work that we had done with them, preparing them, not for the pandemic, but for the economic realities, that they are really ahead of their competitors. For me, that is taking failure and using it, which you use the word to construct for success.

Shannon Tipton:

Wow, I'm blown away by that. That's such a wonderful idea. I don't know if a lot of organizations are doing that. That's taking planning for failure to a whole new level and I think that is something that is certainly worth digging in deeper about. Brian, what are your thoughts about taking failure and using it as a construct for organizational success? Are you doing anything like what Jeff had done in the past or are you doing something different?

Brain Murphy:

First of all, I'm taking notes here because I'm learning from Jeff and to steal his ideas.

Shannon Tipton:

We're all learning from Jeff.

Learning Uncut Emergent Series
Brian Murphy & Jeff Mariola
Accelerating Learning from Failure
Brain Murphy:

Right. A lot of what you said Jeff really resonates with me. I guess I want to cover maybe a couple of responses to this. The first is how I see this around why we have such a hang up about failure. Then maybe I could share a few things that we've tried in the past and that we're trying now at AstraZeneca. First of all, and this is a personal view on failure, I remember when I was at Citi, I was at Citi for many years, the bank, and I had a great colleague, Vanessa Colella, I think she's still the head of Citi Ventures, so basically the head of innovation at the bank, and she used to talk about failure like we have a real hang up for failure in large corporates, because it hangs, it looms large over you and it's as if it's on a big screen behind you in big letters, right?

Her view was, if you're in a start-up, you're an entrepreneur in a start-up, you don't even think of it as failure at all. You just think it's the fastest way to get to success. How can I experiment and learn really quick, really cheap and really fast so that I can get to the successful outcome? High-performing organization is an organization that, I don't think the language is helpful, think it's a case of, "How can we get better? How can we experiment and learn really quickly so that we can get to success as quickly as possible?"

The other thing is we have a hang up just as individuals. We've been schooled and educated to be right, right? We need to pass the exam. We live in a very binary world. I think that's even getting, daresay, worse if you think about the pressures that kids are under now to be the fastest, the best and so on. I think society is not necessarily helping. We're not helping ourselves. In the corporate setting, there's a few things I've seen that I've been part of at Citi and a few things we're trying at AstraZeneca, the use of sims and scenarios that similar to Jeff mentioned, I think, can be very powerful, if done well.

I remember at Citi, as part of a broader organizational culture change, we brought a large number of leaders together in a really large physical space, obviously not so much possible right now, but we walked through, using technology, a really lifelike business simulation game. Because it was developed so well and they were put together in teams and it really tapped into their natural competitive nature that the unsuccessful teams ended up being shut down by the regulator. Now not in real life, but in the game.

I could see this actually had nearly a visceral effect on folks in the room. They were coming up to me later saying like, "We felt it in our guts when we didn't get this right." I think learning, and for that to be really to stick with you, you need to have the right context and you need to you need to feel it and you really need to understand what it means to you. It needs to affect you personally. A lot of the formal learning interventions struggle with this because it's just hard to replicate that, but I think when done well, that can certainly help.

The other thing that we're doing at AstraZeneca is we're moving away from performance ratings. We're moving to an ongoing coaching culture, which is much more forward focused rather than a backward-looking traditional performance management approach, so

performance development. We're supporting feed forward instead of feedback and really trying to bring a set of language into the organization that supports a re-evaluation of how we can learn from our experiences, whether they be termed mistakes or an off.

I'm not really big on the negative analogies here. I think it's just a case of, "How can we continue to learn from our actions and be better as a result about?" I think that's a really

Learning Uncut Emergent Series
Brian Murphy & Jeff Mariola
Accelerating Learning from Failure

important organizational construct is like, "What are the signals we're sending out in organizations around what matters? What are the languages we're using?" Some of our people processes can really be overhauled. We're still in the dark ages in some of these people processes.

Then lastly, I guess, storytelling. There are some great leaders in AstraZeneca and we found them and we're telling their story. We're showing how they are humble, continuous lifelong learners who don't get right every time and don't have the answers every time, but you know what? They're really good at learning from that, bringing great people around them and having a really high-performing continuous learning approach. We're using campaigns and storytelling to make their voices heard, show folks what good looks like and it's okay to not have the answer.

I think L&D can play a really key role in that regard. We need to be great storytellers and to definitely share this on a human level. We help people walk in other people's shoes. They would be some of my thoughts on this one, Shannon.

Shannon Tipton:

That's great because that does dovetails very nicely with a thought and question that I had. Both of you talked about the feeling behind failure. Failure is very personal and no one likes to fail. There is a gut, you'd feel your gut clench and your brain would start to hurt and it's very visceral. The question I had here is that, again, Fast Company made this point that failure is messy. Failure feels like a personal indictment and it really does make you question yourself and who you are and what you're good at.

Now, how can we as L&D or even as just people within businesses help leadership or help the business as a whole take the stigma away from failure? Because failure, we automatically put that in the bad bucket and there's this stigma around it. How do we help organizations with that feeling? Either of you can jump in on that.

Jeff Mariola:

Shannon, if you're talking about psychological safety, you mentioned that when you opened up and to add, hitchhike on to what Brian was talking about at AstraZeneca, he mentioned two traits of what Jim Collins would call Five Level Leaders. What separates them from good leaders is they show humility. They have an incredible will and drive. They have a beginner's mind. That's not the reality in every business that every manager has that. My response to the psychological safety issue and how you create that is learning and development has to spend equal amount of time with senior management, understanding what the initiatives are and how they're going to support them, but the equal time is spent on the ground.

Any company I've ever worked with, for the most part, there is oftentimes two types of truth. There is what? There's the official truth. It's what the CEO, senior managers, the corporation says. Then, there's the ground truth. That's where the men and women closest to the business, whether they're customer facing, colleague facing, but they're a part of executing on that day-to-day strategy. My advice, I would implore that learning and development get close to that ground level, and I'll give you an example in my own experience. The Malcolm Baldrige Award, which was enacted, I think, by Congress in the late '80s, '87 maybe, it's the

Learning Uncut Emergent Series
Brian Murphy & Jeff Mariola
Accelerating Learning from Failure

award that goes out to the greatest service companies in America. It's service, manufacturing and so forth.

Ritz-Carlton has won that award twice. It's the most prestigious award you can get around quality of management, quality of leadership, quality of service. When you win that award, you have to share what you do with others. I took my leadership team of service managers out to the Ritz-Carlton, spent a week out there. I think it's a great example of what you're talking about creating. They create psychological safety. This was years ago, before even the word huddle was so popularized, but the example there to me was in their morning huddle, which they had, it was cross functional.

Every day they spoke. It wasn't the manager necessarily that ran that meeting, but what I noticed in every one of the huddles is that representation from learning and development, HR participated in these meetings. They had a voice, but more importantly, they had an ear. They talked about success, but they also talked about failure. Everyone's aware of the Ritz-Carlton Credo. It's the behaviours that they've all committed to that represent the values of treating ladies and gentlemen like ladies and gentlemen.

In every huddle that I sat in that week, one of the questions that got asked was, "I want someone to share, someone to be vulnerable enough to share in the last couple days where maybe you violated or you didn't live one of those credo values." I could see the L&D folks taking notes, but it was such a safe environment that there was no tension about admitting. They embraced the fact that they didn't live up to a particular behaviour or a particular value. The next question was, "What did we learn from that? How do we take that into the next day?"

I just thought that that, to me, defines a living, breathing, learning and development organization. It is completely supported, completely supported by learning and development. Very, very proactive. Just lastly on that, what this requires at a leadership level, at that official truth level goes right back to what Brian was saying, is that if you want to overcome this fear of failure and people feeling vulnerable enough to overcome that fear, then you have to go first. What do I mean by that? That leaders that are high performing, that are high culture, that really are compassionate about the people they work with are constantly going back for feedback.

They are asking their colleagues, four questions, aren't they? "What do I need to do more of? What do I, as your manager, need to do less of? What do I need to stop doing? What's getting in the way? What potentially am I doing to contribute to that failure? Then lastly, what do I need to start doing that I'm not? What can I create?" I think when managers do that with their colleagues, particularly those that are reporting to them, you are creating that

psychological safety that it's okay to be critical of each other because you're doing it, you're coming at it from a place of compassion.

You're coming at it from places that I care so much culturally about, our business and our mission and our vision that my voice is heard without any fear of retribution. To me that is psychological safety. I think the Carlton does it as well as anybody.

Shannon Tipton:

Brian, your thoughts?



www.michelleockers.com

Learning Uncut Emergent Series
Brian Murphy & Jeff Mariola
Accelerating Learning from Failure
Brain Murphy:

Well, it's just a bit of a build on what Jeff says. Jeff, we haven't even spoken before. It sounds like we're really full partners in this, so it's great to hear your thinking because I've been doing some work recently and we've been doing some work at AstraZeneca around learning culture. We have a big focus on learning culture from our CEO down which is wonderful and we're very lucky to have enlightened leaders who prioritize learning at the centre of the business strategy. As we unpick learning culture, it's clear that really you can't have a learning culture unless you have psychological safety.

This concept of psychological safety has become front and centre for us as we have started to think about our work and particularly as we think about our work from an organizational development perspective. We've now broken this down to understand, "What are the component parts that we need to continue to focus on in order to support psychological safety in the organization?" which has opened up a whole other series of conversations, which we need to have, especially as we go through these challenging times.

I think I can only agree with both of you on the importance of this topic. This isn't a willy, nice-to-have topic. This is a fundamental set of conditions that need to exist in order to have a high-performing learning culture. That then opens up the areas of the role of the manager and I couldn't agree more with Jeff, the topic of vulnerability. In particular, I'm a big fan of Brene Brown and I'm sure many of you have read her books. To have leaders who are vulnerable individually and in collective is a critical part and sometimes let's just call it out. That is often not typical of your corporate leader.

L&D's role is to really act as a coach and as an advocate for this progressive work, and often, I found, both at Citi and AstraZeneca, sometimes it's about identifying the colleagues who are great examples of this and shining a light on that and/or maybe bringing providing some space for those folks to be able to come together and talk about the fact that this topic and sometimes how countercultural it can be. I agree. I think in essence it's about thinking about psychological safety in the context of your learning strategy.

I don't think it's too hard to connect the two, and then, you can get into a really interesting conversation with the business about how you want to put the right conditions in place more broadly to support learning. This means often it's an organization-wide effort, touching on different topics right through to particularly around leadership development and OD. This is a real passion for me, is making sure that we think of ourselves in learning, not just through the individual lens, but also we aggregate that into an organization development lens.

Yes, the psychological safety as an underpinning, you can't have a fear of failure unless people are trusting each other, they feel safe at have a basic human level, and if you build out, the rest I think will flow.

Shannon Tipton:

All right, here's my follow up into that. You both said that this sort of feeling, these sorts of behaviours, they're not necessarily normal to a lot of organizations, the organizations that perhaps live in the construct of command and control, for example. Now, what do we say to those business leaders who claim that celebrating failure or failing fast seems to let people off the hook for bad behaviour? They say, "Learning from failure, we're just allowing our organizations just to fail all over the place." How do we help shift this particular mindset? How do we help the egos and the humility become more of the normal?

Learning Uncut Emergent Series
Brian Murphy & Jeff Mariola
Accelerating Learning from Failure
Brain Murphy:

I'll have a quick go with this, Jeff, and please jump in. First of all, I don't think we should do the trap here for L&D. Let's not fall into the trap. The trap being, let's get all lovely about learning from failure in a theoretical way, right? I think we should not follow that into the trap and we should be really looking at this through a business lens and think about this to their live reality. In essence, the question that I would challenge back is, "Do you want to have a high-performing organization? Do you want your people to be better tomorrow than they are today?"

Now, there are some fundamental questions that are probably better craft than I just done around the business reality, "Do we want to offer more to our shareholders this time next year than we are now?" Because the reality is it's not being soft at all, it's actually being extremely hard because the highest-performing organizations, the high-performing teams are the ones that do not cover failure. They do not let the opportunity to go pass without saying calling it out. They really trust each other. They can criticize, but in a progressive way. They are every day relentless in how they can improve and learn from what they've done and do better.

I think it's actually a really commercial argument. If we couch it in a way that probably is a little bit better than I've just done, but I think you get the gist in terms of the hardnosed commerciality of this which as L&D professionals, we don't have a great track record of that, but I think we're getting better. Then actually, you're turning on its head and you saying, "Look at the price of not doing this. Look at the price of not being serious, like covering up mistakes and not learning from them and running the risk of repeating those mistakes." That, in today's marketplace with the pace of change that's happening, is potentially a death nail to your organization.

I think the smart leaders get this. I think the majority of folks, especially if we can be better at the language we use and understanding their context, I think it becomes a much easier discussion, but Jeff, jump in here. I guess you'll have a lot of clients you've had, this very conversation with them, I'm sure.

Jeff Mariola:

Well, Brian, you were talking about high performance. Shannon, you mentioned command and control. My approach with that is clearly particularly if it's that reluctant or cynical or resistant management that is in that command and control, put evidence in front of them.

There is so much evidence. If you look at the highest-performing growth companies, the highest-profitability companies, culturally they are interdependent. Much more so than even the independent ones that operate in the silos with a lot of high performers, but the depending culture, which is what you're talking about in command and control, what's the monster there, Shannon?

"I follow the rules and I do what I'm told. I do enough to cover my butt." Where do you think they're at on a performance scale of one to five? Probably about a two. You put the evidence in front of them and there's so much out there. You look at the work that Satya Nadella has done at Microsoft in the last four years of transforming that culture from a highly independent. Steve Ballmer, a company of individual performers that were out to get each other They performed well. Their growth was average. Their profitability was average. In four years, he is transformed that culture. It is the most valuable company in the world today. It's worth a trillion ... The company has the highest value of any company.

Learning Uncut Emergent Series
Brian Murphy & Jeff Mariola
Accelerating Learning from Failure

Why did that happen? Look inside what Microsoft is doing. Brian, you used the word mindset or Shannon, somebody brought up mindset. He has embraced growth mindset, that beginner's mind, that learning mind, that overcoming your fears, that desire for feedback, that support of your individuals. He will tell you that the transformation in the last four years that Microsoft has had is because of the focus that they have on creating a learning culture around growth mindset, so much so than in every market Microsoft operates in this year.

They are conducting workshops across the business, not just with managers, developing a growth mindset culture, which opens the door for me to show up as my authentic self. That means my failures, my disappointments but also my success and also my strengths. Microsoft is just one example We could go on and on with this. Put in front of that command and controller, evidence of companies that are thriving because they are interdependent. I think you can start to melt that away.

Brain Murphy:

I think it was the Microsoft's CEO who said, "I want us to be a learn-it-all culture, not a know-it-all ..."

Jeff Mariola:

Absolutely.

Brain Murphy:

I think that summarizes beautifully the points you're just making. It's a great example. Using that evidence is great because it just moves the conversation to whole other place. It's great advice.

Shannon Tipton:

Particularly, it resonates with me, Brian, what you just said about what Microsoft said being a learn-it-all organization. Jeff, bringing the evidence to the forefront, absolutely. I think that as an L&D industry, we need to learn how to do more of that. We need to be more succinct in our messaging around that. Now, when the conversation does turn to this, when we start talking about learning from failure, would we agree that not all failure is created equally, that

there are times, we've got to take accountability for that failure, that failure does require some, for lack of better term, performance management versus a failure that we learn from, that we strive from, that we move forward from? Are there differences here?

Jeff Mariola:

I think so. I think the post-mortem process, but you're used, Shannon, the context of a company that was out of business that went back and looked. Forward-thinking businesses are periodically examining the failures that they have, without blame, without a shame. They're smart enough to understand we're going to have to change something. They're looking at it, "What did we learn from that? More importantly, what are we going to change systemically in our processes, systems and approach so we don't repeat that? That's one example, I think if you're constantly looking at that and people feel that they can openly talk about that, you're going to move away from it and learn from it.

I come back to this to Nietzsche who said, "Amor fati," learn to love your fate. I think that applies and what he's saying there is learn to love these failures because there's nothing I can do about it. What's happens happen. All I can do is learn to embrace it, to learn from it

Learning Uncut Emergent Series
Brian Murphy & Jeff Mariola
Accelerating Learning from Failure

and ensure that now I'm headed down a path with less resistance. That's the mindset I think that we have to take because I don't know of any business ... If I look back at the last 100 decisions that I've made in my own business, chances are 20% of them were just probably wrong, but if I'm self-examining and looking at that, then I am coming to truth with it and then doing something about it.

That to me is that next step is, "What am I doing?" It's like this pandemic. "What am I doing with my business? How am I reassessing my strategy, my vision, my mission? Then, how am I communicating that to each and every person in my organization?"

Shannon Tipton:

Brian?

Brain Murphy:

Well, I guess there's another L&D trap here. I'm going to try and I fall into it a couple of times, which is we pontificate about learning from failure and then the guy who runs the production line or flies the airplane, turns around at you and says, "Oh, that's all fine and dandy, but I failed once and people, serious stuff happens, right?" I think we absolutely need to understand the context of the business and of the situation we're dealing with. Then again, that's no excuse. I turned, again in his head, there's lots of ways that we can support the organization to learn continuously and to learn from failure, whether that be sandbox environments, whether that be ...

I'm a big advocate of experiments, and actually, the start-up industry can really help us think about this because they do this really well, especially in the tech start-up space. I think understanding the context and not letting us away with making excuses why we can't learn from failure because of the nature of our business, I don't think applies. Then, you mentioned performance support. If we move the intervention as close to the point of need as possible, quite often, especially if we've learned from best practice, then we're able to get ahead of that and to insert ourselves actually right there in the flow.

I think there's many different ways looking at this. I guess it's not being lazy and challenging ourselves to make sure we really understand the context of we're operating, but staying true to this principle that we need to support the organization to be honest about learning from its mistakes. That would probably be the couple of things that I'd add.

Shannon Tipton:

All right. Thank you for that that does shed a light on thinking about the spectrum of failure. As you said, an airplane pilot, if they fail to complete their checklists as appropriate, then that puts a lot of people's lives at risk. There's one level of failure versus another level of failure, but I think that the key thread in all of this is, "How do we learn from that? How do we move forward and be successful with it?" I cannot believe that we're closing up to the top of our hour. This conversation just flew and I could listen to both of you for another hour for sure.

What I'd like to do right now is to wrap this up, and Jeff, it's really interesting. I had to smile when you had mentioned, as a business leader, you ask yourself, "What should I stop doing? What should I start doing?" With these podcasts, the way that we like to conclude are with those questions. I'm going to put the spotlight on you here. When we talk about learning from failure. Do you have any advice for learning and development departments? What do they need to stop doing in order to help businesses be able to move forward with

Learning Uncut Emergent Series
Brian Murphy & Jeff Mariola
Accelerating Learning from Failure

psychological safety, with being able to create this culture of learning from failure? What do they need to stop doing?

Jeff Mariola:

Go ahead.

Brain Murphy:

Thanks, Jeff. I think we got to mirror the behaviour that we're seeking to support in these organizations. I think we got to stop trying to be right all the time and have any answers. I know this is obvious, but sometimes we don't. We don't live up to what we're trying to achieve in the organization. I think we've got to stop trying to have all the answers and be right first time. That would be my ... That's a personal offering, me and my team, that we're trying to live up to right now. Jeff, over to you.

Jeff Mariola:

Shannon, from a learning development, we're talking about psychological safety. For me, my challenge to go out to learning and development professionals would be, stop all the initiatives around change around learning at a behavioural level. That's where they start and trying to change people's behaviour. I see so much of that. What happens is is you never get enrolment. The program has just drift away and people just turn their eyes start doing is start at a physiological level and now more than ever, with the anxiety.

In the recession, we were dealing with fear, the fear of losing 25% of our business, but we knew that, so you can plan accordingly. You take the pandemic and the financial recession that we're in, you not only have fear, but you have anxiety. The difference to me is with anxiety, I really don't know. There's a lot that we don't know about what's going to happen over the next six to 12 months but push L&D and start at the physiological level when they're talking about learning, development, behaviour change. Start at the physiological level.

By that, I mean, having real conversations before any initiative gets launched, any change initiative around being mindful. What's that mean? Have real conversations with your all stakeholders around emotional intelligence. If I can start at a physiological level, which is the health and wellbeing of all the colleagues that I'm working with, if we get out and have real conversations about overcoming what we're afraid of, then I think we can move on, but you have to start with the emotional brain of all of us to get us to understand where we're at and get that right first and then we can move on.

It's a bigger investment. It requires a lot of emotional and personal sweat equity, best investment you can make in a business. It may be lumpy at times. It may be a little are challenging for certain people, but if you start there, you're going to get more sustainable engagement in staying ahead of this rapid change and I now more than ever, I think that's just the way that L&D has to look forward at how they're going to impact the results of a business.

Shannon Tipton:

To clarify, what you're saying is, when it comes to behavioural-based training, stop jumping into the middle of it, start at the beginning.

Jeff Mariola:

Yes.

Learning Uncut Emergent Series
Brian Murphy & Jeff Mariola
Accelerating Learning from Failure
Shannon Tipton:

I agree, we do have a tendency to do that. Then would you say that to start, perhaps, L&D departments or even L&D people specifically, that maybe this work on emotional intelligence needs to start with them first?

Jeff Mariola:

Yes. Outside in.

Shannon Tipton:

Outside in.

Jeff Mariola:

With someone outside to work with the leadership team, with the L&D team, with the human resources team. First things first, if you start there, then you can start having a bigger impact across the business.

Shannon Tipton:

Brian, what would you say about starting? What should L&D start to do then?

Brian Murphy:

I'm going to disappoint you and I agree definitely with Jeff because I just think this ... I was writing down some notes around and as he was saying a conversation, I was writing the same thing because what we're doing in AstraZeneca is really starting as a L&D team to help create the space for the right conversation in the organization. Now, often that's in the context of learning, but we think of learning very broadly as I think you've probably got the

impression already from me today. Once you do that, then you create the opportunity for your L&D team to get into some really interesting spaces or to create some really interesting space for dialogue and conversation.

There's great tools now that help, collaborative tools, social tools that really help us bring communities together to explore different topics, especially if they're folks who might be a little bit marginalized in terms of being progressives in the organization, around some of the topics we've talked about today. I agree with Jeff. We have a responsibility because there's not many parts of the organization like L&D who can really engage with the employee out of real human level and to understand what's going on for them and to be able to bridge that then into how the organization thinks differently.

Doing change, I agree. Change at a very basic level is around, "How can we engage and have great conversations to understand what's going on for folks and how can we then use those insights to support that change thereafter and bring people together to achieve that?" I find [inaudible 00:52:09] in L&D becoming great storytellers, great connectors, but most importantly, really understanding what the employee journey is from their perspective and probably getting out of the way a little bit at times as well and just facilitating that reality because we can do change.

To Jeff's point, there's lots of change professionals, but often their idea of change is a pretty process-orientated change management process. Often real change comes with creating the space for dialogue and for shared understanding. I think L&D, we have that in our toolkit

Learning Uncut Emergent Series
Brian Murphy & Jeff Mariola
Accelerating Learning from Failure

to do that. We sometimes we just need to get little sharper elbow scope to find the space to be part of that conversation, but I think the L&D professionals of the future is definitely going to need this in their toolkit and then be able to see this at an organization level, then in aggregate. I agree totally with what Jeff has said.

Shannon Tipton:

Well, I like the add-ons that you put into that. It does go back to where you started our conversation today when you talked about doubling down on understanding what makes us human. I believe that by starting with understanding the employee journey becomes so critical with that which leads me then to my part three of this question, which is what do we need now to accelerate? We're already doing it and now we just need to turn up the heat on it. What are your thoughts around what it is we need to accelerate?

Brain Murphy:

I can take a start, and then, I know Jeff will bring it home really strong, so let me get my piece out of the way. I guess, I know I've said this before, but I feel really strongly about it. We have to be the change ourselves that we want to see. I've had the great benefit of leading L&D teams in my career who have really walked the walk, walked the talk rather, in terms of some of the change you want to see. It's not been easy. We've had to become social learners. We've had to really let go of what we've known and learn at going to areas that we're just not comfortable and we haven't known before. We've had to become marketeers. We've had to become data analysts. We've had to become ... We've got to get interested in neuroscience.

I'm not saying we have to be experts in these, but we definitely need to move into these spaces because if we're then going to support this change in the organization, back to the point around feeling it, when I was at Citi and I was trying to support the development of social learning organization, well, I'd just gone through a six-month series of workshops around building out my professional learning network, building out a community in a certain way as a practitioner. When I was talking about this subject and owning it, I really felt really strongly and passionate about it.

I think to be an accelerant in the organization, of course, there's a load of things that we can talk in a second about some of the levers we can pull and things we can do, but one of the main ways that I've seen it in my own personal experience is for you and your team to really understand and learn what it's like first and that can be a real accelerant further down the line.

Shannon Tipton:

Jeff?

Jeff Mariola:

I would add to that and come at it from a leadership perspective. Because of COVID, because of what the next six to 12 months look like, to me, you'd accelerate the challenge. I don't envy any CEO, he or she that's working in this environment, but I do know that being in that environment, the next year, in your career, you've probably had no bigger opportunity to find meaning and purpose in your work and then how you're going to transition and transform your company over the next six to 12 months. That requires more than ever, as all this fear starts showing back up.

Learning Uncut Emergent Series
Brian Murphy & Jeff Mariola
Accelerating Learning from Failure

I'm looking at Downtown Chicago right now and it's empty in the loop, but over the next four to six months, people are going to start coming back to work. They're coming back with anxiety and with fear. To me, the key leadership skill is going to be compassionate. We have opportunities as leaders now to make the biggest difference that we ever have in organizations and helping people that may not want to show up and talk about what they're going through. That comes through showing compassion because here's what I see happening, Shannon, and this is going to be the reality, just understanding the staffing business like I do.

We went 10 years, where there were more opportunities, more jobs than there were people. When the anxiety starts to drip away, we're going to find ourselves in September, October, November, there will be more talent out there in the marketplace because of what's happened economically. Here's what's going to happen. Our companies, we're going to look at our leadership, we're going to look at our managers and we're probably going to ask a couple questions, "How well did they look after us? I know they had to make tough decisions, but how compassionate were they in doing that? What did they do and what was their contribution to our community?"

Then looking through it, from my perspective, "What have they done for me?" If you don't have a great answer for all three of those constituents, you have a very good chance of losing some of your top talent, the men and women that wouldn't have left prior to COVID

because things were just so good. The challenge is, "How do I show up as a compassionate leader with the opportunity to do some of the most meaningful work I've ever been able to do?" That would be what I would accelerate, Shannon.

Shannon Tipton:

Wow. I don't think I could build on that, Jeff. Thank you for that. I think you're right. From a business perspective, from an L&D perspective, from a human perspective, I think that we all could accelerate that human touch, that belief in people and understanding and having that empathetic, I guess, connection with others. Thank you so much for that. As I said, we're at the top of our hour and I really want to thank you both for your time, your thoughts and consideration today. This was an engaging and wonderful conversation.

To put you two together, it was kismet, absolutely fabulous. I'll give you each a couple of seconds. Brian, I'll start with you. Where can people find you? Is there anything in particular you would like to point them to?

Brain Murphy:

Well, first of all, thank you for the invitation. I've had a lot of fun. It's been probably the best hour of my day, all the meetings I've been at today, so thank you. If people are interested, I'm on Twitter. bnmurphy14 is my Twitter. It's not particularly inspiring, but there you go. That's where I'm on Twitter and obviously LinkedIn. I think it's murphybrian1, something like that. I look forward to connecting to the listeners.

Shannon Tipton:

Great. There are some YouTube videos of you speaking out there, aren't there?

Brain Murphy:

Learning Uncut Emergent Series
Brian Murphy & Jeff Mariola
Accelerating Learning from Failure

Probably. There's a few things out there, but yeah, on the Twitter feed, I'm on LinkedIn. You'd probably be able to find them as well.

Shannon Tipton:

Great. Jeff?

Jeff Mariola:

Easiest way would be mariolaunlimited.com. Take a test drive there. All the things that we do and talk about are there. Also LinkedIn. LinkedIn just search for Jeff Mariola. You can always email me. I love continuing these conversations. jeff@mariolaunlimited.com. Either one of those three avenues. I'd love to keep the conversation going.

Shannon Tipton:

Great. Well, thank you again. Brian, enjoy the rest of your evening or not the rest of your evening, but hopefully your day starts to wind down so you can have a great evening. Jeff, I hope you have a wonderful Friday, the remainder of your day.

Jeff Mariola:

You too, Shannon. It's beautiful out there. It's absolutely gorgeous there.

Brain Murphy:

Thank you.