About the Emergent Series

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

Shannon:

Hello, this is Shannon. You know, it's been wonderful to collaborate with Laura and Michelle creating the Emergent Series. We see the discussions we are having with guests as part of being a collective sense making process to figure out how we can anchor ourselves in the current business reality and help other learning professionals identify practical actions that they can take to be more effective and to adapt to the changes created by the pandemic response. Learning Uncut has always been about keeping it real and having real conversations and this Emergent Series is no different. What we want to do is reflect on all that has been discussed and figure out the answer to the "now what" question. What action can learning professionals and learning teams take from these conversations to emerge from this disruption as being more relevant and effective than ever before. Now it's your turn – and we're going to invite you to take part in figuring all this out. We're planning a highly interactive community event. It's not a conference and you won't be spoken at. It will be more like connecting issues to people and generating solutions through conversations. The goal is for L&D professionals to come together and focus on a series of business challenges to generate practical ideas and actions that can be taken away and applied in your organisations. As the event takes shape we will share more information on the Emergent episodes and on our social media channels to let you know how you can join in. We look forward to hearing from you.

Shannon Tipton:
Okay, ready gents?

Simon Gibson:
Let's go ahead.

Simon Tindall:
Yup.

Shannon Tipton:
Let's do it. Hello and welcome to the Learning Uncut podcast, The Emergent Series. I am Shannon Tipton, guest host and owner, founder of Learning Rebels, where we encourage organizations to think differently about workplace learning. I am very excited to have two gentlemen on this podcast with me today who are crazy dedicated to helping businesses connect, learning to business impact and moving L and D to focus on next gen skills and capabilities, the importance being especially true during this time of immense disruption.

I have with me, what I referred to as Simon squared. So first we have Simon Gibson who works in an advisory capacity for the LPI, which is the Learning Performance Institute. And Simon is an experienced people leader with real passion to deliver meaningful, commercial

change and transformation, via appropriate learning and organizational development. And he most recently worked with RS components, Fujitsu and NBC Universal, just to name a few. And having worked in many different sectors, Simon brings a fresh and challenging outlook to our world, especially at this time.

Also I have with me Simon Tindall, and, yup, another Simon. So Simon is the head of skills and innovation at Open University, which is a fully digital online university, the largest university in Europe right now. And they have the mandate of providing education to all. The Open University is open by name and by nature with an open admissions policy, really geared to bringing all walks of life together for educations. Welcome gentlemen, I appreciate you being with me today.

Simon Gibson:

Thank you.

Simon Tindall:

Thank you.

Shannon Tipton:

All right. Well, it's been several months since our daily lives were radically altered in response to the pandemic, and as restrictions start easing around the world, it's clear that there's going to be an enduring impact on how we work and live. And we like to start off each of these podcasts with one question, which is, what has the pandemic, the disruptions that are all of 2020, what does that meant to you personally and in your businesses over the course of this year? So I'll start with Simon G.

Simon Gibson:

Thank you. I do like, first. Great way to start. I think from a business perspective and as a practitioner in this kind of learning, talent development space, it has truly shone a laser like spotlight on what companies are doing or not doing to be a bit provocative around developing, growing skill capability. It's of no surprise that many companies globally, internationally have been hit squarely between the eyes, and aren't able to, how can I politely say? Pivot, change, evolve, grow. I'm not talking about, well, we've got everybody online and everybody's now working at home. That's not what I'm talking about. That was a great skill, but that might not make the business sustainable in 12, 18, 24 months' time.

So I feel, and I know we'll get into a bit more unpacking that. I think it's just a big spotlight on growth skills and capability. Personally, look, I haven't worked for a few months. So it's been quite nice to recharge, I'm super fit, I'm healthy.

Simon Tindall:

Blank space.

Simon Gibson:

It's definitely a time to reflect and observe and question and challenge. And, again, I know we'll talk. I wrote quite an interesting piece quite towards the start of that, that just said, don't forget where we've come from and don't forget what we're here to do. So, quite reflective on the personal space.

Shannon Tipton:

That is kind of nice, isn't it, that time has allowed us to read and think and assess and assimilate information as well? So I think that is a bright spot that's come out of this. What about you Simon T.

Simon Tindall:

Well, I think starting on a personal level, I haven't worn shoes, proper shoes for at least six months. But aside from that, I think the interesting thing is, has anything really changed? And lots of people at the beginning of lockdown, at the beginning of COVID, were talking about, COVID having this massive impact on skills and learning. And I think what is done is not actually... These issues were underlying within the economy and were underlying trends before COVID. What COVID has done is forced the hand and accelerated the need to rescale, the need to upscale. Particularly, we already have, in the UK, an issue where we have 5 million people claiming benefits at this stage and that's going to grow, we would believe as other government support systems cattail. So there's this underlying sort of trend that's happened in the economy that's been accelerated by COVID.

The positive side, so I think we saw, certainly there's for people, maybe they're early adopters, to actually start taking on new skills to recognize that COVID is going to change their careers. And so we do free course provision within the Open University, we found within the first eight weeks of lockdown, we had over a million learners come into that site and register to do free courses. So that was a huge exponential spike in demand some people are doing things over directly related to careers and improving their employability and those things, other people maybe were looking at taking up completely different subject interests and those things. But there was definitely an appetite for people to refresh and do new things. But as I say, those may be the early adopters in society, as opposed to some of the tail is going to be more reluctant.

Shannon Tipton:

Wow. That's amazing. One million people looking to either augment their knowledge or re-skill?

Simon Tindall:

As registered on new courses. These are free courses, but yeah. And we found that even for our paid courses coming into the academic year, our numbers are significantly up. I think the level of inquiries into the university has probably risen almost by about 50%.

Shannon Tipton:

That's outstanding. And I think that that really opens up the conversation for what our topic is today. And our topic today is all about the skills economy. How are we going to re-skill, up-skill, cross-skill, as a population in general and within organizations specifically, and how can L and D really be a business partner in this initiative? So McKinsey and Company shared an article about up-skilling, which dated this, even before the current crisis, changing technologies and new ways of working we're disrupting jobs and the skills employees need to do them. In 2017, they estimated that as many as 375 million workers or 14% of the global workforce would have to switch up occupations or acquire new skills by 2030 because of automation and artificial intelligence.

87% of executives said that they were experiencing skill gaps in the workforce or expected to experience gaps within the next few years, but less than half of the people who participated in this survey had a clear sense of how to do this. And so here's my question to you. We know that artificial intelligence, automation and other forms of technology, are key drivers for the future and for present skillsets. And not only will technology produce more jobs, but more jobs that may not necessarily be technology driven. So how can L and D

spark a movement to support this up-skilling and re-skilling for the future, and not simply by saying, "We'll just put out more training courses?" So what's the next move gentlemen? I'll start with Simon T.

Simon Tindall:

Well, so I think the key thing is it goes beyond L and D. This is about societal change really. And what I mean by that is, the skills gap isn't a temporary thing. It's not something that is just going to impact the next two or three years. It's a long-term issue and an ongoing problem, because with AI and new technology, that pace of technology is just going to increase exponentially. And so the impact on people's jobs will equally increase. You're already seeing it with more enlightened employers starting to look far more towards getting generalists rather than specialists at high level and those types of things.

So I think one of the biggest things we need to do, and maybe as L and D people, but just as people in general is build a longer-term strategy. It has to be something, which is about changing behaviours at numerous different levels. So behaviours of employers, behaviours of employees, of workers or potential workers, it has to be this acceptance that is not the old model, which was already outdated. That you go to university for three or four years, or you finish your education and then you work for 30, 40 years, and then you stop. That was already hopelessly out of date, and probably wasn't true. But I think what we're going to say is it has to be this progression or this movement towards progressive training, that you are constantly picking up new skills, re-skilling, up-skilling, as you go through your career.

Because the nature of work is going to necessitate... Someone of my age, we probably changed career two or three times in that career spell. We know that is not going to be the case for people that are just starting in the working environment now. So I think long-term strategy, collective strategy, and it has to be buying long term, we've got to stop thinking in terms of government policies, in terms of national policies, we've got to stop putting sticky plasters on problem areas of skill, and actually take a more coherent view and say, "Right, how do we actually educate people right back at the schools level? And how do we educate those people that are already in the working market and are adults?"

Because someone starting who's 25 now, is going to be working probably for the next 45 years. So how do you continue to progress them through and keep them fresh and give them the incentive and behaviour to actually go and seek new skills and new knowledge?

Simon Gibson:

Let me build on it Simon, I think there's couple of interesting points you called out. So from a in business practitioner viewpoint, I would say, to answer your question Shannon, what's the next step? I'd say, go and question, really question, go and get your homework marked, what have you been doing to grow skill and capability in your company? And I'm pretty sure in general, a massive generalization now, massive generalization now, there won't be many hard and fast connections to, we've been driving longer term business.

It's the strategy to Simon's point. However, big however, if you're a listed company on the stock exchange and you've got to deliver quarterly results and there's pressure on you, and you're a big ugly corporate machine, and having worked in many of them and know many people that do work in them, that puts different pressure in the system, to, "We're going to do this thing. And in two years' time, we'll have 500 people that look like X." Purposely not saying what that is, but broadly we know, right?

Simon Tindall:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Simon Gibson:

Which is different to, "But we put 200 people on a thing and they came back Wednesday." And that psyche, that conversation, I've talked to many CFOs, business leaders, heads of sales directors, there's a paradigm in our system, there's a friction, there's a tension that says, "I want something today. You make good stuff. You give me some good stuff. We'll tell my mates we had some good stuff, and we'll just keep doing the good stuff." If you have a tough and I'm going to be challenging, if you have a tough conversation going, "Do you know what 70% of the stuff we've been doing is not really relevant." It's nice, it's good. But to your point, Simon, we can go get some of that stuff free, we can curate it, we can point to other stuff. I'm not talking about what it is. I'm not talking about the solution. There's just lots of different ways to go get it.

And then to your point, then there's a change in behaviour, isn't it? Because you got one side, you got a behaviour or a mindset that I would say. And then the other side you've actually got skill and capability. So we want to be a company that looks like this. Great. Right. I've got it. So can you go out and recruit those 500 people? No, because it's going to cost you X amount of million dollars. We don't have that money. Let's come back. So how many can we grow? Do we know, to your point, do we know our current company skill level? That's a tricky one right? Well, what do you mean? Well, what's your current capability today, versus where you want to get to?

Macro trends tell us, and we've alluded to our own country, but internationally it's very similar, productivity is going down, hours worked is going up, we're getting less good at doing stuff. That don't work. Any report prior to COVID, you've alluded to the McKinsey one, which I'm fascinated by, there's really interesting data from the world economic forum, that says by 2022, we need 100 and plus whatever million people who look like this, and these types of jobs are going to go down by about 70 million. So there's a net off of we need about 60 new million new type roles, new type skills, new type capabilities. And again, you alluded to, we can't produce them fast enough from any education system around the world because it kind of doesn't work. It's a no, no, it doesn't work. We can't send them off for three, four years. They turn up at work and go, "We got a lot of data analysts." Now the world's moved much faster than that.

So that balance, I suppose, what I'm sharing is that balance of how do we keep the show on the road today and change the world? Can we drive our car and change a tire at the same time? You go, "Whoa, it's a bit crazy." We've got to learn it. We've got somehow, somehow we got to work it out how to do that.

Simon Tindall:

And I think you've got, backing up that point is, you've got a political system in the same way that you go commercial pressures on companies. You've got a political system that thinks in four and five year cycles. And so this is the almost like climate change. This is not dissimilar in many ways, is you have to start thinking about saying, "This is a long-term issue for us, so let's start thinking about a strategy that over the next 10, 20, 30 years as to what we need to at least think we should be doing, we're not going to get it right all the time." But start thinking about getting people to adapt to change, getting people to think that AI and because their job is going to change isn't necessarily a negative thing.

It's going to happen anyway, so how do we embrace that change and how do we get people to start building their own confidence? What is surprising, I think when you look at skills, is there is a relatively high percentage and I think it's getting up to half the people that still lack fundamental basic skills in maths, in English, in digital. And it's like, as a ground requisite, as a prerequisite, let's start addressing that. We know those are going to be a key. We want to start addressing some basic stuff. And equally, it's about government policies, about companies, it's about learning providers or moving in a coherent way.

And I think to the individual, it has to be, let's develop something that is accessible, that is affordable and gives them sufficient incentive either negatively or positively to actually encourage them to go down that route, more positively than negatively. I don't want to inflict pain on these people.

Shannon Tipton:

Wow. That was great. My hand could not keep up with what both of you were saying everything just so critical. This brings me to this particular thought. So we say here that the education system is not going to be able to produce the skills, the people behind the skills, fast enough to keep up with the economic need. So this means that re-skilling, up-skilling needs to happen within the organizations themselves. So my question then becomes when it comes to promoting a culture of learning to unlearn or learning to relearn, this requires trust. It requires trust from an employee to a business. So now how can we help employees trust the business when the business says, "We need you to re-skill, we need you to up-skill?

And so how do we bridge that trust, how can L and D help bridge that trust or as an organization, what sort of organizational shifts can we make to help people trust the business to say, "Yes, you need these new skills?"

Simon Gibson:

So I'll give you a hypothetical example. If you run call centres anywhere on this planet, in the not too distant future, we probably don't really need as many people to answer a telephone doing. Why is that? Well, to your point, you can use automation. It'll get to the point where voice recognition is so pure and so smart that we won't know that you're talking to an automated response, right? However, you don't need to be a quantum scientist to understand you still need people to work in that environment and then around in that environment. Now, to your question, depending on the type of company you are, you could do a number of avenues, couldn't you. You could say, "Well, look, our long-term plan, but it's not really visible is we're going to make X amount. And we're going to invest in this tech over here, to automate the hell out of that thing."

Or you could be the company that says, "Well, we've got X amount, a thousand people that do that role today. We are going to offer them the opportunity to re-skill towards this pathway over here, that takes two years." To Simon's point, you also know, not everybody's going to want to do that. Personal circumstance will play a factor of age, current circumstance, desire, appetite, there's loads of factors at play, but broadly you're going to have a population of people that could do that. You're going to have some that don't want to do that. And some that might be sit somewhere in between. So to your question, does big business have that opportunity? Yeah, it does. But it also still got to keep the lights on remember, they're two different pots of money.

Running an organization today costs X, creating an organization tomorrow costs Y, and it's pretty much like our global system at the moment. How do we balance economic benefit with global health? What's our trade off? Well, somebody's always making that decision, and look, I'm just trying to share realistic examples without naming too many companies. They're just realistic challenges of today, of today. I don't feel enough companies probably put enough energy into understanding, Simon's point, the longer-term investment that they'd have to make to shift those skills or capabilities, which is a different question.

Shannon Tipton:

Simon T.

Simon Tindall:

Well, I think there's a role of government, which is, how do you encourage, or how do you sway, to take Simon's point, about moving between how do you make it beneficial for businesses to invest in the future education of its workers? How to employers equally see that retention of an employer and retaining the skills that they already have is actually going to be a much more cost effective and beneficial way than necessarily laying off hundreds of people to then go and recruit in a job market. So I do think that there are companies out there that are starting to think about developing learning as a benefit or developing learning and training packages as part of a key piece of employee retention.

So it isn't just about, "Well, I can throw money at this and if I need to go and recruit more data analysts in three years' time or whatever I need, I can just pay high salaries." That attribute becomes an economic way of doing it. It's far better to build that scenario where you start building people towards what you perceive as future need. And with that, you carry their skill sets and experience through. So a lot of that really comes down to valuing. Going back to some basic stuff, as Simon previously mentioned, how do you even know what the skill set of your organization is? How do you audit what your existing skill sets are and recognize what elements of those skills be those formal technical skills, or be those much softer skills, like sort of leadership or mentoring or coaching and recognize the value of those?

Because arguably within a change environment where you want people, you want a future employee to be very flexible, to be creative, to look at challenges and overcome those ways, or to see technology and be able to take advantage of that from a business point of view, you're going to encourage those probably more around those core or softer skills than possibly than in their technical skills. And certainly you've got organizations today, like say Amazon or Amazon web services, those types of organizations that are thinking about, "Absolutely, we want to go and hire an engineer."

But we're less worried about what their technical aspect of their engineering is. We're more concerned about what their flexibility is or what are their underlying, if you like, core skills? So, how do they think, how do they work in teams? How do they work individually? Are they natural leaders? Are they natural followers? Because those are arguably bigger challenges finding the right fit of a person in an organization. If you have that, and they're technically minded, you can teach them new technology, but you can't necessarily teach them to be... Or it's a bigger challenge to teach them to think in a certain way or be creative.

Shannon Tipton:

I agree.

Simon Tindall:

I'm not sure if I answered the question.

Shannon Tipton:

That's okay. I think it brings up some really good points about what is an organization willing to do? So you think about Simon G, your point, to, we have to maintain the health of an organization from a growth perspective, but we also have a fiscal responsibility about managing KPIs and certain goals. And that's reality. If we go back to the opening statement here where 87% of it executive said that they were experiencing skill gaps in the workforce, so we know, they know a gap is there. Do the employees know that gap is there? And again, it goes back to that trust of, if my employer says, "Shannon, you need to re-skill or cross-skill," why am I going to trust my employer that they're going to teach me what I need to know?

Simon Gibson:

Yeah. There's another contentious point isn't there, which will bring it to light for us about trust. So March, whatever for any country around the world, pretty much went into lockdown for a period of months, some a bit longer than others. Pretty much all formal, face to face, education, training, learning, whatever you want to call it, stopped, overnight. Like you said, you gave a great example at the start, shut the door. Did people stop learning? Did people stop finding... No, no, we know this, right?

Shannon Tipton:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Simon Gibson:

Simon's given an example. Go look at the Udemy stats, go look at the Coursera stats, millions and millions and millions of hours, people went, "Whoa, I'm going to go learn some stuff because I've got my own time." Right?

Shannon Tipton:

Right.

Simon Tindall:

Yeah.

Simon Gibson:

So that's an interesting thing about trust isn't it? So can I take that back to my place of work? Now we're all in a place right now where we're going, we don't know if that job's going to be there when you go back, burying schemes internationally around potentially losing a role. Maybe it's less of a role. Well, big thing about trust is are people being productive when I can't see them? Old school thinking, right? Old school, I need to see my team. I need to see my office. I need to see my people. Well, what haven't leaders and executives been able to do? I'm not surprised by that McKinsey research, that kind of says, executives going, "We feel their pressure," says, "We're not going fast enough. We don't have the right people. It just doesn't feel right."

My question and challenge is where's the data that says you know this, how do you not know that in your warehouse you've got somebody who studying data analytics at home?

Most organizations don't do they? And if you found that out, would you promote that person, would you help that person, or would you just ignore it, because they don't fit your cliche band of talent because they're not hierarchical or senior enough? It's just a loaded question. So I'm probably answering your question where the question is, probably employees and I'm one, I've been one, I would then question, what's in it for me? If I tell them I'm doing this stuff 30 hours a week in my own time, wonder if they can help me. And some people will want that help, and maybe some don't, maybe some don't.

Simon Tindall:

I think employees will share their success. So interestingly Simon, the stat that we were talking about before we recorded was in the first eight weeks of lockdown, the Open Universities free courses, we had over a million people register to start courses. So there is demand there. A lot of those courses that they signed up for were bashed open courses. So it was a set course, they would go through the course, maybe it was an eight-week course. And then at the end of it, they get assessed, online assessment and quizzing, and then they get awarded a digital badge.

And what was interesting, of those that completed that course, so there is a drop-off, we know that, but of the people who completed, 85% from our data say, "Yep, we're going to go and share my digital badge, my certificate with my employer." So these may be the tip of the iceberg. They may be the motivated people. But if you say, "Well, these motivated people, they're going to go and do this stuff anyway," why don't we start looking at the bands below those just below and say, "How do I tip that next band to start doing similar behaviour?"

So it comes down to, it's not the government's full responsibility to re-skill the nation. It's not employers, it's not employees. It's a combination of everyone, including learning providers, training providers, education institutes, to start providing... Our role as an institution has to be to start providing very relevant training or very relevant education accessible, that's affordable that people can get to. And higher education still doesn't do that. I was looking at some survey that we did with an employer that we're doing some work with at the moment, and they're doing corporate sponsorship. They're sponsoring their employees to undertake free education, to do a degree with the Open University, this is Zuber that we're doing it with.

And interestingly, the audience that we surveyed of the drivers and their family members were saying 50% of them said that they'd previously experienced barriers to getting into higher education. And that's predominantly cost, it's too expensive, it's predominantly about time, and it's also about perception that doing a degree, "Yeah, that's not really for me," doing education because their previous education experience be that school, be that college, whenever they finished education, have been a negative or could have been a negative education experience. So it's that challenge of how do you get someone who is an un-confident learner, who recognizes that you can find, go and tell them their job's under threat, but how do you turn them from being a confident learner and recognizing that ability to get them to start being on a re-skilling or up-skilling challenge? And some of that, it's not just about giving them new skills, it's getting them to recognize what skills they already have.

Simon Gibson:

Yeah. And it's an interesting point there as well, Simon, because I suppose what you could, without taking our conversation off on a tangent is you could blur into social economic barriers to entry to education, no disrespect to people that are in those professions. I wouldn't be surprised that they're kind of saying, "We've hit many barriers to further education," but pretty similar to my point around just hierarchically, we don't invest in

management leadership capability for the shelves can do it. Well, no, because they don't have that direct influence.

But to your point, they might have the desire, the hunger, the appetite. I'm just talking about, can you balance, can you really balance and understand where your organization is, where it needs to get to, and then I think you alluded to it earlier on is many companies are willing to invest in that if you put your hand up.

Simon Tindall:

And there's some really simple fundamental glitches or flaws within our education system. The fact is, if you look at anything within STEM or IT, there are a shortage of females working in that area. Now, that issue isn't that they're turned off by science at 18, that issue relate actually, the survey would kind of indicate that they move away from those subject areas by 11 or 12. And so the whole point is that's fine saying, "Well, we'll just concentrate on males or we'll concentrate on this group." So there you go. You're now saying we've got a skill shortage and you've now disregarded half the potential workforce.

And it's not just male and female it's disability, it's racist culture, and saying, "How do you actually get people who do not perceive that those are the roles for them to actually go and try those roles and get into those roles?" Because there is this fantastic resource of human ability there, but our systems kind of already pick and choose where we think people should go and work. So you're a shelf stacker or what was interesting in the work with Uber drivers is 20, 30 or 20, I think it was 20, 25% of them already have some higher education experience. They're driving because that's the job that they want to go and do at that time. They're not driving because they lack education.

And what we found with that education program is it launched in January, by the end of this year, we're going to have 800 drivers or one of their family members, because it's part of the program, that they can push it onto a family member, studying to do a degree with us. Even though that's not going to change their ability to drive a car, they can already drive a car. What it changes is what that driver or that family member wants to go and do in three or four years' time. And interestingly, the courses they sign up for, lots of IT and technology, law and business. [crosstalk 00:36:14] here we are with a huge resource pool. And it's not just the Uber program, there's similar programs in the US where people like Starbucks with Walmart actually going, just because you work stacking shelves doesn't mean to say you haven't got the potential to go and do something far more advanced.

Shannon Tipton:

And this is a topic that's not new to the L and D industry or HR departments, about going out and finding who is a good fit or who has skills that are sitting in the organization right now. So the question then becomes, yes, we need to get out there and find those people. And so now does this mean that finally, L and D needs to really wrap its arms around and embrace social and collaborative learning, working out loud, showing your work, sharing your work? So L and D embracing that and businesses embracing that, is it finally at its apex?

Simon Gibson:

To a degree again, I'd say there's company organizational context, right? So we're in an interesting field where many providers and solutions say, "Here's the solution to the problem I don't know you have." So I can imagine many companies found the adoption of Teams, Zoom, whatever platform frightening. I can imagine that to our point earlier in the

conversation, their digital, broad digital literacy to make the best use of these platforms and technologies, even though, as we joked at the start, you use them personally. So, "Whoa, this is weird. So hold on. I can do that in my own time, but I come into work and they give me an Abacus." And you go, "Hold on." It don't quite match, does it?

And we've talked about pace and speed. So you go, "But hold on, I can do 1,000,001 things on my phone, outside of work. And you've given me this chalkboard and an Abacus to work within work." All that just got blown up, didn't it? Bang, six months ago, bang. And so slowly, but surely many companies, irrespective of size, are kind of going, "This can't work for us. Do we need to send people to that sales meeting? Do we need to make that work?" So then that has unintended, but positive consequences to your point, Shannon, it says, "Well, how do we share top tips? How do we have our check in? How do we work out loud?"

What's pretty cool is to ask a question to X amount of 1000 people you work with because somebody probably knows the answer. But to Simon's point, are you brave enough to ask the question? Are you brave enough to put a post on and say, "I need help on X, I don't know about Y can somebody help me?" And somebody in another country might be able to reply that all depends on the individual, the company, its ability. So I believe the solutions have been around forever, forever. I'm joking, forever. 10, 15 years, this technology has kicked around and it's not changed much. Sorry, Microsoft, sorry, everyone. It's not really changed much since [inaudible 00:39:38]. It's been great.

Shannon Tipton:

Just because it hasn't changed doesn't mean we still can't make good use.

Simon Gibson:

But that has changed, doesn't it? So that's your question, and that's my point is can we make, we as a profession, can we make better use of it? Absolutely. Absolutely. I'm not talking about taking a three-day course and putting it three days on Zoom. No, forget that I don't want that conversation. But can you socially connect your organization using some of those tools and platforms in a better way? Absolutely. Absolutely. Surely many, many, many companies will be running WhatsApp groups that their IT function will tell you they don't have.

Shannon Tipton:

Right, people will find-

Simon Tindall:

It's true because everyone uses their own personal networks of people within that job to go, "I'll go and ask them," because they understand this issue. So people already have that informally. The challenge is how do you embrace that as a company culture to do that?

Shannon Tipton:

How do you use this then, how do you use this technology or the social groups that are emerging seeing the light of day to really help organizations with their analysis of who is out there, who knows what? Right?

Simon Tindall:

Yeah.

Shannon Tipton:

So how do we now uncover the hidden knowledge within our organizations?

Simon Gibson:

I'd go back to my point, I'd build your tribe. So if you've got certain skill, I've done things recently around data. If you've got people that say, "Yeah, we're really interested in data." We had alluded earlier to Amazon cloud technology, "We're really into cloud technology." Go find them, build the tribe, find the space that they're playing in because they will be playing in it already and adopt it. So this is my point, question what you're doing as a profession trying to help its company, accelerate, move, change, evolve. Shine a light on it, shine a light, go find the people that are passionate. Go find the people that are willing to talk about it and help others come to it. Build the dream stuff. If they build it, they will come. Now it doesn't work like that.

It's got to be useful. It's got to be relevant. It's got to be helpful. And then if you're building old school, like-minded communities of practice and you've got all this wonderful technology to help you surface and ask questions and share that information, my question then comes, why wouldn't you do that? Why aren't you doing that in a way that helps those people connect, the organization connect, other people connect? Otherwise you're stuck, especially in today's world, you're stuck with it. If I don't know Shannon, how do I get to ask that question? I'm stuck.

Simon Tindall:

And I think that really touches on that whole area of coaching and mentoring as well of having those support mechanisms. So, we're an online university. Everything we do is digitally delivered. But we also have a global workforce of tutors. And we know that you can push out a free course to someone and absolutely that helps if they go and do that course. And they can go and do that course by themselves. But just having someone to mentor, particularly on skills groups, where you're trying to up-skill say a group of unconfident learners, that ability to have someone locally there, who is either face to face in person in the real world or in the COVID world on a Skype or a Teams call or whatever, that person's really, really important.

They don't necessarily have to teach them the content is already there online, but they've got to go, "Yeah, I'm teaching you," I don't know, "I'm teaching you percentages." And it's like, "Yeah, I can't do this." And it's like, "Well, yeah. Nobody can actually do percentages that well, don't worry too much about it." It's that confidence building and that kind of just guiding people through courses is really, really important. That's either informally through just people you ring up on your day to day work, or when you're doing training programs, it's great going, "Yeah, we can do an online course for everyone in the country. Fantastic." But when it will have more impact is when you have a system of local support and mentoring and coaches of people who just go, "Yeah, let me just explain that how I would see that particular problem or something."

So a solution is not everything goes digital and everything's online and available on your phone, that's part of it. You still need that human interaction, that is really, really important.

Shannon Tipton:

So would you say then that part of our responsibility in finding the people within our organizations, as far as that, that deeper knowledge, maybe it's not necessarily all about finding people who have skills, but it's about finding people who know people who have skills?

Simon Tindall:

Yeah, absolutely. Because you don't know what skills you need and you don't know what knowledge you need. And if we're looking at new jobs, these new emerging challenges, nobody knows all the answers. It's more about, "Well, how do I get some creative thinking here? How do I get a little bit of experience?" And I'm not sure that that many companies embrace that. The classic, is every year, so many people will leave a company, they'll either retire, they become a redundant or whatever. And as they leave, what attempts do that company have to try and tap into that knowledge, 30 years of knowledge about this job, about this industry or whatever?

Very little is done to capture the knowledge that sits within existing employers, particularly as they come to the end of their career or the end of working for that particular organization. So that's a huge, that just disappears for companies.

Shannon Tipton:

So that brain drain can be controlling that, and really from an L and D perspective, so Simon G, I'm curious as to your opinion about this, is we think about finding the people who know other people. So we've talked about the coaches, the mentors, should L and D, should businesses, rather than saying, "We need to up-skill a population," maybe we need to reach out to our organization to see who... Simon, who do you know, who knows how to do X, Y, Z? and maybe there's a group behind XYZ that we need to tap into. So rather than trying to measure skills and skills gaps, maybe it's about establishing that matrix around mentoring, coaching, because those are going to be the people who hold that information in their brains.

Simon Gibson:

Yeah. I'll go back to my earlier point, depending on the context, the culture, if that word resonates mindset of your existing organization, will probably shape whether you can ask your company that question. What questions can you ask your company, your organization? I'm a massive, massive believer in the power of the network. I wouldn't be talking to you if it wasn't for my network, [crosstalk 00:47:40] example of how it works. And anybody who knows me relatively well or fairly well will know that that's what I believe. And I will quite happily share and talk about and give time and support and mentor in my own time, because that's what I believe valuable. Now that doesn't mean everybody has to do it. But if you can ask your organization, if you can be really brave, I think it's quite brave and quite modern to say, "Look, we're going to skill B," it's just, to Simon's point, it's just open. It's just open.

It's not a tap on the shoulder, actually, if you're really smart, you might know who to tap on the shoulder because you want to know who your rock stars are, but you also want to find the people that are the diamonds buried below the surface. And that's really hard unless you're really brave and really open and very transparent and very trusting and just say, "Fill your boats." Right?

Shannon Tipton:
Right.

Simon Gibson:

10,000 applications, we've only got 100 spaces, but we're going to find the best possible people, irrespective of hierarchy to do that thing. And technology can help, but your network, either formally or informally, needs to be in place or needs to be active, which then comes back to a point about leadership skills, understanding the pulse of your organization, how'd you get insight? McKinsey is saying, CEOs are selling this, there's many CEOs, no disrespect to them, that don't know what goes on in the shelf stacking, right?

Shannon Tipton:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Simon Gibson:

Really go, "What's the real problem. What's the real, real, real problem on the coalface?" Go walk a mile in their shoes and you'll find out in 24 hours, in a few days, and then you can bring that back. And that's really interesting data to say, "I think we need to focus over here, not here."

Shannon Tipton:

So it is not about that immediate fix, is it? It's like you said, Simon T, it's not about the sticky plaster. It's about future proofing or setting ourselves up for success as an organization that then leads me to wonder about where do we find people within our organizations? What I see as a potential barrier is that when an internal job mandate goes out, something within the sales organization, let's say, then they only send that email out to those within the sales organization. So they say, "We've got a director of sales position available, who in sales wants it?" So they don't send it out organizationally. So that could be a barrier to what some of these CEOs are saying, "We don't have the skills," but maybe you do, if you were to only ask your population.

Simon Gibson:

Yeah. It's a challenge to our function, isn't it? Across the learning talent, whatever you want to call it, I don't really care. It might be hard, how well can your organization the minute you go over five, 600 people? It's quite complex quite quickly. And you go, "Yeah, but we've got a talent cycle when we do X and we put a label on people and we give people a tap on the shoulder," I don't really care. What I'm interested in is the diamonds buried below the surface, to your point, that you might not know. And if you're in an organization of many, many thousands, that's really difficult. That's really, really difficult to surface. And it becomes process led to Simon's point.

So there's a balance between, as a practitioner, how can you really find those people and do the things that the company requires? So it's almost two different things at the same time, find the people to do the things, but also come up with the things that we should be doing. And then ultimately you'll find the people. Which comes first?

Shannon Tipton:

which comes first?

Simon Gibson:

[inaudible 00:51:53] and it's a lively question isn't it? And it's good to have Simon T on, because you go, "Well, in the education space, those people can just come find us. They

can pay for a product, they can come do a thing." It doesn't matter. But in a business space, you go bold and I've got a captive audience, these people want to be here in the main, right?

Shannon Tipton:

Right.

Simon Tindall:

Yeah.

Simon Gibson:

We're willing to invest in them. Let's find the best, I'm doing bunny ears if you can see, the best people to do that. And so therefore you've always got that kind of competing, I suppose, priorities of, "How'd you find them how'd you find the right ones?" Or do we just give people some money, and trust that they'll go and do the right things in the right way?

Shannon Tipton:

Well, which is, to Simon T's point, bringing... Let's take Uber as an example here. So Uber is investing time resources if it were, to their people to participate in open university, there's going to be an upside to that for Uber.

Simon Tindall:

Absolutely. It's an upside from corporate social responsibility, tick. It's a big upside is about retaining their best employees, their best drivers who actually are massively motivated because either Uber has given them an opportunity to go and change their career or give them a qualification and make doing a degree affordable and feasible, not just for them, but it could be for their spouse, their partner, their son or daughter, that also enables them to do that. And particularly with Uber, if you look at the demographic of those workers, those are 70% of first-generation migrants. So they're highly motivated to get on, get established, and are driving for Uber for maybe on a temporary basis, maybe for a couple of years to help that process. This actually helps them retain those hardest workers.

It makes good sense to do it. It's a valuable thing. And it's not just... Uber is one we're working with. We know in the US there's other schemes like that. But I do see that this piece where we would call learning as a benefit, these sort of programs where you are offering people that ability to either directly educate themselves or to educate someone close to them, starts becoming really, really compelling. It's more compelling than just putting a bit more money into a salary offer that then gets eroded away on taxation or just disappears. This becomes a much more sticky retention factor to retain your best employees.

Simon Gibson:

It's just an interesting... [inaudible 00:54:57] I was just going to say that fires off in my head. That's assuming that the company strategy, anybody evade commerce wants to keep those people or skills on that relevant timeframe, because well, as we're experiencing how fast the companies need to pivot, adapt, change. Again, it's just my point.

Simon Tindall:

But that's an interesting thing. Because you either take one view or the other view. One view is, I know there's going to be change. I haven't got the right people. So I'll get rid of all these people and I'll just go and pay a lot more money to get some new people in. And to be honest, that's going to fail, you know long-term that's going to fail. It either becomes

prohibitively expensive, or basically you lose the whole company culture and ethos. Most companies please tell me, are not that tactically inclined. The beauty of these other ones is to go, "Okay, I may not have the right staff and they may not be doing the right things, but I've got enough potential within my own current workforce to actually adapt and get them to adapt with me and stay with me."

So I retain all that culture, all that knowledge, all that stuff that is actually take people years to build up, but I equally get them to start thinking more creatively, to start helping sort of develop new programs, new products based on technology to take advantage of change. And at the same time, I also retain these employees. So in the long scheme, you know that if you work from a personal point of view, if you probably work 10 or 15 years for the same company, or you change your job every two years, because you're career hopping. You're probably ended up at the end of those 15 years, getting paid more if you have multiple changes.

That doesn't necessarily mean that you've got a better work life qualification or work life balance or anything. So there's a value of that person, that recognition, that someone who's worked 10 years or five years with a company actually holds a huge amount of potential resource for that company to go and utilize. Too often, that's just discarded. As I said, when people retire, where's that knowledge go? Where does that skill go?

Simon Gibson:

Yeah, I suppose and it's more a build about business agility and speed. Again, we're led by research that says to your point earlier on, we're more likely to have seven or eight different career experiences than we are the traditional, "Come work me for 30 years, man, and boy, and you'll retire here." That's a very different conversation with a CFO that says, "This group of people, might only be here for two years, but they're going to accelerate our capability, our skill, our speed, our production, our stuff we sell," and that outweighs the fact that some not all, but some might leave in two years and that's not on bad terms either. Right? So again, this is my point-

Simon Tindall:

No.

Simon Gibson:

... of different thinking, it's okay to go right?

Simon Tindall:

Yeah, it's okay to go and it's okay to come back at some stage as well.

Simon Gibson:

It's a pretty cool journey. So it's just a slightly different take on it.

Simon Tindall:

But I think you look at things like government apprenticeship schemes. Fundamentally, that's a good positive thing. It's just, going back to Shannon, one of your, what are the short-term things we could go and do? Is make that scheme more flexible, make it, so it's not tied down by lots of regulation and restriction. Make it so that it's not just about doing certain degrees in certain apprenticeships, but could be used to generally just raised training standards as a

source. And Levy works, people have accepted that, it's kind of like a tax on corporates. So utilize that Levy far more effectively rather than just have that trickle back to the treasury.

Simon Gibson:

Or spend it.

Simon Tindall:

It's Friday evening, I'm getting political now.

Simon Gibson:

Or just spend it, as we've got two whatever billion sitting in a bank account somewhere.

Simon Tindall:

What's the point of that?

Shannon Tipton:

And what I was looking for... Here we go. I was looking for this statistic that you both had talked about earlier, which was, in regards to general L and D, general training departments, 70% of what is pushed out there is not relevant. And another study, it also said this, I read this earlier this week, I'll put it in the show notes, I can't find the information off the top of my head, but also said that the traditional scope of training, as far as, we're going to put you in a training class and sit for three days, or we're going to send you through a blended design or an eLearning course, or what have you, just is not fitting the bill anymore. Now, it's about supporting a culture of curiosity, a culture of learning and implementing that within your strategy in order to continually move the re-skilling process throughout organizations. Right?

Simon Tindall:

Yeah, it wasn't my stat, but I think there's a need, there's two needs, is just having training courses for the sake of training courses, doesn't mean anything. They've got to be that if people are picking up skills, they can see a direct correlation between that and finding a new job or finding a job. So there's that whole piece around, I think, education institutions, trainers, employers have to do a lot more to bring the piece around employability and jobs to skills. So that we're actually, even at degree level, but even more informally on shorter courses, we're making sure that what they are training and then learning and understanding becomes relevant to employers.

There's always that case of graduates coming out of universities and not being work ready. That's been around for years, it merely needs to be addressed. That, again, is quite a fundamental, simple thing to go and fix. So I think there's an issue around that. And I think there's also that issue that, that creativity you're building that portfolio of kind of learning and understanding, isn't just about doing formal courses and formal training. It's about picking up life experiences or recognizing more importantly, recognizing those life experiences. So if somebody goes then, I don't know, they're not working, they're a mother, but they're connected to their school, kid's school and they're doing PTA organizations, how do you capture or how do you get recognition for the skillsets that he or she has built up by organizing people by running by fundraising and translate that into a working employer language or translate that into giving people credit towards formal qualifications?

And that is some of the things that the OU we're really trying to not just recognize people's previous education experience from other universities or other colleges, we're also trying to

go, "Well, so tell me, if you've been working for the last 10 years and you now coming back to education, we don't necessarily need to teach you things that you already know through your life, through your 10 years' experience." We need to recognize that you're already at that level and then top you up towards getting you to the next set of qualification. They're not necessarily easy to do, but that's the way the education has to sort of become far more relevant to addressing the overall problem of skills and getting people into jobs ultimately.

Simon Gibson:

I'll just had Shannon, I suppose my extension of Simon's point is, to our profession is, do you have to catch everything somebody does in terms of their learning life cycle? We don't, we know we don't. I read stuff, you read stuff, you look at stuff, that doesn't get recorded on a system, on a learning management system. As a professional in our world, I'm quite relaxed about that. What I'm interested in is the behaviour, the mindset, are people willing to learn, grow skill capability?

And then just a really simple takeaway for me is if I went and looked at your company development spend, its learning spend, would I understand where you're going or what you do? Because if I can't, that's quite scary, isn't it? If I looked at where you're spending money on your people and it doesn't really reflect what your business is trying to do or where it's going, I think you've got different questions, probably not.

Shannon Tipton:

Right. I couldn't agree more.

Simon Gibson:

Hard truth. It's just a hard truth.

Shannon Tipton:

Right. It is. It is. If the dollars are not aligning with the overall organizational goal, then why, why are we doing the things we do? Perfect. So now here is where I'd like to get to our rapid-fire line of questioning here. What we like to wrap up with is asking you about what does L and D need to stop, start and accelerate in regards to our topic of today? So I am going to start with Simon G, so Simon G-

Simon Tindall:

It's cool.

Shannon Tipton:

... tell me, what does L and D need to stop doing to help businesses promote the acceleration or the skills economy as it were within their organizations? What do they need to stop doing?

Simon Gibson:

Yeah. Really easy. They just need to stop doing the stuff that's not adding any value to where or what it's going to do. I know it sounds really funny. It sounds really easy. Trust me, I've been in many companies that that's been the hardest conversation I've had. Here's the 50 things we're not going to do, stop it, be brave.

Shannon Tipton:

Be brave. I like that.

Simon Gibson:

Talk to me about it and I'll tell you how to be brave.

Simon Tindall:

I had a similar one, which probably ties into that, which is stop looking for quick fixes. This isn't something that is just going to get fixed by a little bit of investment over the next two years. This is an ongoing, a long-term issue, and we've got to stop. There's some really positive things in the UK, things like National Retraining Schemes that are being talked about, that are being developed, those are positive. Equally at the same time, there's still a lot of duplication of trying to fix point issues, and it's got to be a lot wider than that. It's got to be something that we take a much more coherent, comprehensive lookout.

Shannon Tipton:

Thank you. So Simon T, I'm going to start with you on this one then, which ties into your point, which is what can L and D start doing? Give me something tangible that L and D can say, "All right, I'm going to start doing this today to help build the skills economy within our organization."

Simon Tindall:

Well, we've probably touched on some of these. There's a number of here, things we could do. So for example, do we actually know what our current level of skills is? So we always talk about a skills gap, but it's intriguing, because we don't actually know what the top of that gap is. And we probably don't really know what the current level of skills is. The first, one of those maybe very, very difficult to forecast, portray. The second one of actually saying, "Okay, well, let's look at what skills people have within our organization," not just what level of educational qualification now, but what level of other skills, how can we extract and go, "Well, what leadership skills does that person have, what organizational skills, what career planning?"

Whatever the definition of those core elements that they have, start measuring people to say, "Okay, I'm trying to understand where you are." And then the next obvious piece of that is if you're here, and you're very low on these particular skill sets, how do I get you to the next level? It may not be, how do I get you to top, but how do I just raise overall levels of, even some basic stuff? How do I just raise people's basic skills in digital or basic skills in maths and English? Not just trying to always target those particular problem areas, but say, "How do I raise a whole organization's skills in a particular area?"

Shannon Tipton:

Thank you. Simon G?

Simon Gibson:

I would come with, I suppose a slightly different angle. I'd say, go and find out what your top three business or organization challenges are, make sure you understand them, talk to the people that are affected by them, I don't just mean the people that shout loudest. What are the top three business challenges and work out, probably building on Simon's point, what can you do or what you might already be doing, because that'd be really cool, what can you do that will help alleviate some of that pain? And now some of that could be really short

term. I'd imagine most of it's not going to be, it's going to be kind of medium to long. So just go and find out the top three and underpin what you're doing to support it.

Shannon Tipton:

Last question then, what can L and D do to accelerate? So we talk about understanding maybe who has what skills, getting out there, talking to their people, et cetera. Now, what do they need to do faster? If we're going to, we realize that we've got this issue and it's sitting on us at the year 2020, we need to hit the ground running, not just right now, but continually, to move the needle forward. So Simon T in your opinion, if there was something that we needed to light a fire and say, "You need to accelerate this process, you need to accelerate it now," what would that be in your opinion?

Simon Tindall:

I think the piece is around that, we've talked on it and we've touched on various times, which is around cultural acceptance. It's not something that's going to change overnight, but how do you start getting a learning culture into your area or an improvement culture, building that into your employees, so they start thinking about how do they not only improve themselves, but how do they also improve their job functionality and productivity? So it's about encouraging people to seek out training or to those things. So, there can be funding for that, there can be time off for that. It can be allowances to do that, which actually says, "Look, we recognize that you're worth investing in." That's the kind of change of language that I think a lot of organizations need to adopt in order to start moving in a positive direction and some of these things. Many already have, not all.

Shannon Tipton:

That was a big light bulb moment for me. The part about changing your language, changing the vocabulary around learning to learn as it were, and the acceptance behind that, you just turned on a big giant light bulb above my head. Thank you for that.

Simon Tindall:

I saved it to my last comment.

Shannon Tipton:

Simon G, last comment is yours.

Simon Gibson:

The pressure, right? So I suppose my build and add to that is don't be... I talked about bravery earlier. It's probably easy for me personally to say, "Don't worry, try some stuff." But that's what I'm going to say, we need to be faster, we need to be smarter. And so try some experiments. If you know what the problems are, solutions aren't our problem, solutions are never our issue. Our issue is finding out what the right problem is, right?

Shannon Tipton:

Right.

Simon Gibson:

[crosstalk 01:12:09] if you know what the problems are, go try some stuff, see what you get back, make some noise, to Simon's point, communicate, use the language, find your tribe, try on 10, works on 10, probably work on 100, works on 100, it's going to work on 1000. You can do this stuff really quickly now, and especially in this world, where we're at with these

tools, get social working for you. You don't have to have the answer, get good at curation. Get good at talking to your organization talking to itself. Become good friends with marketing, become buddies with your comms and internal experts.

Shannon Tipton:

Yes, yes, and yes. I've been known to say that you should have IT in one pocket and marketing in the other, because those are the people who want to help you, they're geared to help you. So I love that idea of just accelerating your internal network essentially, but also the experimentation part. And anyone listening, if you listened to our Learn From Failure podcast, those attributes work hand in hand here, don't they? Accepting that, being able to move forward. Well, this was really enlightening and really engaging. So many good points and so many great takeaways for the people who are listening today. So I'll give you one last platform here, Simon T, where can we find more information about Open University? Is there any other resources you would like to point our listeners to?

Simon Tindall:

Well, let's talk about courses. So as I said, we have open learn, which is our portal of free educational courses. Free to anyone, that is just typing open, learn into any standard rather than give a long address, into any Google window or browser of your choice, just type open learn. But equally just, I think it's worth looking at some of the Open University sort of thought pages that are going around. We're doing some work at the moment with job centres around the country.

And when we were just about to release a hub, which is particularly a curation of skills and employability courses, although that's targeted for people in job centres, it's available to anyone. And literally if you type Open University DWP for, Department of Works and Pensions, that will come up and you can go and do those courses. You don't have to be an audience of the job centre to do it, it's open to all.

Shannon Tipton:

Is this global?

Simon Tindall:

It's global it's 24/7. It's in English-

Shannon Tipton:

Tremendous.

Simon Tindall:

... that's the only criteria.

Shannon Tipton:

Okay. Fair enough. Simon G, what would you like our listeners to know? Where can you point them to additional resources for you?

Simon Gibson:

Cool. As I say, I'm always happy to talk. Obviously, hopefully you've got that through this podcast.

Shannon Tipton:

Absolutely.

Simon Gibson:

So you can find me on Twitter, Simon1Gibson, you can find me on LinkedIn. I'm happy to connect and talk further. I said, I wrote an article recently that's generated a lot of interest and I'm always keen on differing views. I'm an advisory board member to the LPI, which is the Learning and Performance Institute, which as a practitioner, I'm passionate about shifting our skill level to help businesses. I think this is a great time, I've got lots of great tools, lots of great content to help our profession. Go and take a look if you haven't. And yeah, if you've got any questions, please shout.

Shannon Tipton:

Well, thank you for that. And I think the article that you're referring to was the one on LinkedIn, which was, If Not Now When, right?

Simon Gibson:

Yes.

Shannon Tipton:

great article, so everyone should find that. And I will also put that in the show notes. So once again, gentlemen, thank you so much for your time, graciously volunteering your time with me this evening. And I look forward to digging more into the resources that you've put up and looking into your website. So thank you once again for being with me.

Simon Gibson:

Thank you.

Simon Tindall:

Thank you for the opportunity. Cheers.

Shannon Tipton:

Cheers.