

Learning Uncut Emergent Series
Harold Jarcho & Krystal Irving
New Structures for L&D Teams
Conversation with Michelle Ockers published on 1 October 2020



About the Emergent Series

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

Michelle Ockers:

Hello it's Michelle. Welcome to what is the last of our guest episodes for our Emergent Series. Shannon and Laura and I will be doing some wrap up episodes where we talk about some of the themes from our 16 guest discussions during the Emergent Series, what struck as the big ideas, the big practical actions to come out of these discussions that will help L&D be more relevant and effective into the future. In this discussion today with Harold Jarcho and Krystal Irving, Harold mentions liberating structures as a set of new approaches to running meetings more effectively including in the virtual world. We're actually going to be using some of these liberating structures for a series of workshops that Shannon, Laura and I are hosting in February and March which we're inviting you – learning professionals, learning teams, learning leaders, to join us in to explore the practical application of the themes, the ideas, the practices and approaches that have been discussed throughout the Emergent Series. This will be done online. It will be done at times that are suitable to people from every time zone. So please watch out for more information on LinkedIn and we'll share more about those in our final wrap up episodes for the Emergent Series.

Michelle Ockers:

Welcome to this episode in the Learning Uncut Emergent series. This is a very special episode in that it is the last episode where we are bringing guests together to explore a theme that's relevant right now for learning and development as we look at how to be really relevant, really effective as we're going through a whole stack of shifts in the world of business during 2020.

Michelle Ockers:

Today's theme or topic that we're going to talk about is around organizational structure and what sort of structures should we be looking at in our learning and development team? Are our traditional structures up to the job that's demanded in the modern era? Are they flexible enough? Are they adaptable enough? Do they serve our organizations and our people well? Or should we be thinking differently around organizational structure and, along with that, around the way we set up roles in learning and development? So we have two guests joining us today. First is Krystal Irving who, according to her LinkedIn profile, is the product owner of the Always Experience Learning squad. Always Learning Experience squad. That's right, is it-

Michelle Ockers:

... Always Learning Experience Squad, Krystal? Which is very different. I've never come across that job title before, Krystal. So can you talk to us just a little about what it is that you do and on your organization, the ANZ Bank?

Krystal Irving:

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Yeah, no worries. It's interesting, nobody knows what I do from my job title. We use Agile practices at ANZ. We call it our New Ways of Working. As a result, we've got job titles that reflect that methodology. So the product owner, essentially, is responsible for directing the work, prioritizing the work, ensuring strategic alignment. The critical difference, though, between a product owner and a traditional head of functioning or something like that is that they don't have direct reports. The squad members don't report to them directly, they report to chapter leads who are often outside of the squad. That's quite a deliberate decision to really ensure psychological safety but also to ensure the product owner takes a bit of a coaching approach to that work. So, yeah, it was a definite shift from the traditional hierarchical command and control style of leadership that we were used to.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. We're going to come back to that whole structure and dig into that a little bit more to get our heads around how it works, and why you're using it, and what benefits it's offering. Our second guest is Harold Jarche from New Brunswick in Canada. Harold focuses on sense-making in networks, communities and teams, and often talks about the fact that work is learning and learning is the work. What does that mean, Harold?

Harold Jarche:

I think it really comes from, I mean, it's a play on a Keats' poem, Ode on a Grecian Urn. "Truth is beauty, beauty is truth. That's all you need to know. That's all there is and all you need to know." But really, it's the moving away from the idea that learning and working are separate things. So you go to school, you do your learning, and now you do your work. And you go on your course, you do your learning, and now you do your work.

Harold Jarche:

That worked well when we had mostly structured organizations, non-distributed organizations, and we didn't face a lot of complex challenges. As more and more of the work that people are doing is complex, is that we have to actually be learning as we're working. It's very much, I think, aligned with Agile. It's also aligned with Cynefin Framework and understanding that in complex environments is that we have to probe, sense, respond. That probing and sensing is the learning. So we basically have to try something out, learn from it and then adjust and keep trying these things out.

Michelle Ockers:

So Harold, before we look at the learning and development domain, a lot of the things you talk about, a lot of the work you do, applies more broadly to work in the modern era. Let's talk about shifts in thinking and approaches to organization, structure and role in recent years. It almost feels a little bit experimental, some of the stuff we hear about. We hear about Teal organizations, Holacracy, and Agile as new models. Although, Agile feels a lot more real. A lot more organizations, as we'll hear about more from Krystal, are using Agile approaches now. Why are we even searching for new models for organizational structure? Why are we playing around with roles? And what changes are you seeing on the ground in organizations broadly?

Harold Jarche:

Yeah. I mean, we're searching for new structures because the old ones don't work. I mean, that's basically where it's at. I've been studying this for a quarter of a century now, pretty well. The shift with the internet and everything that the internet entails, whether it's an Internet of Things, whether it's any of AI, all of this stuff all wrapped in together is that. Now, if we take a look at our... Because right now we're in a society that's dominated by the

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markets, right? I mean, we can see that, right? It's about the economy, things crash, and the market is not dealing with our big problems. The market is doing crap with climate change, right? And this Dennis. The market is really actually not doing a great job with the pandemic. I mean, a lot of that is being done sort of beyond the markets.

Harold Jarche:

The same thing with institutions is that a lot of our institutions were designed in the 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th centuries. If you take a look at our system of governance. I mean, I'm in Canada. You have a bicameral parliamentary system like we do. I mean, in our case, I just voted, we had an election here in New Brunswick, there were five different parties. I mean, there's only two sides of the house, but we have five parties. Three of them are on the left and two are on the right. We're trying to figure this. I mean, everything is sort of fragmenting and becoming fractalized. And so I think that's the big thing.

Harold Jarche:

What's interesting is that, I mean, I saw this happening 25 years ago and was sort of on the edge of that just because of what I happened to be studying and what I was looking at, and it's kind of home and staged now. It, like with the pandemic, is that that's shown the cracks in a lot of the systems, in our education systems, in our medical systems, in our political systems, in the way that we move food around, the way that we treat people, the way that we employ them, all that kind of stuff. So I mean, as I mentioned this before, it's like the blind men and the elephant and that everybody sees a small piece of the complexity. So Teal addresses one thing that's good for certain things. Agile's the same thing. But what we don't have is a holistic way of putting these things together and I think that that's the challenge for the next decade or two.

Michelle Ockers:

So do you think anyone's got this right yet? Do you think anyone's figured out the model? How close have you seen an organization, or an industry, or a society come to actually getting through this fragmentation and creating something that's starting to show the way to reducing these spillover effects and really being fit for the interconnected era that we're living in?

Harold Jarche:

I don't think there's any organization, or company, or country that is really there yet. There are some that are closer. I mean, I worked with Amazon a number of years ago and they're probably the most agile, flexible, dynamic company that I've ever worked for. Decisions are made very quickly. People understand stuff. Information is passed really well. But you take a look at what Amazon is doing to the economy and to society and you say, "Well, maybe that's not really a good thing."

Harold Jarche:

So they're getting certain pieces right, but I don't think that anybody's getting the whole thing right and really, for us to progress as humanity, is that all the pieces have to be working together somehow. There are folks who are looking at that with the idea of the new sphere and new politics and moving beyond nation states. And we're seeing that now with dealing with the pandemic. The researchers, the research community, is doing a great job of cooperating outside of national boundaries. So the Chinese are cooperating with the Canadians and the Americans and the Europeans, right, and just getting things done. So I think there is some positive stuff there.

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Michelle Ockers:

So I did ask you to go big picture and you have definitely given us-

Harold Jarche:

Well, that was big.

Michelle Ockers:

... big picture. Some of that I think will be good to return to, particularly the idea of going beyond nation states, going beyond organizations. But let's bring it back to an organization that's recognized the need to do things differently. Krystal, I saw you nodding. I know we're not sharing the video from this, but I saw you nodding when Harold was talking about fragmentation, which kind of leads into starting to explore what's happening with learning and development at the ANZ Bank. So I think it's around about an 18 month period you've been trying to do something different with organization structure. If the period's different, just set me straight on that. But where were you at the start of the period of time where you looked around and said, "Look, something's got to change here. This isn't working for us," and what triggered that thinking?

Krystal Irving:

So, oh gosh, I may be wrong with these timelines, but I think it was around late 2016, our CEO made the announcement that the Australian business was shifting towards a Agile way of working. So it's a bit of a movement that's happening across the organization and specifically in talent and culture. It was important for us to align ourselves with the way that the rest of the organization, or the bulk of the organization, is operating. I think we're the first large-scale financial services organization, in Australia anyway, to make that shift.

Krystal Irving:

But what's interesting about it is for the learning and development model at ANZ, we're a highly decentralized model. We have a very small team at the center at talent and culture. But then out in all of the divisions in the business units, we have hundreds of learning capability teams. Not all of them, actually, I'm not sure if any of them, are actually using this methodology and I think it's the center where we're using Agile practices. That's been really interesting just in terms of the way that we're working compared to, and the conflict created, working with teams that aren't operating in that way. So it's an interesting situation where we're having to adapt our practices acknowledging that they don't work that way and vice versa, and using different terminology. It's been a really interesting period as we ourselves are learning, making that shift into the Agile way of working.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. Obviously, there was an organizational directional shift which after four years is not fully worked its way through the organization, by the sound of it. That you've kind of got this mix of approaches. Apart from the fact that it was an organizational direction and it was desirable to align with how your customers were working and the language they were using and so on, was there anything else, when you looked at this and you thought... What was the initial reaction? Was it, "Yeah, this makes sense. This will help us address some issues in learning and development" or, "You know what, we're not convinced, but we think we need to try it"? And if you looked at it and said, "This makes sense," what were the issues you thought it would address? How did you think it was going to help you?

Krystal Irving:

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I think the main reason we thought it was going to be helpful is it just enables you to move at pace and really deliver iterative value on the things that matter. So in order to achieve that you need to have really strong strategic alignment right across the function. You need to have really clear agreement on what the priorities are and making sure that you're all focusing on the one thing. It's been a journey. Look, if I compare our first quarter of planning at a functional level for all of T&C when we come together and talk about the work for the next quarter, the first time, everybody had different priorities. It was quite messy.

Krystal Irving:

The most recent quarterly planning, for the first time it felt like things are really clicking into place. We were all talking about the same work. We were all clear about the dependencies right across the function. From a learning and development perspective, the things that we were supporting and focusing on was the right things. When all of the different areas of talent and culture were talking about what their businesses needed, we were working on those things. So it's taken us 18 months to get to that point, but it actually makes work a lot more efficient because you've got a very, very clear North Star that you're all heading to.

Michelle Ockers:

Is it not possible to achieve that same level of focus on the North Star, on the purpose, that same level of strategic alignment, with a more traditional hub-and-spoke kind of structure or a federated model? To what degree was moving Agile necessary to achieve that level of strategic alignment? Or, is this just a case in point where strategic alignment was lacking and it provided an impetus for people to sort that out?

Krystal Irving:

That's a really good question, actually. I think, for me, one of the key differences is the breaking down of hierarchy. So ANZ, like so many organizations, has had a very traditional, hierarchical command and control model, a very large, tall hierarchy. We've really broken that down, and the whole point of Agile is to leave the decision-making with the people who do the work. So instead of having to go up and up and up for key decisions to be made, which can take weeks if not months, the people actually doing the work in the moment get to make those decisions. What that means for leadership is that their primary responsibility is ensuring that those people have enough clarity and context to be able to make the right decisions in the moment. And so they're able to move a lot faster and that's not something that I experienced in the previous model.

Michelle Ockers:

Right, right. So Harold, I know you talk a lot about hierarchy versus wirearchy, that that's a phrase that you often use, wirearchy. Do you want to talk to us a little about the challenges of hierarchy and noting that Agile is one approach that helps break that down and create more fluidity with decisions and getting it to the right level, what's this idea of wirearchy, and how does it help an organization to move at pace?

Harold Jarche:

Yeah. So I mean, a hierarchy, it's still a network. It's just a simple branching network. Start with one at the top, two below, four below, et cetera, et cetera. That's a hierarchy and information flows up and down through those, usually. Sometimes there's an informal organization around it and information can flow around those kinds of things. Hierarchies were invented by the church and the military, right? They've been at it for millennia because they were necessary. One of the challenges with simple hierarchies, though, is knowledge flow and filters. So that if I know something and it has to go up the chain of command, it

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goes through five or six people, it gets filtered, right? And it may not be the same message. We know that and we've tried to work different work-arounds through the years on that.

Harold Jarche:

Wirearchy is called an organizing principle that John Husband developed, almost, it'd be, 20 years ago now, that book. 1999, 2000, I'm not too sure. It's pretty simple, and I like it, and I've written about it a lot because it is a simple starting point. John calls it, "A dynamic flow of power and authority based on information, trust, credibility and a focus on results enabled by interconnected technology and people." Actually, I would say that Krystal probably would say, "That sounds kind of like Agile."

Krystal Irving:

Yeah, I would agree with that.

Harold Jarche:

Yeah. So it's more just, I'm very much into first principles, so if you don't build your house on the right foundation, you can't fix it when there's a problem with the planks. And so I see that as an organizing principle. The other principle that I think is very important is the one that supposedly is the basis of the European Union, and that's subsidiarity. That's the notion that decisions should be made at the lowest level possible where they can, the people who are closest to the problem. Again, kind of related to Agile on that.

Harold Jarche:

So I think, again, it goes back to this whole thing, dealing with complex problems, having to make decisions without all the information there, not able to completely analyze as we would with a waterfall methodology, is that a hierarchy can get in the way. But if you remove the hierarchy, then you also have to do things like increase transparency so that everybody can see what the heck is going on, so you don't get little snake works, skunk works, I should say, going on in the basement.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. So Krystal, let's bring this to life with how a project works in this structure at ANZ Bank. So you've talked to us a little bit about your role as a product owner, the fact you work with squads, squad members who don't report in to you, rather they report to a chapter lead. So there's some new kind of constructs in there. Does it make sense to maybe just pick a project and talk us through, how does that get set up? How does the work get figured out? What's the scope of work here? What are the deliverables? How do you go about forming a team? How does the team work together? So maybe if you could just talk us through an example to bring this to life for us.

Krystal Irving:

Yeah. Well, if I think practically about a learning design, so delivering a particular project, what generally happens is you have different squads with different areas of specialization and a squad that's dedicated to delivering a particular piece of work. So a learning design project, you have a cross-functional squad. So you'll bring people in from the Always Learning Experience squad and those people will be focused on learning design but also the learning technology, how to actually set up the program in the system to enable it to scale.

Krystal Irving:

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But then you'll also bring some [inaudible 00:19:30] from the business. You might bring people in from the business partner tribes who have a really strong understanding of their business's context. You come together and you work through the problem and you break it down into chunks. They're called epics. You break those epics down and you sequence them and then you get each epic and you break it down even more into sprints. So a sprint can be a week, two weeks, three weeks. It depends on how quickly you need to deliver the piece of work. And-

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. So Krystal, I just want to clarify something there. When you talk about this breakdown from epics to sprints, it almost sounds like a project work breakdown structure, if I can equate it to something that people are maybe more familiar with. If you start with this high level of, "Here's the scope of work," and you start decomposing it. Is it a similar idea or is it different in some way?

Krystal Irving:

I think it's similar and different in other ways. So how the structure works is you have what's called a feature, and a feature is time bound. For us, it's something that can be delivered in six months, nine months at a stretch. Then that feature is made up of a series of epics. One epic could be module one design. Epic two could be technology system set up. Module three could be delivery. Then each epic will have a series of user stories. How you describe those user stories is in the context of the customer. So it will say, "As a learner at ANZ, I want to be able to demonstrate this new skill, so that I can..." So it's very much anchored in the perspective of the learner. Then that helps to shape the work. Then you get very clear about, "Well, what is the definition of done for us?" That defines your delivery goals, so what you actually have to deliver to be able to finish and close out that epic.

Krystal Irving:

So the language, people who haven't heard it before just go, "What does all that mean?" It took us a while to get used to it. But also coupled with that is a really strong commitment to Agile rituals and ceremonies. Those ceremonies and rituals are enabled to ensure that the work moves at pace and that you're able to identify blockers very quickly. So every day we have a daily standup. We come together for, it's meant to be 15 minutes, but we've got quite a large squad with a large remit, so we do half an hour. Everybody talks about what they achieved yesterday, what they're going to achieve today and any blockers. As the product owner, it's my job to help remove those blockers if needed. At the end of a sprint, you then do a retrospective where you talk about: what was achieved? How did it go? What could be improved? Then you have sprint planning where you then plan again for the next sprint. We use a three week cadence in our squad, which has been working very well for us for a year.

Michelle Ockers:

That's a really good description. So when you start talking about structure and roles, you're also talking about ways of working, right?

Krystal Irving:

Yes.

Michelle Ockers:

They all kind of come together. So how does decision-making then vary? So you're the product owner. Do you make all the decisions? How is it clarified who's making what

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decision, so that people don't end up falling all over each other or waiting for someone else to make a decision? How does that work?

Krystal Irving:

Yeah, it's definitely been a bit of a storming exercise getting that balance right. So I'm very much about making sure that the people who are doing the work are empowered to make the decisions as much as they practically can. So for me, that's about making sure that people know what they're working on, that they feel accountable for delivering it, that they've got a really clear definition of done and that they have enough context and clarity to be able to make decisions in the moment. Where they engage me is where there's significant risk involved in a decision. I'm the risk owner on behalf of the squad, so they like to make sure I understand what risk is being accepted. Or where there is a decision that needs to be made that does, for whatever reason, need to go up the hierarchy, I'll handle those conversations, just because it's more efficient and faster for me to do so.

Krystal Irving:

So for me, if I've got squad members who are making the wrong decisions, that's a symptom that I haven't given them enough information to be able to make the right decisions. So it's a model that's very much anchored in psychological safety. People do need to feel safe to make decisions and get it wrong and know that they will be supported and be able to learn through that process. I think that's something that we've achieved in our squad. We're quite proud of the fact that when you come into our squad, it doesn't feel like there's a hierarchy, it feels like everybody has equal say and that's something that for me personally is something I've worked really hard to foster and so has everybody else.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. Thanks, Krystal. Harold, as you listen to Krystal talking about how work is now getting done, what were your thoughts, observations, comments?

Harold Jarche:

A couple of things. One is, Krystal has said before, is that not everyone works this way. So I'm interested in the tensions, or the miscommunication, or the silos, or walls. I mean, is it a little bit of nirvana inside an older style organization or not?

Krystal Irving:

Yeah. You do clash against each other and sometimes it can be tempting to use our Agile rituals and our way of working as a bit of a barrier to engaging with us properly. If I use a practical example, it's not uncommon for an area of the business to come to us and say, "We need help working on this item today." And I'll say, "Well, we've just had our quarterly planning. Our work is agreed for the next few sprints. You're going to have to go into the backlog and we will assess your work at the next planning session."

Krystal Irving:

That's not always practical. We're in financial services. We answer to regulators. Sometimes we have to move at pace. And so what that means is you have to be really open to, first of all, understanding where they're coming from, understanding the way that they work, and being prepared to have prioritization conversations and trade-off conversations with your different stakeholders. That can be confronting as well. You'll get one stakeholder who wants one piece of work delivered and the other. Product owners have brought those stakeholders together and said, "Whose work is more important? Let's battle it out. Who gets the

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resources and the priorities?" I haven't personally done that yet, I haven't had to. But I've heard of it being done and imagine it would be quite an interesting conversation.

Harold Jarche:

Priorities are interesting because the other thing I was thinking of, I've worked with a large pharma company a number of years ago. We were working on a project that was promoting cooperation, collaboration and knowledge sharing. It came to a point where people said, "Well, we're not going to share this knowledge because if I share it with someone in a different sector, a different department, that could help them in their annual performance measurement system."

Krystal Irving:

Wow.

Harold Jarche:

And right now we're cutting out, because the company was cutting the bottom 20% every year. So, "If I help you, that's good. That's a good thing to do. But if I help you and you raise higher than I do on the annual performance measurement, I lose my job." Right? So I'm really interested in terms of Agile and performance management or measurement, what you call it, and is there any friction there?

Krystal Irving:

Gosh, there's zero psychological safety in that, isn't there?

Harold Jarche:

Oh, yeah.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. That psychological safety has come up quite a lot in this Emergent series. We talk about it a lot in the L&D world now around being able to take risks, being able to experiment, being able to get things wrong and it's okay to bounce back.

Krystal Irving:

Yep, yeah. I think, just to your point there, Harold, or your question, actually, we're in the middle of evolving our performance system and we're actually moving to a space where we're measuring more on team outcomes than individual outcomes. It's about the what you did and equally the how you did it. So the behavior that you demonstrate and the way that you deliver your work is actually just as important. So that, we're still very early in the journey of delivering that framework. It's just, I think this is year one. We're about to have our first end of year performance conversations in this new frame, so it'll be very interesting to see how it goes. But I think that shift towards team performance outcomes is so different.

Krystal Irving:

The other day I got back from leave and my squad had already proactively set up a session to talk about next financial year's objectives. So they were driving that conversation because as a team, they're held accountable. I wasn't even involved in the conversation. They just said, "No, we're going to do this work," and I said, "Okay. Well, I can't go," because they'd booked it at a time that clashed. I said, "But here's what you need to know. Here's some context and let me know how you go and then we'll have a conversation to close it out." But,

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yeah, it shifts the accountability and the way that they interact and knowledge share, which is amazing.

Harold Jarche:

Well, the team-based evaluation, I mean, this is W. Edwards Deming in the '80s, the 1980s, was saying that you should not get your first annual performance evaluation until you've been at the company for 10 years at least.

Krystal Irving:

Oh, wow.

Harold Jarche:

Then he also said is that none of us work in isolation, so it should be teams that are being managed and departments and the company on that. It's a nice to sort of see that finally evolving. I guess some of the old ways die not very easily, it seems.

Michelle Ockers:

It's so interesting when you start making shifts, organizations, all these things, all these different systems are connected in organizations, right? We're talking about the rewards system, like if you want to start making shifts in organizational structure, or in roles, or in the way people work, you actually have to sit back and look at that bigger system, right, Krystal, to see what else needs to shift to make this successful? Have there been other elements of how the organization works, or any of the people, policies, systems, processes, technology? Has anything else had to change to enable the benefits of the shift you're making to an Agile way of working actually work?

Krystal Irving:

Yeah. Look, technology is a huge enabler of this way of working, a massive enabler. I've gotten to know our technology space quite well in the last 18 months because we own learning technology for the bank, but we're not in the technology division. So we have to partner with them really closely. Making sure that we've got the right Agile tools to enable us to be able to plan, to do so in a transparent way. But most recently with the COVID-19 crisis, actually having the right collaboration tools to be able to see each other and work together, given we're not in the office.

Krystal Irving:

Agile, when it was first rolled out, it was all about teams being together in person and working the problem together every day. We're an organization where all roles flex is a keystone of our employee value proposition and the ability to work from home, to work flexibly in a way that works for you, there was a lot of concern right at the beginning about the tension that that held with the Agile way of working. But COVID-19 has just broken that right apart. It's been really good, really refreshing, I think.

Michelle Ockers:

I was going to ask if COVID-19 had accelerated anything. So it sounds like the answer's yes. Is there anything else that you've been able to really make great strides with because of the environment that COVID created and some of the barriers it dropped to doing things differently?

Krystal Irving:



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Yeah. Actually, I feel guilty about the opportunities that such a horrifying crisis has actually created, but at ANZ, we have Always Learning culture. That's one of our three cultural pillars, which is why we're called the Always Learning Experience squad. Our learning culture, traditional, very traditional like, learning happens in a classroom. You go away, you learn, you come back. Then, as we know, inevitably, nothing changes.

Krystal Irving:

So we've introduced a learning experience platform in the last few years called EdCast and it's been quite slow getting adoption around that platform really humming. Use of virtual learning technology, augmented reality, those sorts of tools just wasn't happening as well as it could be. Well, COVID-19 has completely disrupted that. So now we've seen adoption of our learning experience platform explode. We had over 5,000 active users in August alone, which was massive. The conversation's shifted. People are asking different questions. They're asking for virtual learning tools. They're asking for virtual learning technology licenses, platforms. It's very different to the conversations that we were having with the business before this started. I would say it's accelerated our digital learning strategy by years.

Michelle Ockers:

Harold, you look like you want to add something there.

Harold Jarche:

I can. You know me, I can always say something. But one thing that I've observed with the pandemic and with everyone working virtually by default, where COVID-19 is now the chief technology officer of every company, is I've seen several instances of people who are not in the learning and development branch, department, who are developing learning stuff, learning guides, learning aids. "Oh, this is what I did. Maybe I should share it on the collaboration platform that we have." I think seeing more people do that kind of do it yourself plus and then sharing things. It'd be interesting, though. Krystal, have you seen anything like that and noticed that?

Krystal Irving:

Yeah, yeah. I think it's also just, particularly with the learning experience platform curation, curating and uploading of artifacts is definitely starting to move a lot faster and happen more organically. I think what that's done is it's created a really pressing need for us to provide some really clear principles around what good curation looks like and what great learning content looks and feels like, particularly from an accessibility perspective. When you've got people designing learning content with good intent, but they may not necessarily know how to design for accessibility standards. So one of the things we'll be focusing on in the next quarter is really pulling together learning artifacts to help support people as they start to self-create learning content for their peers.

Harold Jarche:

Yes. So it's almost there's another role, an emerging role in learning and development, is finding the stuff that people are building, designing and sharing, taking that in, curating it, again, making it perhaps compliant, maybe adding resources to it and then sort of pushing that back out across the enterprise, which makes a lot of sense.

Krystal Irving:

Curation is an emerging skill. I think there's not a lot of really, "Here's what best practice curation looks like." One of the problems we've had is people curating learning pathways

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that are weeks long. And we're like, from a learning perspective, "Do we really have time to invest that much time in learning data fundamentals?" So it's those sorts of challenges are starting to pop up. But it's a really good problem to have.

Michelle Ockers:

We have had an episode before, a case study, on Learning Uncut from Westpac about curation and how they've approached curation, so I will share that with the show notes. And I'm aware of some Australian organizations, Telstra springs to mind. At one point they had a team of five people in a learning and development team who were doing nothing but curation. It was kind of like this big catch up play for a period of time to really understand what they already had that aligned with strategic capabilities, both inside and outside of the organization. I'm not sure where that's at, at the moment, but they certainly leaned heavily into building the skill.

Michelle Ockers:

I wanted to ask about roles, Krystal, so do people still have traditional roles? Do you still have instructional designers and facilitators and things we would recognize if we looked at an org chart and looked at roles and labels against people? Do people still have those labels, and if so, have the labels changed at all or what's inside the box with the label on it changed?

Krystal Irving:

Yeah. Well, if you look at the labels that are in my squad, I've got employee journey experts. But within those employee journey experts, there's different types of work that they do. So I've got an employee journey expert whose specialization is communications and change. I've got another employee journey expert whose specialization is instructional design. When projects pop up that are quite strategic projects that require that instructional design expertise, she will go and work on those pop-up squads. I've also got some really good L&D generalists who have a delivery background, design background. We don't have facilitators centrally in our squad. That was a deliberate decision when we created the model. There are, however, facilitators out in the divisional capability teams and they generally have a focus on delivering job ready training.

Michelle Ockers:

So to what degree do you think the labels and the language make a difference? So you've introduced this employee journey... Was it employee journey manager?

Krystal Irving:

Expert.

Michelle Ockers:

Expert, yeah, label. Then underneath it you rattled off some things which kind of sounded like things I would find. There's an instruction designer under one of those expert labels or roles. You've got a change specialist. How does using that term employee journey expert and saying, "You're the employee journey expert," how does that change what gets done, the way the person approaches their role, the skills they need? Does it shift anything or is it just a different label?

Krystal Irving:

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I think it's a different label. What we use at ANZ in the areas that have adopted this way of working is a framework called Types of Work. When you have an individual, there's different types of work that they're capable of doing. So it could be project management, change management, instructional design. Every individual has different types of work that they bring to the table. As a product owner, it's up to me to understand what types of work they bring to the table, what types of work are they working on developing? And making sure that I do assign the right people to the right work. So when you're in the model, it makes sense. But outside, looking in, it can be very hard for people to know what your value proposition is and what services you provide because the job titles are so generic.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, yeah. How do people actually get assigned from squads onto a... Do we call them projects? Is there a different label for a chunk of work?

Krystal Irving:

Yeah, just project, pop-up squads. There's lots of different terminology depending on who you're talking to. So in my squad in particular, I generally will provide an opportunity for people to opt in to work. Sorry, my husband's just walked in. He's delivering breakfast. You're going to have to edit out all the background noise.

Michelle Ockers:

Oh, or we may keep it in as a sign of the times. What do you think?

Harold Jarche:

Yeah, I think we keep it in.

Michelle Ockers:

It'd be a nice touch. Let's do that.

Krystal Irving:

Oh, yes,-

Harold Jarche:

Does he deliver to Canada?

Krystal Irving:

He probably would at this rate, if they let us on a plane.

Harold Jarche:

Yeah.

Krystal Irving:

We would happily come to Canada. I've never felt so trapped in a country.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. So you give people the opt in to a particular project.

Krystal Irving:

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Yeah, yeah. That's what works well for my squad. Others, it can be a collaboration. So the product owner will talk to the chapter lead and say, "Do you think that this person would be a good fit for this work?" Then they'll have a conversation with the individual. I think it really depends on the maturity of the squad and the level of self-awareness around skill and capability and the individuals in that squad. I think in our squad, we have a really good level of self-awareness. We know people will see something and recognize that it's a stretch. That won't necessarily mean that I won't let them opt in to that work, but it will mean that I will potentially acknowledge they may need some more coaching and support through that process.

Michelle Ockers:

So Harold, we've obviously talked a lot about Agile as it's being used with Krystal's team and with ANZ and the learning and development organization there. You will have seen it used elsewhere. What are your thoughts on the pros and cons of Agile as an approach to addressing some of those challenges we spoke about earlier like fragmentation and pace?

Harold Jarche:

Yeah. I think Agile is one approach used appropriately that can sort of advance the bigger picture, change in a workplace. I like what Krystal was talking about. You have this very generic title, right? Was it journey expert?

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. Employee journey expert.

Harold Jarche:

Employee journey expert. But each person has within that a number of skillsets and background experience. If you think about the need for flexibility is that instead of putting a person into a job title, right, bang, okay, "You're the widget and you're going to fill this job position," now we take that person who has multiple facets, skills and experience, give them a generic title, which is probably like human, which would be a good one, which I think changes the mindset too. Is that, it's not like, "Oh, I'm getting an engineer type three coming in." No, I'm getting, "Mary is coming in and, oh, she's in this general area," but I actually have to talk to Mary to understand what her background and experience is.

Harold Jarche:

I think that that's a much better, much more human way because when it comes to knowledge flow, particularly when things are complex, is that we are unlikely to share complex knowledge with people that we don't trust. So we have to find ways of trusting people and knowing them as humans and not just, "Oh, another person from IT. You're one of those kinds of people," type thing. So, yeah. No, I think it's a good start, I mean, in changing the workplace, digital transformation, whatever, social business, whatever terms we want to use. I mean, these are big things because we're dealing with complex human systems.

Harold Jarche:

Again, we talked about the performance measurement system. There's the pay and benefits. I mean, are pay and benefits transparent to everyone in the company? There are companies that do that and there are some real benefits to doing that, to people saying, "Oh, this is how much different folks are being paid." I know that in a lot of companies, that's taboo. But I definitely think that the more transparency we have, the easier it is for us to address any of the issues. I think, Krystal, as you said with the pandemic, is that the pandemic suddenly

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forced us into being explicit about what we're doing, right? Because we're doing it through Zoom, or through the collaboration platform, or something like that. So I think we're all on a path. Actually, we're all heading in the direction of the journey and we're all taking different paths. Hopefully we'll get to the North Star some time.

Michelle Ockers:

Well, hopefully we get there quick enough before these spillover effects that you were talking about, Harold, really derail us as a whole, as a society, as a civilization. There was a 2017 blog post that caught my attention where you talked about many organizations today being nothing more than, "Attractive prisons." What did you mean by that term? And has your view changed at all in the three years since you wrote that blog post?

Harold Jarche:

No, there's the answer. So attractive prisons was a term coined by Dave Gray, who wrote *The Connected Company*. Dave Gray founded Explain, the company in the US. I've met Dave a couple of times. But when he was talking about attractive prisons, it's almost like the problem is that we hire these people, we say, "Okay, you're wonderful. You're great. You're this individual person. Now, as soon as you come into the organization, is that you have to conform, right? But we're going to pay you enough that you can put up with all the things that you have to conform to."

Harold Jarche:

Look, I've been a freelancer for 17 years, so I've been totally corrupted, that I can not work inside an organization anymore. Because as freelancers, and I've worked on many projects, some with lots of people on them, is that we come together, everyone is an individual but we have a common objective, and we sort of hammer out the relationship. "Okay, you're the client lead." "Fine. Okay, that's good. We all agree." That's done, right? That's what I call, these are temporary and also agreed upon hierarchies, which I think like, "Okay, we're all together in here. You're the lead on this one because you're the best or you're the one who's got the time," or something like that. We get the work done. But kind of like doing studio work in the film business, the next job, I might be in charge.

Harold Jarche:

I think that having reorganization built into the organization as opposed to doing it once every five years I think gives a lot of flexibility. That's the flexibility, I think, that we need. Again, treating individuals as individual entities with multiple facets, taking a look at the results of what teams are achieving and not an individual performance measurement system and having flexibility and transparency and system, I think it's the big thing. Because, unfortunately, is that when you create that box called the organization, the more structure you put into it, basically, the more prison walls you're putting into it.

Michelle Ockers:

Does it scale, is my question? So I work in collaboration with others cross-industry and we go through that kind of process you've just talked about, Harold. "Here's the project, here's what we're trying to achieve. Who's got what role?" And if another opportunity comes up, we reconfigure. But then you're talking about having to scale that up for organizations which literally, some organizations, I don't know if there are any in the millions, but there's certainly hundreds of thousands big and... How big is ANZ, Krystal?

Krystal Irving:

About 45,000.



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Michelle Ockers:

About 45,000. And you've-

Harold Jarche:

Yeah, yeah, and I knew that [crosstalk 00:47:30]-

Michelle Ockers:

... explained after four years, people are still working in different ways. How do you scale this kind of flexibility?

Harold Jarche:

You scale it by having a structure that scales. I mean, how do you scale the internet, right? So small pieces, loosely joined, right? And look how big it is and what it does. It's because, of course, there's nobody in charge of the internet. Well, so far. Who knows what's going to happen as it becomes Balkanized over time? Something like Universal Basic Income is that if everybody has the same basic income and then you work together for the extras, right? I mean, that suddenly is that now I don't have to worry about speaking of psychological safety. I have the psychological safety because I have my guaranteed income in the company or the organization and then I can work with other people to add more value and I can share in the results of adding that value.

Harold Jarche:

There's a payments company based in Seattle. Price, I think, is the owner, CEO. He gave everybody a basic income of 70,000 because he said that's what you need to live and if you're going to have a family, if you're going to commute and everything like that. He took the same pay. He was making millions of dollars, right? Again, the psychological safety within that organization is incredible. Then when the pandemic hit, he actually went down to zero for his salary to make sure that he wouldn't have to lay anybody off. The company is growing, against what all the pundits said of this thing, "It's not capitalist. It's not going to work. There's no competition." The company's doing very well. And that, I can send you the link when I find it, if you want to put it into the show notes.

Michelle Ockers:

I've got a stack of things to share in the show notes. So anyone who's listening, take a look at the show notes. I'll put together a stack of the references that have been mentioned and related resources. I feel like we're in such an early stage of this conversation. It's a pity to have to wind it up. But one of the things that Shannon and Laura, who are co-hosting the series with me and I've decided to do, is to continue the conversation into the future in a slightly different way.

Michelle Ockers:

We're going to run a series of workshop events online in February, March, focused on how do we apply the themes that have come out and the ideas that have come out of the Emergent series? And centered around a series of different business challenges and so what? What can we do differently from the way we might have tackled it before? And other ways of taking the insights from the series and applying them and continuing the conversation over the coming year. So it's not the end of a conversation, it's the beginning or the middle of one, depending on where you join us in the conversation.

Michelle Ockers:

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What I'd like to do to take us through to the landing point in the conversation today is to do a quick round of stop, start, accelerate. So I'm going to ask each of you just to run through one thing you would recommend. It can be in the context of structure and roles or more broadly what you see learning and development doing in their work at the moment. What's something that you would suggest that learning and development teams, professionals need to stop, start, and accelerate? We haven't lined up a sequence here, so who would like to have a go first at that?

Harold Jarche:

I could do a stop. I'll start it off.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. We can do it. We work our way through the list in any sequence you guys want.

Harold Jarche:

Sure, okay.

Michelle Ockers:

So off you go, Harold.

Harold Jarche:

Yeah. One thing I think that you have to stop is stop being pushers of content. We live in a ubiquitous surround of content. I don't need to get another e-learning course on how to do whatever the heck it is. We need to stop doing that.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, yeah. Krystal, you're nodding. Would you like to say anything?

Krystal Irving:

I am. And-

Michelle Ockers:

Have you got a stop too?

Krystal Irving:

Yeah. I think it's really stop the status quo, yeah, stop designing content using our traditional known methods. For me, that really leads to what we need to start and that is really start thinking about how we can enable learning in the flow of the work so people can learn iteratively and in the moment, like we do in our home and in our personal lives. It's something that needs to be done really purposefully, I think.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, yep.

Harold Jarche:

Absolutely.

Michelle Ockers:

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Do you have a start to add, Harold?

Harold Jarche:

Yeah, I think a start-

Michelle Ockers:

Or would you like to elaborate on that one? You're free to do that too.

Harold Jarche:

Well, to build upon with Krystal on the start is that we have to start making connections and that really, learning and development should be in the connecting business. Connecting people, connecting ideas together is making those connections that maybe other people don't have time to make. I think that becomes really important. Because more and more I see the shift from learning in courses to learning in communities. And so making those connections from which perhaps even communities may emerge.

Michelle Ockers:

Yep. And how about an accelerate, Harold? Is there anything that we've started to do that you think we need to accelerate?

Harold Jarche:

Make meetings more effective.

Krystal Irving:

Yes.

Harold Jarche:

Seriously-

Krystal Irving:

That would be helpful.

Harold Jarche:

... I've been working with a client on that one and we've taken all the bad of the onsite meetings and we've stuck them into Zoom and they've been horrible.

Michelle Ockers:

Even worse.

Harold Jarche:

Things like they have to be 60 minutes long and one person talks. There's a whole bunch of really good and emerging practices in that. One that I would recommend is just start trying out some of the Liberating Structures. I don't know if you're familiar with the 33 Liberating Structures, which was stolen from other people, but that's beside the point.

Michelle Ockers:

I'll add that to the show notes.

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Harold Jarche:

Okay. But that's like, try to do something, do it different. I mean, in six months of doing more Zoom meetings than I ever thought I would do before, is that what people really like are the breakout rooms.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah.

Harold Jarche:

No one ever came out of a breakout room and said, "Oh, that was too long."

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah.

Harold Jarche:

Everybody comes out of it and says, "Gee, I wish we had another 10 or 15 minutes to talk amongst the three or four of us that we have."

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. And Krystal, an accelerate from you.

Krystal Irving:

Oh, look, I think just based on what I've seen, for me, it's accelerate that breakdown of hierarchy, the transparency and sharing of knowledge and putting the decision-making in the power of the people doing the work. That's really where we're seeing massive gains in productivity and positive outcomes.

Michelle Ockers:

Thank you. It's been such an interesting conversation. Thank you both for joining me for this conversation. There'll be links to your LinkedIn profiles in the show notes and we encourage people to reach out to our guests when we post the episodes. We share them on LinkedIn and also on Twitter. So we encourage people to ask questions, to join in the conversation.

Michelle Ockers:

As I said, we'll actually be using some of those Liberating Structures in the workshops that we're running in February to explore the, "So what?" and the practical application of some of the themes and ideas from this special podcast series. So thank you for that. I think you nudged me in that direction a couple of months ago, Harold. Thank you so much. Thank you for joining me today, Harold and Krystal.

Krystal Irving:

Thank you.

Harold Jarche:

Thanks, Michelle.

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