



### **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.*

### **Laura Overton:**

We've been blown away by the quality of contributions on the Emergent Series of Learning Uncut – it's just been outstanding. We've explored new learning and development business models, mindsets, culture, capability, technology tools. But to help L&D use these to really emerge stronger, we need to reflect and apply that fresh thinking to our current challenges. Which is why we are ready to engage with your questions and are planning a series of events to practically work out what it takes for L&D to emerge as business critical in the times ahead. So get in touch and join us on the journey and we look forward to emerging stronger together.

### **Laura Overton:**

So, hello everyone and welcome to this edition of the Learning Uncut Emergent podcast. My name is Laura Overton and I'm co-host of the podcast with Michelle Ockers and Shannon Tipton. And today we really want to look at a topic that's central, really, to the theme of this podcast, of how do we help learning and development emerge stronger as a result of the disruption that we're finding ourselves in?

### **Laura Overton:**

And to be quite honest, we can't really do that on our own. We've got to do it in great partnership with others. So, that's going to be the topic of today. And on that note, I am so thrilled to genuinely welcome two incredible people, Shai Desai, who is the co-founder of Learning Plan in Australia. I had a great opportunity to meet with you when I came over to launch an Unlocking Potential report, and love the work that you're doing, Shai, to literally unlock potential with your clients in Australia. So, Shai, welcome to the podcast.

### **Shai Desai:**

Thanks so much, that's very kind of you, thanks so much.

### **Laura Overton:**

It's great to see you. And Barbara Thompson, Babs, great to have you here. Many people in the UK will know you through your work with BP and then going on with various consulting companies. And a new job now. I've known you for so long, Barbara. I'm so thrilled you're able to join us today! Thank you.

### **Barbara Thompson:**

And likewise. And hello, Shai.

### **Shai Desai:**

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Barbara Thompson & Shai Desai

Smarter working partnerships for L&D– Barbara Thompson and Shai Desai

Hello. It's good to meet you.

**Laura Overton:**

Great. So, one of the questions we've been asking absolutely everybody is: What has the disruption that we've been going through for the last, well, six months meant to you guys? What impact has that had on you, and your work, and on the way that you're working with your customers? Babs, why don't we start with you. I'd love to get your views on this.

**Barbara Thompson:**

Yes. Well, firstly, wow, is the first thing that came to mind when you were saying that. On a personal level, I have changed jobs. I lost my job and found myself going back in house and working at Network Rail, which is a wonderful environment. Very different to any environment I've worked in before. And I have some very lofty strategic ambitions to deliver against. So, that's one part of it.

**Barbara Thompson:**

And on the personal side, I've really been evaluating where I do my best work. It's slightly been forced upon us. But I've been really making sure I'm taking time to sort work out. Where that is, how it is, why it is, so that when things get back to some sense of order, then I'm primed and ready to go. So that's just a little bit of a headline for me.

**Laura Overton:**

Brilliant, I think that it's really making all of us stop and reflect quite a lot about what we do; why we do it. And great and congratulations for the new role at Network Rail. And Shai, what about you? What's been happening with you and your team this last few months?

**Shai Desai:**

Yeah, thanks, Laura. Glad to hear that, Barbara. I think it's similar down here. I think in the main... I guess we all know that times have been a bit tighter, the resources are certainly leaner and people are asking more of us and things like that. I think, on a personal level, it's probably just really a lot of time around just how we manage time and our experience and how we optimize productivity in the time that we have and, as time has gone on. And we're all working from home, it's probably a bit more about just around resilience. You know, working smarter and a bit more transparently with people. Really just communicating what the day looks like for all of us and being out and about when we are not having a great day.

**Laura Overton:**

That is so insightful, really, because I think we need people around us to be able to do that, don't we? To be able to stop and to be able to reflect with and I think, from my perspective, the last six months has been... I want to say, flooded, with new people to talk to and to be in support of and who have supported me. I think, personally, the concept of partnership, actually, has never been more important, actually. The partnership we have Michelle and Shannon on this podcast series and other and more informed partnerships I've had.

**Laura Overton:**

So, actually, you're just making me, personally, reflect on how important people are around us to bring out the very best in us. And, you know, if I look at that definition of partner, obviously, from the Oxford dictionary, because I'm British. No, seriously, they talk about people, pairs of people, or individuals who are engaged in the same activity, in the same

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outcome, or moving in the same direction and that's one of the reasons why we wanted to talk about this subject here today.

#### Laura Overton:

So, Babs, what about you? Why is partnership important in learning and development at the moment? What's your perspective on that?

#### Barbara Thompson:

So, seeing it from both sides of the fence. I mean, I spend quite a bit of time in house and then jumping ship to the other side of the fence, and consulting. What I have realised is that you need to be very intentional about what partnership means. That you come up with a great definition, but often times, I've been the recipient of execution only and very intentionally friend as vendor or a supplier. And on the other side of the fence, I've seen it, perhaps, some of my peers want to do the same. And, for me, it's something about being very intentional of a win win and that we have sort of kind of shared responsibilities in terms of making it happen, making it work.

#### Barbara Thompson:

Whenever I sort of sit down and work with partners for the very first time, I say, "Well, first of all. lets not stand on ceremony If there's something to say, let's say it. This is kind of a safe environment for us to do that." And I'm also looking at us a kind of extension of the value chain as opposed to me just kind of lobbing something over the fence, which I've never done. So, this is not about execution, it's about us collaborating to get the best possible outcome. So, for me, it's about being very intentional about how you frame that and how you have ways of working to keep that.

#### Laura Overton:

That's brilliant. Thank you so much. And, Shai, does that resonate with you? What's the value of partnership from your side of things?

#### Shai Desai:

Yeah. I agree with Barbara, there. I think, you know, there is certainly a very shared responsibility out there and I think the underlying tenets of that really come through. So, as a partner slash vendor to companies, I think, you know, we have to assume that we're being entrusted with your brand and what we do is to represent you in the best possible way. Now, in some cases that can be outsourcing a small part of a training function, helping people either manage their investment or help them with technology capabilities or things like that. And in other ways, it's really managing the skills of people and to say how do we avoid over-investing in the people or technology without knowing what we want to do. And, so, our role as a vendor, really, is to support that function of people and really bring a relationship. And Barbara said it, it is a shared responsibility underpinned by a lot of trust and open communication.

#### Laura Overton:

Yeah, I think I was just reading, recently, about some work from Gartner looking at future roles in organizations and future trends in workplace organizations and they're saying that over 30 percent of people in the study that they did said that they're going to be moving more to a more contingent and gig workforce. They're saying, "We might not be having all of those roles internally." Some of those things that you've just been talking about, Shai, but in some cases, we're going to need to look at working with individuals as well as established vendors to be able to do that. I mean, that's just perhaps one example.

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### Laura Overton:

We've talked about vendors. We've talked about maybe gig economies. What other people should we be thinking about partnering with in order to achieve a goal? Babs, what do you think about are there other stakeholders in organizations that we need to be considering as partners?

### Barbara Thompson:

I personally have seen or I personally have invested in my thinking in this way a few years ago because historically, the stakeholder was deemed the person who was paying the bill and the person you engage with and then I started to learn and develop my practice around user centered design. So, maybe making sure that the people who are impacted are actually the people you speak to, which might sound common sense but quite frankly, working in an industry, and more broadly than that, what I tend to do is a bit of a mapping once I've spoken to... let's frame them as the audience, because any touchpoint that they have, that should be the people that you speak to so they understand it from a system wide perspective. So, that's what I tend to do so that I get a decent 360.

### Laura Overton:

Thank you. And, Shai, is there anyone else that you would add to that list or is it kind of complete from your perspective.

### Shai Desai:

no, no. That's a great point. I think we look at it in a similar way. We look across different lines of the business to understand what the impact of the problem's going to be. So, I think Barbara's captured that perfectly.

### Laura Overton:

Yeah. And, I think also what I've seen, just looking outside over the last, you know, sort of few months, is that there are other parts of the business that seem to be working on similar problems to us. I'm thinking about, and last year I looked at what data analysts were doing, and they were saying, "Oh, we need a number of different things to happen in our organization in order for us to become more data aware." And I look at the checklist we're exactly the same things that the learning professionals were saying, "We need to have more of this in the organization." Same with marketing as well. So, I think there are potentially partners within our own organization that could be driving a similar goal that we could potentially team up with. So, in terms of moving forward, that, I think, is going to be... that open-mindedness about partnership is going to be important. Babs, what do you think?

### Barbara Thompson:

Yeah. I was just nodding profusely whilst you were saying that. I forgot to mention a couple of other stakeholder groups, which I routinely and regularly check in with. So, a lot of my work has been enabled by technology. So, IT, are a jet stakeholder for me. I'm very interested in understanding their roadmap because there might be some things that they're doing and also I've forged close enough relationships that if they want a try out new products and services, then I can be part of that. So, that's one audience group.

### Barbara Thompson:

And another, which is making me think about, for me, I've really sort of honed on what I think I'm sort of doing within the line of business. I just so happen to sit within the L&D reporting line, but I'm part of the business. I'm very intentional about that and it's about understanding customer behaviour and customer trends that can be used as part of the narrative for the

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very things that we're designing so that it's sort of anchored and it's not just fluffy and indeed a solution. So, again, asking to directly check in with those teams that have that insight so that I can bake that into the very things that we're designing. So, those are two audience groups.

#### Laura Overton:

That's quite a broad stakeholder map, potentially, and potential partner map that we've kind of outlined there. If I kind of rise up again a level and actually look the concept of partnership, working with people towards the same goal, in what ways do you think that L&D can use partnerships to make us stronger? A lot of people are feeling quite fragile right now. You know, resilience, you talked about, Shai, being important for us, but how do you think that we can use our partnerships to make us stronger?

#### Shai Desai:

Yeah. I think a lot of the focus right now is how do we make work better. So, how do we do group work experience, how do we optimize productivity, but at the same time, as I mentioned, I have been thinking about resilience and how teams really work better together. So, you know, it's a crossover between the L&D team. Perhaps what we do, as an L&D team, also crosses over with what a customer experience team does, what the user experience team does and the IT team does. And, so, as we're developing people, we're sort of looking at, not just the skills of L&D, and the people capabilities, we're looking at how do we leverage what those teams can bring back in to develop and engage employees. And, so, we're looking at some of that elevated experience and expectations and what technology can bring in and what can they add into the learning mindset.

#### Laura Overton:

Yeah. Because, actually, we're shifting, aren't we? I know both of you are very passionate about learning and development. Not just about delivering programs and courses but improving performance of individuals in the workplace and we're kind of shifting into this concept of a much wider organizational learning culture here, aren't we? Babs, what do you think? Have you got a few examples of how you've worked in partnership in order to achieve some performance outcomes? Can you give us some ideas of how that's worked for you?

#### Barbara Thompson:

So, I was working on some development for a global graduate audience and I recall my boss saying, at the time, "I don't need to do this for myself." Because, essentially, I think, if I'm just counting out at least the external stakeholders, probably about six... so, I was working with a development company, a technical development company. I was working with a copy writing company. I was working with a pure design agency and some others that can't quite spring to mind, translations, and my boss was suggesting, at least for a couple of them, I could merge the activities and my way of working is to work with the best people that can do the best job. So, the efficiencies of working with this one size fits all doesn't quite appeal to me. And to pick up on Shai's point, is something about elevated experiences. I think for me, there's something about the wider perspectives that we get from working beyond the bubble of L&D, absolutely. And if I think about it from the external partnership perspective, can absolutely tap into the kind of clients that they work into

#### Barbara Thompson:

There's also something that at least the good ones do, which is be very mindful about lessons learned so they come prepared and sort of help us get the best out of our investment and time and the way, also, that a person wide, as I've said before, not just

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another open fence. I have had to develop myself to be able to lead multi-disciplinary teams and to make sure that I can converse with them in a language that is relevant to that type of organization. So, those things of personal learning and I think that any, again, from the perspective of external partnership you can work with, they should always leave the client in a better place. That has been my mantra, working on the other side of the fence as well. So, support their own development and, when they walk away, perhaps not create that co-dependency. That's just a couple of things there.

#### Laura Overton:

Wow. That sounds like quite a mammoth effort and later I think it'll be great to dig into some of that but before we do that, Shai, have you got examples of how your true partnership has really added extra value into your clients?

#### Shai Desai:

Yeah, I think it comes through when we are not considered just to be an external outsourcing group or we're considered to be part of the experience of what they're trying to achieve. So, I think the client work that we love and so we get to do consulting work, we have to understand what kind of designer projects we can take and what development opportunities there are, what kind of supports will be needed over the long-term, after programs. So, when we do things in the retail space, you know, it's understanding the mindset of people in that space, how they're driven by sales, how do we adopt that and change it into a learning culture. It's not going to be through formal courses. It's going to be through some sort of competition or gamification mechanics and then helping them learn and re-learn things based on these sort of incentives that are not sort of... here's a bit of content and here's an assessment piece that's going to help you learn that piece of content but rather, how do we drive that behavioural change through some sort of mechanic or learning solution design that it understands and takes into account their environment.

#### Shai Desai:

So, we have opportunities to do those sorts of things. That makes for a much better experience. It's not just for the end result, but also for the relationship between us, the supplier, and the companies that we're working with.

#### Laura Overton:

You know, that so resonates with my own experience. A long time ago, I mean a long time ago, maybe a couple of decades, I was working in an online learning organization that had massive libraries and my roles was to work with the organization that had bought these libraries and I went in and just said to the individual, "Okay, well, what are you trying to do with this?" And, they said, "Well, actually..." I said, "What does success look like?" And they were telling me and I was getting really excited about their goals and vision and then I looked down at what they'd actually bought. They bought a subsection of something because it was... you know, anytime, anywhere learning. All of that kind of... you know, the kind of stuff, the reason why people used to buy online learning back two decades ago, and maybe still do now. I hate to say. But just sitting and talking with the client and saying, "Okay, well, what are we trying to achieve? Do you realize what you've got there isn't going to help you to do that? I think we need to look at this in a slightly different mix."

#### Laura Overton:

And it's such a buzz to be able to sit down and work with individuals when you're both looking at the same goals. It's a buzz for all the partners involved when we can line up the goals first, isn't it? So, I mean, what do you think stops us? Let's think about external

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vendors, first. What do you think stops us from fully taking advantage of the level of expertise that we have within our vendors? Shai, I'm going to ask you first because you probably experience this day in, day out but I'd love to get your perspective on that.

### Shai Desai:

Look, I think what really stops us is often defined as time. When people say, I just need this thing done on these days or I've just got a budget to build this one thing that's pre-defined and I think we often turn that around to say that's, you know, obviously... the objective is to find the right way or we haven't identified the performance gaps, how are we going to solve that problem by doing this thing? If people just treat training as an incident, you know, it's sort of this one-off thing that people will do. Suddenly, they're going to be great at what they do. You know, that's sort of the wrong approach. You know, often the thing that really suffers is we don't have an opportunity to look at the wider environment and understand any preconceived biases or understand the environment or context of why people are doing what they're doing.

### Shai Desai:

And then, beyond that, it's also, towards the end of project, it's going, how are we boosting this retention? How are we helping people go beyond the course and actually learn this thing and how do we get their feedback back into what we do next? It's a bit of everything.

### Laura Overton:

Yeah. Yeah. And, Babs, I know that you have a view on external providers and vendors as well. What do you think stops us from getting into decent partnerships where we're working towards the same goals? You can be honest. It's just the three of us.

### Barbara Thompson:

It's just the three of us. Well, to be candid, some of it falls down to trust. So, I know that I've been introduced sometimes as the lady that's going to come and help us insert x program or insert x activity and not always to a very warm reception in the very first instance and then, you know, I have to work very hard to make that happen. And, sometimes it's because... the whole reason that they're engaging with a third party in the first instance is perhaps somewhere of a continuum between a lack of capabilities inside, time, as Shai already said, or something's gone wrong, quite frankly, that requires our help. So, that's one part of it.

### Barbara Thompson:

The other part of it is that the relationship is being poorly defined so it's just, let's engage in them and we'll just speak to you when we need things, rather thinking about the collective talent that exists and how we can get the best out of everything. So, I think those two are front of mind, definitely about poorly defined, ways of working, and lack of trust.

### Laura Overton:

Yeah. Yeah. I think I certainly see that in a lot of organizations and there's... I'll put it at that. I sometimes feel, as well, that learning leaders don't trust potential partners because they see them as salespeople and there's a sense of... I want to share with you but you're going to just sell me something and I also know the learning leaders don't like to be seen as being salespeople themselves, in terms of getting connection and engagement and promoting their self-worth. You know, one of the interviews that we had, recently on the emergent podcast was, someone said, "You know, I've never seen a profession more down on itself as the learning and development profession." And we kind of potentially extend that to almost expect the worst of our partners as well.

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**Laura Overton:**

We hadn't planned this but how do you think we might get over that? How do we start to build trust, do you think? I mean, Shai, I know a lot of your customers really connect and relate to your brand and to you. So, I mean, how do you think we should be building trust on both sides of the fence?

**Shai Desai:**

Yeah, I think it's the open tenets. It's us saying, let's have that respect and open communication and let's build a relationship and, even in saying that right up front, we're only quite transparent to say, look, we're not the fit for everybody. And, so, let's call up one another. But, really, it's sort of in that early stage it's probably just defining how do we want to work together. How do we make things more efficient? How are we going to make decisions together?

**Shai Desai:**

You know, what's are role in representing each other? How do we handle issues that come up and at the end of the project, again, it's like, what are the metrics that we're being measured by, both of us?

**Shai Desai:**

And so it's creating those sort of fundamental tenets underpinning the relationship and then being very transparent of that. It's an open communication. We're not going to hide anything from each other and we're really here to represent each other in the best possible way.

**Laura Overton:**

Yeah. Yeah. Barbara, not all vendors think like this. I know many, many that do. And I've had the real privilege of connecting through with them. But, some don't. Are there any behaviours that you see, from a vendor side of the community, that potentially decay that trust? You know, sort of make us question trustworthiness?

**Barbara Thompson:**

Well...

**Laura Overton:**

A bit radical there.

**Barbara Thompson:**

Well, it's funny you mention the point about selling because I have seen that. I have seen that in house and you can be right in the thick of something and got loads going on and then it's almost as though, you know, can I schedule some time to talk to you about portfolio or this, that, and the other. Well, no. Well, no, not quite now. So, that can definitely ruin trust. And I think there's also something, for me, which is sort of quite unforgivable, which is around delayed deliverables. And then you've got to face up to your client group and say why it's late. But then that's something that comes back to kind of ways of working because I would absolutely flesh that out at the start, in terms of expectations, et cetera.

**Barbara Thompson:**



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And there's also something that I've seen, which is around... it's around the thing we're selling but people asking if they can meet with the world and his wife] to sort of just try and build that lead, et cetera, going forward and, you know, I accept that's part of parcel of working supply side but I think there's ways and means of doing it that doesn't alienate people.

#### Barbara Thompson:

And I think, just going back to the previous question that you asked Shai, I think one of the ways I've set out my stall, in terms of the supply side is to say, actually, you know your audience and you know your organization far better than me. What I'm here to do is to illuminate and provide an objective viewpoint. And actually, one of the things that people have been very pleased about is that I can ask questions that you can't. And they've been thrilled about that. So, I think it's, you know, again, just sort of dialling up the value that you can bring and looking at a way that the combined is better than the individual.

#### Laura Overton:

Yeah. I definitely have experienced that in my own work. As long as you come in with the heart of genuinely wanting this project to be successful and when you see yourself as part of the team and you just can't help but see yourself as part of the team and, therefore, your role is to make heroes of those that are working with you. You know, we want to get this. So, are we moving away but you won't and I want you to be here and to be the hero of this story because we've seen progress.

#### Laura Overton:

Yeah. I love the concept of partnership and the people I partner with have always made me feel stronger and I always want to make them feel stronger as well. I mean, I'd really like to know how you think we should identify the right type of partners to work with? You know, what kind of process? What things should we be doing ourselves and what things should we be asking others to help us with? I mean, Shai, I know you work through this process with the clients who are in that space to do that. So, what advice would you give about how to identify the right things to work with others on?

#### Shai Desai:

I think, again, we look at, quite openly, just understanding each other a bit better. So, what capabilities do we each bring to the table here and what kind of expectations are we putting out to our organization. So, we look at ourselves as sort of a group that can bring a certain skill set and a certain experience and a certain context to your companies and we look at companies to say, here's what you don't know about us. And really open the kimono, so to speak, and sort of share with us some of the inner workings of the organization that will help us build that trust and build that relationship and then sort of... you know, as a leader, we can sort of then go, "Look, people right now are really worried about their skills or their jobs or their careers and there's a lot of things around employee experience that are concerning people." And so we sort of look at it as a partnership and go, well, what thing can you do internally and things can we do externally and if we marry those things together, hopefully that builds a better relationship between us.

#### Laura Overton:

What kind of things do you think we should really make sure we can do versus the things that potentially we can work with, with an open partner like Shai?

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**Barbara Thompson:**

As ever, it depends. So, for me, that tends to fall out of the performance consulting conversations that you have and I tend to sort of frame in my mind as a continuum between very sort of edgy, perhaps sort of, masterclass talks all the way to something that's facilitator led and from a performance conversation, that will help me sort of arrive at sort of which end of the spectrum that is. With the sort of the edgy master classes, instead of working with pure subject matter experts. So, not necessarily thinking about, okay, let me go to, as an example, a business school and let me see what sort of relatively vanilla thing they have that can match what we're looking for but to be very focused on what you intend to do. So, that's one thing and I think what we don't often talk about, in the case of partnership is the ability, if we're talking about it from a facilitator-less session, where you might have an external SME.

**Barbara Thompson:**

I'm just thinking about something I designed in the past where it involved a neuroscience which is really helping people get to the basis of learning to learn and then we had to have an internal SME, who's then bringing that organizational context and knowledge and that was a sort of beautiful marriage and a beautiful partnership, if you like. I don't really hear a lot of those things. It's either externally facilitated or it's internally done but I think that's another example of a pure partnership.

**Laura Overton:**

It's how we bring it back together the best of both worlds into that space. That's really exciting. One of the things that kind of just went through my mind, then, was the fact that what we're talking about here is, you know, bringing out the best results into an organization by using the resources around us in smart ways and I think that using our partners also to make us smarter is something that's important. And I think, if we stay on the external partnerships that we have at the moment, I think, for me, some of the ones that really work the best, so those that are willing to educate and potentially even challenge our thinking, rather than just say, "Yes," to our requests, Shai, do you find that you're able to kind of enter into that kind of relationship with people?

**Shai Desai:**

Yeah, we do. And I think we are able to have that sort of conversation, again, just built on, really, integrity. So, at the time, you want to sort of build the reputation for your business that sort of says, "We're not just a group you go when you want something built. We're the group you go to when you want to have a conversation that will lend itself to some sort of strategy or some sort of approach and then we might know something about the things that you're thinking about." So, whether that be the alliance that we've formed and developed with partners that we work with as a vendor and then we're sort of pushing that inside our organization. We're really focused on sort of going, these are the skill sets our team needs as an outsource partner of a business and then these are the skill sets we can supply back into the companies that we work with but we're also on a continuous improvement cycle ourselves.

**Laura Overton:**

Yeah.

**Shai Desai:**

So, we need to look at fields outside of learning]. Whether it be marketing or behavioural science or, you know, even things like mental models, which was something to build inside the organization. These are the things that define how we work with clients in the future.

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### Laura Overton:

Yeah. And, actually, the fact you're doing them for yourselves, you're experiencing that and you're being open as well. And that also then leads to building trust as well. I'm often asked to do webinars or to write papers and sometimes I feel that, you know, the... you're asked to do things because people know you. You know, we'll get Laura to do it because people know you. But, actually, that's not the kind of work that genuinely that I'm interested in. I'm interested in working with organizations who want to bring something new, who want to educate the market, who want us to all move together. Not just to kind of raise the profile of something and I'm really excited to see a lot of the external providers at the moment are getting into this mode of, you know what, it's not all about the product, but it's a way that we connect and we support and we can say no to the customers as well.

### Laura Overton:

Babs, before we kind of leave this area, I'd really like to ask you about internal partnerships because, Shannon was... I was talking to Shannon about this and she said, you know, one of the challenges is, is that often you do want to deal with stakeholders. You want to deal with line managers. You want to find out what is going on and people go 'no. That's... you know, why are you doing that? You're a learning... you're just doing course'.

### Laura Overton:

So, how do you think we might be able to get better partnerships back into the business where we are trusted to go in and talk to people who we don't normally talk to?

### Barbara Thompson:

Yes. That was a bit of a sensation that was burning as you were saying that because I'm often in situations where the learning and development business partner have been the blockers to chatting to other people. So, I've been very intentional about building my own network so that I can circumvent that and that's an audience group that I that I failed to mention but the line managers are absolutely key and we all know about the value that they bring, both negatively and positively and the whole reason that people come into work and also take a job. So, very significant audience group]. So, as I said, I tend to build my own networks and those networks can then recommend people that I can speak to and sort of building out that sort of whole six degrees of separation.

### Laura Overton:

I'd like to pick up on something you just said, there, about the L&D partners.

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### Laura Overton:

Can be the blockers. So, our HR business partners and our L&D partners potentially could be the blockers between the department having better relationships and working towards common business goals with the organization and that kind of blowing my mind and... listeners can't see it but you both are nodding, there. So, should we be digging into this a little bit more? Shai, what's your view on this?

### Shai Desai:

Yeah. I mean, it's a hurdle, we are our own worst enemy in that way. We are always wanting a seat at the table and that's sort of the phrasing that we put in front of the leaders in the business but I think we really need to look at what experience are we giving our people or

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the teams that we're working with? And, so, if we're not benchmarking ourselves, or bringing in skills that are what the team's looking for, then I think that's a real question. We're not really aligned to the way the business is looking. We're just aligning our own interests. And I think that's when we sort of get on a roll. Maybe, you know, LND or HR isn't the place where we should start this conversation. Maybe it is with IT or our business unit and then work backwards.

#### Laura Overton:

Yeah. And that concept of bringing the outside in is something that is important with our partners. Are they bringing outside thinking into our current situation?

Babs, you've worked in a lot of teams and, you know, coming back to the point you made earlier about the multi-disciplinary team and pulling that together, one of the things that Michelle Okers was saying to me was, one of the best teams she'd ever worked in was where they had guiding principals up front that everybody was following in that partnership, wherever they were coming from. What kind of guiding principles would you recommend that we put in place in order to make that type of team where that partnership really works for organizations?

#### Barbara Thompson:

Firstly, I echo that comment. My richest experiences have been that, working in that way. So, that's my first comment. One of the guiding principles is absolutely that there's nothing stupid as a concept to ask, particularly when you've got people working in different dioceses and don't have as much touchpoints with one other. So, ask the question. And one of the things that I am known for, particularly when we have days where we can meet together, face to face, is to be able to be in the room and if someone has some non-verbal clues regarding their thinking, what's going on before, what do you want to ask, and really trying to pull that out.

#### Barbara Thompson:

The other thing is around challenge and agreeing what's a healthy challenge because obviously too much the other way can be quite taxing as well. So, and there's something around... I often talk about ROI, but it's about the return on expectations as well. So, what we collectively can expect from this, what we want individually from this, and over and above, what might be the framed problem statement or whatever? What do we think is happening here? So, tend to spend a bit of time for us to sort of agree those norms that we sort of hold. And the other thing that we do, in terms of a guiding principle we always have the mind's eye the very people that we're trying to deliver this for. So, in many instances were created personas or custom maps just make sure that's really well defined. So, those are a few of the principles coming up right now.

#### Laura Overton:

That's great. I think one of the things that Michelle also said was they had a principle of working respectfully. Everyone to respect each other and also part of that was also respecting each other's commercial terms. So, I thought that was quite an interesting one. I mean, Shai, if I was to ask you to stop being the co-founder of Learning Plan and instead take on a new role of coaching and mentoring, learning and development professionals, to help them work better with their vendor partners, if that was your only job, what kind of things would you be focusing on in terms of your recommendations?

#### Shai Desai:



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Many of the things that Barbara said, there... it's building that great relationship, that great trust, and really building a coaching culture that sort of allows people to talk openly, assessing each other, looking at how we're going to develop, what we're going to implement, what we're going to be evaluating together, how we really connect with each other. And I want to talk about a good friend of mine, Mark in the U.S., sort of said, we sort of rely on each other as subject matter experts, but really, the way that we work is sort of a subject matter network. Everything that we do is connected to something else and mostly other people are going to have more experience than us. So, how do we lean on what they're experiences are and then develop ourselves. If I was going to focus on being a coach, I'd be really looking to sort of say, how can people understand what engagement looks like, what the experience is going to be, really giving them the guidance to help them do their jobs better.

#### Shai Desai:

Whether that be through action learning or whether it be pairing people together to achieve the best results. Just understanding individual needs, individualized interests and aspirations, and then helping them come up with a series of concepts that help them do their job better.

#### Laura Overton:

Oh, that's great. And, I guess, also if they were working with external suppliers, you would be coaching them. Say, okay, well, what can they bring to the table. Are you going to trust them? Have they got a previous examples of work that they've done? Can they introduce you to other clients who have done that, who've done that kind of work as well? And I guess to maybe bring some of the principals that Barbara's been talking about. To say, treat your vendors with respect and embrace what they know into what you're doing in order to achieve those goals, as well. We're all in it together. That's basically it.

#### Laura Overton:

Now, what we try and do, because we're all in it together, we want to be practical as well and I want to say thank you for all the different practical ideas that you guys have already given us in this conversation today. You can tell it's really getting my mind going. But, as we close the conversation, there's something we're asking all our guests on the emerging series podcast is, what would be the specific recommendations you would give to learning leaders right now? What would you recommend that they stop doing, that they start doing, and that they accelerate? Some of those things that they're kind of doing but they need to really put their foot down on those behaviours. So, Babs, I'll go with you first. What would your recommendations be for the profession when it comes down to partnerships? To stop, to start, and to accelerate?

#### Barbara Thompson:

Oh, goodness. As reflective, it's somewhat, "Ah." Okay. So, in terms of stop, what I've heard amongst the industry by and large, is that we are going to convert classroom training to... whatever. Online, and that's nonsense. Don't do that. There might be some... you have to unpack what it is that you're trying to do and then think about what the medium is. So, let's stop saying that we're doing that because when things get back to some sort of normality, we've already created those norms with our stakeholders. So, that's the stop.

#### Barbara Thompson:

The start is to recognize to the point that you've already made, we're all in it together. So, we just happen to be the specialists in the line of the business but, actually, it's about drawing

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on other ideas, skill sets. In order to make that happen, we don't need to see ourselves as working on an island to achieve that.

I think the thing to accelerate is the listening exercises that we should be doing, particularly in these times. What's the belief systems that people are holding, how are people working in a very smart way to develop themselves, because guess what, they're doing things in spite of anything that we're creating, and really get closer to understanding that so that we have a big clear narrative and we're able to join conversations about what we could do rather than being on the back foot.

#### Laura Overton:

That's great. Stop just pushing everything online for the sake of it. Start working with others, looking at their strengths and accelerate our listening abilities. So, thank you for that. Shai, what about you? What would your final recommendations be?

#### Shai Desai:

Yeah. I couldn't agree more. So, definitely stopping thinking about everything as e-learning . One, nobody has the time. Two, it's rare that you're going to have 100 experiences. You'll have a few So, I think the only... every business that you work with says we're in a complex business or we're a highly complex business, and I think what we need to stop doing is really overthinking that and going, let's just change the approaches that we're taking with things and let's also work with the tools that we have. So, the tools that we have will get us the best experience today and the tools that we put in next will give us a better experience than that. So, stop thinking about everything as a course. Everything certainly is not a learning course. it is just about performance tools and outcomes.

#### Shai Desai:

In terms of starting, it's given us a great opportunity to experiment with things. We now know that everyone can work from home which has given us more flexibility in how we work. So, why don't we work across functional teams a bit more when there's the opportunity to do that. why don't we leverage the tools we've got to support communication? To really market the way we are training and learning from each other a bit more and to build a greater sense of a learning culture in the organization where people can bring up their own individual learning experiences and push that back inside their organization. We find that, obviously, it builds a great learning culture and it builds the engagement but it also brings around, usually, a behavioural change where we suddenly have a group of advocates building this lifelong learning culture or mentality and that's really helping grow a business.

#### Laura Overton:

Great.

#### Shai Desai:

And to get to your third point, what Barbara said to accelerate, you know, listening is absolutely the thing right now, you know. Really just feeling what the organization's going through. Probably just thinking a bit more about the resilience and how teams can work better together and just optimizing productivity service. It's not really an 8-hour straight day anymore. what are the periods that work best for everyone? we've found some have stopped meetings between 12 and two, just to give people an actual break from the focus of their work, force them to go outside and take a walk or do something different and just help them get through this sort of period of uncertainty, help them stop worrying about... you know, obviously they have a focus on the business so let's talk them through the employee

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experience. Really, how do we simplify the work and help them deal with the stress they are going through.

### **Laura Overton:**

That's amazing. So, to kind of summarize that... it's about how do we work as a team. We're all about teamwork, aren't they, about how we can work effectively as teams and give each other the space and the freedom to be our very best selves while we're working against that common goal and, you know, at the end of this conversation, I really feel as though we've been partnering together. We've been really kind of thinking about that together and you've been great thinking partners for all of us, as the listeners here today. And we just want to say, on behalf of the listeners, thank you so much for sharing your insights and your experiences and helping us to be better partners to those that surround us. So, Shai, thank you. Babs, thank you, for joining us today.

### **Shai Desai:**

Thank you so much.

### **Laura Overton:**

That's great.