



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:

Hi, it's Michelle. Thanks for joining Laura, Shannon and I for this discussion of our insights from the Learning Uncut Emergent Series and how the podcast discussions inform actions that L&D can take to be effective now and prepare for the future. The good news is that although the series has ended, the conversation and the quest for actionable insight has not. Just in case you don't listen all the way to the end, I want you to be aware of an opportunity that you have to join Shannon, Laura and I and some of our guests from the podcast series in a summit in February and March in 2021 called the Emerging Stronger Summit. It's an opportunity for Learning and Development professionals to come together to work through issues and identify better solutions to business challenges. If this practical community-based event sounds of interest to you, please see the link in the show notes for where to get more information and express your interest in the Emergent Summit.

I'd like to thank Go1 for their support and acknowledge them a sponsor of the Summit. A single subscription to the Go1 Content Hub will provide you with the largest curated eLearning library from a range of the world's top training providers. Use the [link in the show notes to find out more about Go1](#).

For now, enjoy our conversation and please join us in conversation on LinkedIn to share your insights from the Emergent series. We'd love to stay connected.

Michelle Ockers:

Hello, and welcome to this wrap-up episode of the Learning Uncut Emergent Series. I'm Michelle Ockers, and I have with me today, my two wonderful co-hosts, Shannon Tipton. Welcome Shannon.

Shannon Tipton:

Hello. Hello.

Michelle Ockers:

And Laura Overton. Welcome Laura.

Laura Overton:

Hello. Back together again.

Michelle Ockers:

I know. I know it's exciting. Isn't it? We started this project ... I think we first talked about this project back in May, and it's now October. 2020 has been an incredible year really, hasn't it? Full of challenges, at the same time, full of opportunities. I often sit here and I think, "Here I am in my office, in my home in Brisbane, I've not been many other places this year and I've never felt so connected to a global community of learning and development professionals."

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What's your sense of, just from your personal experience, where you're at this year and how the year's been? Maybe we'll start with you, Shannon.

Shannon Tipton:

I agree with you, Michelle. I was just mentioning to somebody this morning that it just seemed as though the American movie Groundhog Day ... I don't know if you're familiar with that.

Michelle Ockers:

Yep. Yep.

Shannon Tipton:

It felt like Groundhog Day during March, April, May, into June, and then all of a sudden it's November. It's like, how can we move so slow yet so fast concurrently? So the feeling, if you will, around everything that's happened this year has just been very, very strange. And I agree with you too, by the way about the traveling part is I haven't gone anywhere this year, which as you all know is unlike my schedule. And I feel very connected to my network. So it's really interesting what you can do when you can't travel.

Michelle Ockers:

That's true. And Laura, how about yourself? At a personal level, what's this experience been like for you?

Laura Overton:

Just the experience of being involved with you guys on the podcast has been great. And it's given a real sense of focus during the last few months as well. I think that's been really interesting to see how that's gone. And I was really listening to one of the episodes that you had recorded, Michelle with John and Katrina. And the comment that she was making about the fact that we can't get our ticket to fly out to Chicago or Brisbane, but just flying there is like a click away now. And it really has been like that for me.

Laura Overton:

It's just the connections have been phenomenal. And also the opportunity to use the time to reflect. A lot to reflect on, not just in the last number of months, but how the last few months, and making sense almost of the last few decades. So that reflection process has been really interesting for me.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. So our preview episode, the last time the three of us were together on the podcast was the 23rd of June where we discussed, why were we creating Emergent, and what are the big questions we wanted to explore? So we were three months into the pandemic at that point. And Laura, you described where we were at the time as a pivot point. There were important decisions that learning professionals had to make, choices about what to bring from the past into the future, as well as the year progressed, we would be making decisions about our experiences in 2020 and what to take into the future.

Michelle Ockers:

And I think this sums up nicely, the contribution we all aspire to make with Emergent, which is to help inform these choices, to help inform these decisions about what we leave behind and what we take forward into the future across learning and development. And the action-

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oriented focus we wanted to bring to the conversation in its entirety around what actions can learning professionals and teams make to become more useful as we emerge from the pandemic and prepare for the future.

Michelle Ockers:

So late October. It's actually, as we sit here recording this, the last working day in October for me here in Australia. You guys haven't quite entered that day yet in the UK and the U.S. So we're seven months into the pandemic now. Four months further down the track. So how, if at all, do you think the impact on society and organizations has shifted in those four months versus where we were three months into the pandemic when we started our conversations? Laura, it looks like you're ready to talk. You go.

Laura Overton:

I think that it was really interesting at the beginning. There was almost like a knee-jerk reaction. And I think your disruption series really helped with that. How do you respond fast and rapidly to what's going on around? And I think as the time's gone on, there's been more reflection on what is going on. And the fact that that knee-jerk reaction is not necessarily going to sustain learning and development in the long-term future. And that realization I think has been quite tough.

Laura Overton:

And I remember saying to my husband at the beginning of the lockdown process, everyone's together on this when we're all in the pandemic at the same time with the same actions, but I would not like to be a politician anywhere in the world when we start to come out of this. And I feel that that confusion, that complexity, what does this mean for my job? Where do I go from here? What we're seeing in society, I think has also been very much reflected in the learning and development communities we've been supporting as well.

Laura Overton:

So I think that emergency response to emerging stronger, it's a really important call to make right now. And I think probably more vital now than when we started the series.

Michelle Ockers:

You're nodding, Shannon?

Shannon Tipton:

Yeah. I completely agree. What I've been seeing and hearing is that first rush, that first knee-jerk reaction to the pandemic itself, workplace learning specifically, and then there was a pullback about, "Oh, this too will not pass." So now we really need to pull back those reins and reflect more upon, what are we going to do in the future, but also, oh my gosh, what kind of a mess have we created by having this knee-jerk reaction? And now we need to, not only fix the mess that we've created, we need to plan strategically for how we're going to emerge from this in the future. So it's been a push-pull moving forward. And that's what I'm seeing as well.

Michelle Ockers:

I think it's going to last a lot longer than I thought it was going to last when we spoke four months ago. And I studied a lot of history when I was in school. And I remember when the troops went off to war in late 1914, everyone thought they'd be home for Christmas. And that went on for years. One of our guests, Dani Johnson used a fantastic term. She talked about

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COVID as a shockabuku, that was in a discussion with you, Shannon, which is a beautiful word.

Michelle Ockers:

And what she said, it means there's a spiritual swift kick to the head that alters your reality forever. And I think that's what it has been. Initially, we thought, "Well, we've just got to get through this. Here's some things we can do," but what we've now come to realize, and with all these second waves and the numbers continuing to rise around the world in terms of people impacted by the pandemic and how hard the economic impact is hitting people, it's like, "Well, This is going to be around for a while."

Michelle Ockers:

We don't have a vaccination yet. We don't know when we will have a vaccination. So we're all having to adapt, which includes learning and development to some ongoing changes. And to your point around ... Both of you have talked about, we went through this rapid reaction. It was fit for purpose, lots of quick pivots, and we've heard a lot about guests talking about, "Well, overnight, we had tens of thousands of people who suddenly were working from home and we did it. We supported them. They're all there, they're functioning." And now is the time to be more thoughtful.

Michelle Ockers:

And I feel like the honeymoon is over for learning and development. We had a period where everybody accepted that we were all doing things at scale, that we hadn't done before at scale, or for the first time. And there was a level of leeway, I think all round. But my sense now is we should have learned a lot already, and there may not be quite as much tolerance or acceptance from some of our stakeholders for things not being done well. What do you guys think? Is that a reasonable reading of the tea leaves, or do you think there's still lots of tolerance for us to try things and not get them right and lean into that more?

Shannon Tipton:

I think there's both. I think there's a balance of both here, but I do sense that there is an impatience surrounding us where our stakeholders, they want solutions to whatever the problem is, whatever you have determined the problem is. They want a solution, but they want a good solution. And they're looking to us as an industry to not only provide just a stop gap solution, but a good solution. They really are looking to us for that.

Shannon Tipton:

And I think some of the people in the industry are still in the, "Let me provide you a quick solution," rather than a good solution. And the businesses, I get a sense of some of the people that I'm talking to, they're growing less patient for that. And I am, again, hearing the stories of businesses creating workaround solutions. I was just recently consulting with a company about their onboarding program. And I said, "Well, what does L&D have to say about this? What does HR have to say about this?" And the business sponsor said, "Oh, I guess we should have gotten them involved."

Laura Overton:

Ooh, painful. Painful.

Shannon Tipton:

Right?

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Michelle Ockers:

Especially something as obvious as onboarding, right?

Shannon Tipton:

Right. Remote onboarding specifically. So they are, again, circling back around, "If we can't get the good help from L&D that we need, we'll just create our own solution."

Michelle Ockers:

What's your view on that, Laura, around tolerance for things? Perhaps to use Arun Pradhan's words in his episode. Again, this was, I think, one of yours Shannon, where he talked about the idea of scrappiness and a bias to action and being okay to be a bit scrappy. And that his own human centred design methods, he scaled them back because they were just too slow for the era. And that's probably still the case that a lot of the ways we might've worked in the past were a little bit too slow, to your point about impatience, Shannon. So how scrappy can we still be?

Laura Overton:

I don't think it's necessary about being scrappy. I think it's about being responsive and relevant. And that to me sums up what a potentially good solution is. It may not be a hundred percent on the production, but if it's there at the right place and the right time for individuals, and it's the right type of intervention to support the performance issue at hand, then I think that we're on a roll.

Laura Overton:

And I think what's really interesting, you mentioned a minute ago, Michelle, about the honeymoon being over. And immediately, what came into my mind was actually the honeymoon might be over, but maybe the marriage is just about to start. And that to me is quite an interesting concept, because I think in our responsiveness and the speed, suddenly many in learning and development at the beginning of this process were rolling their sleeves up and getting involved in fundamental business change.

Laura Overton:

Fundamental business change processes, including remote working and health and safety. Completely, it revamped in people's minds. And these were becoming business critical issues, and we were right at the heart.

Michelle Ockers:

Well, several of our guests told us they we're part of their organizations' crisis response teams, right?

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Laura Overton:

Yeah. And we've said for so long, give us a seat at the table. Here it is. I know we had one of the guests, and I think it was with you Shannon. Actually, with Barbara. They said, "Let's drag it out." But we didn't have to drag it out. We were being dragged in, in that sense of that moment immediately afterwards. Like we're all in it together. Now, for me, that was a start of potentially a brand-new type of relationship through with the business. A brand new-

Michelle Ockers:

I like what you've done there.

Laura Overton:

... relationship.

Shannon Tipton:

Yes.

Laura Overton:

One that needs work. The business models that we're seeing in industry at the moment are changing all over the place. Whether it's retail or whether it's that medicine or automotive, whatever it is. The core business models in many organizations are having to adjust. That means the processes are having to adjust. The way that they use their talent is having to just. There is never a better time to be there and literally embed with business.

Michelle Ockers:

And we did have a great discussion with Jos Arets and Geraldine Voost who's from Bronkhorst about different options for business models, so that if people haven't listened to that episode and they're curious about, well, what business models might work. And that's not just because it's been informed by the pandemic, but a long body of evidence. And I know we're going to talk about evidence. I know that will come up in our discussion.

Michelle Ockers:

One thing I think it would be really remiss of us to gloss over is the significant impact this has had on some individuals in the learning and development profession. In Australia, I have seen very good people lose their jobs or be furloughed for long periods of time through restructure. But I don't believe Australia has been as hard hit as many other countries. And some of our guests indeed were either on long-term furlough. I'm not sure if any had actually been made redundant. Some had changed jobs.

Michelle Ockers:

So it's such a mixed bag, but I think we do need to acknowledge that not everybody in the profession has experienced the pandemic in the same way. We're all in this together, but we're all going through it in our own way. So I think we just need to acknowledge that. And I think Laura, you raised that when we were talking about preparation for the conversation.

Laura Overton:

Yeah. I think some of the stories that we heard from my guests were deeply personal and deeply moving, and really reflected what was going on. And we need to be so cognizant of that. We can talk about all this opportunity, but it's a very tough time for a lot of people who have faced losing their jobs or having to be part of new teams where they've never even met

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those teams. There were several people, at least three people who had started a new job, but had not even met the teams that they were working with.

Laura Overton:

So there's a lot of personal change and tumult going on in people's minds, I think at the moment. And that's why being part of a community, this global community has been so powerful right now.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. And Shannon, I know you run a community for learning and development professionals, and I've run a number of listening sessions where I've just invited learning and development professionals to join me. It's almost like an anti-webinar. Let's have a real conversation about things that are important to you. What's your take on the value of community right now, Shannon, and how that might be helpful for us, regardless of where we're at personally as learning and development professionals with the impact of the pandemic in our work situation?

Shannon Tipton:

Right. Thank you for that. The support is so important. It's like a support group. We have the support group. We're holding each other up and helping point people in different directions. I get emails and LinkedIn messages on a regular basis of people sharing job opportunities. They're like, "Shannon, I have a job opportunity, I can't take advantage of it. Can you pass it to somebody who can? And there is this interconnectedness that is really helping people move forward and to keep moving forward.

Shannon Tipton:

There's a level of people who just feel or felt dejected, and without purpose, and without that North star that keeps them going every day. And I know that them just being able to have a place to be able to reflect on what they're going through and to share those experiences has helped. And I know it's helped me. We all went through this down period, and I'm so grateful for the people that I'm surrounded by because it made me feel better as I worked through my days and such.

Shannon Tipton:

So I encourage people to find your network, find your people because you're not alone. And I think that's the key messaging that's happening within networks today. It's, how can I help each other? And you're not alone. So those people who are in fortunate positions ... I just got another message just right before we came on from someone who is looking for remote instructional designers, and I'm like, "I'll happily pass that along." And so that's the benefit of being connected to some network.

Michelle Ockers:

And I know we'll pick up on that idea about our network and our community and common reflection, reflecting on things together towards the end of the conversation. Because it's been on our minds as to how we can continue to create conversation and a place for people to come to explore together. So we're just coming out of our introduction at the moment, but I think we've touched on a number of things that we will pick up on and flesh out in the conversation.

Michelle Ockers:

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We set out to answer three questions in Emergent. How do we anchor ourselves in business reality? What are the key concepts and ideas that will help L&D to prepare for the emerging future, and what actions can L&D take to prepare for the future? Now, in addition to our preview episode, we had 17 conversations, 34 guests, top-notch thinkers and practitioners from around the globe. To what extent do you think we've answered these questions around anchoring ourselves in business reality, and what actions we can take forward into the future? [crosstalk 00:20:16].

Michelle Ockers:

We have definitely made a start. I think we've made a good start. I know there were some things in there, and now we're going to talk a little bit more about what have we heard and was there anything memorable? It feels like some parts of the conversation we've been having for many years, right? And I know Laura, with the long body of research that you've done, you look at it and you think, "Well, some of it's not new, and we know this." Maybe this point in time is an opportunity to actually unfreeze and do something with what we already knew. And whether that's the real opportunity here.

Michelle Ockers:

There were a few new perspectives and new angles for me, but what do you think about that idea, Laura, that potentially a lot of what we covered here and what our guests shared was not new, but things that we have a moment in time to do something differently about?

Laura Overton:

Well, I don't need to say it, Michelle. You just said it for me. Shannon, earlier you said about Groundhog Day, and a part of me has been feeling and my reflection in the last few months is that we have been somewhere similar before, because when 9/11 hit, nobody could travel and everyone flooded ... You probably won't even remember. You both are too young. And everyone flooded into online learning and online content, and it all went horribly wrong.

Laura Overton:

And it was at that point that a statistic came out. It said, 60% of these online projects are failing. And that's kick-started me in my own research and say, "Okay, well, what are the 40% doing well? What can they teach us? What does success look like, and what can we learn from that?" And I feel as though we're back to that position again. We have the opportunity to learn from those who have actually been successful in embracing new ways of thinking in the past.

Laura Overton:

And it's concerned me a little bit. Some folks put out some research saying that 59% of us were concerned that our use of learning technology wasn't mature enough. We ran our research program called Towards Maturity for 15 years to address exactly this issue. And I think the concept of being in unprecedented times, it's absolutely right. These times are unprecedented, but the journey towards good, effective learning and innovation, that is not unprecedented.

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Laura Overton:

We're not hacking our way through a jungle, through the unknown. We know how to deliver, Shannon, what you call, good. We know how to do that. I think there's a good opportunity for us to be able to say, "Okay, we can accelerate that journey. We haven't got to go through all those years of research anymore. We're not starting from ground one."

Michelle Ockers:

We've got the burning platform now, right? What's your sense on what's different now, Shannon, to where we might have been in the past with being able to apply this insight around what good looks like?

Shannon Tipton:

What's different now?

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah.

Shannon Tipton:

I think what's different now is the course to action is what's different now. Previously, we might've just been able to, and we have. We wrapped ourselves up in a warm cocoon of training creation, and facilitation. And that's always worked and it feels really comfortable for us, but now that's all been exploded. And so now this course to action is what's different. We do have the tools, but we really haven't used them very often.

Shannon Tipton:

And some of us might even be rusty with using them. But I think that the advantage that we have is a greater realization that this does connect to the business, and should connect to the business more. More and more conversations that I'm having now are starting with the, "Well, what does the business want?" And I was like, "Yay, we're asking that question."

Michelle Ockers:

For the business lanes.

Shannon Tipton:

And that's the good news for me. And I've seen this progression over the course of a few years now slowly making this evolution, but now in particular, I hear more and more of that talk and that cadence of, let's move this forward so that we are really adding value. So that's what I see is the big shift was this fire that's been lit under us, the fire that is 2020 and needing to do something with this information and moving forward with it.

Michelle Ockers:

Go ahead, Laura.

Laura Overton:

I was going to say, it's brutal if you don't do something about it now. It hurts not doing it. And I think a lot of people have been very fragile. It's been quite brittle. When you hold onto the past so tightly, when it's ripped out of your hands, it's quite a brutal situation. And I don't think I've ever seen that level in your face change.

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Shannon Tipton:

Right. And we've known this. We've known this. We saw the signs even before the pandemic. We saw the signs of this movement towards virtual, towards blended, et cetera, et cetera, as it connects to working with the business. And we saw all those signs, we didn't necessarily jump on those signs. And now it's screaming up to the top and being able to take advantage of that. And that's what I saw in the conversations that we had was a continuous realization that we have these tools. Now we need to really make use of them.

Michelle Ockers:

Laura, the 2019 Towards Maturity research report, the transformation journey looked at three key barriers to change in learning and development and to innovation. Two of those, I think, have radically dropped away this year. The first is cultural resistance. So one of the things learning and development teams and leaders were reporting was that business won't engage with me on doing things differently. Well, hello, remote working. Hello, everybody having to figure out how to collaborate virtually, having to lead virtually.

Michelle Ockers:

So there is a hunger, there is a burning need to figure out how to do that, and the barriers of drop because we don't have the classroom. And who knows how long we won't be able to return to the classroom for. So we will be, I think, a lot more ... Hopefully a lot more considered about how the classroom is used and it's no longer the default. So that was the first barrier. The second is the technology barrier.

Michelle Ockers:

Now, I think we're still grappling with that, but we're coming to terms with it. The third was our own capability and mindset. I know we'll spend a little bit of time talking about that, but the other thing I see, apart from a couple of those key barriers changing, because the organizational landscape has shifted because of the events of this year. There's a couple of new things which maybe were bubbling away, but have been really amplified by the pandemic. And one of those is this emphasis on purpose, connection to the organization, a sense of belonging, and humanizing work.

Michelle Ockers:

So there's been a lot of talk about leadership and what forms of leadership have really been most effective this year. And it's not news. It's just that again, the changing landscape has highlighted what really works. And this sense of making us more human and more authentic, breaking down some of the barriers. So I think that's one of the things that's really shifted, along with the very last episode that you hosted, Shannon. It feels like you were the only one who was hosting episodes. We keep talking about your episodes. That's interesting.

Laura Overton:

They were so good. They were so good.

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Michelle Ockers:

They were great. They were great. But the one on the skills economy with the two Simons. The skills economy. Again, that's something we've been having a conversation about for a few years. But because of the acceleration of the shifts in what skills do we need, or organizations needing to move people around because demand for different services shifted so quickly, I think the re-skilling conversation has really amplified.

Michelle Ockers:

So for me, two things that maybe have dropped off and two things I think that have really been heightened that are relevant to our work in terms of business shifts. Any thoughts on either of those from you?

Laura Overton:

I think the re-skilling one is really important. And there was a report that was released last week from the World Economic Forum on The Future of Jobs 2020. And they talk about the double disruption. The industry has faced ... Originally we were all talking about how automation is going to really completely change the mix of what we do in the workplace, and so how the jobs are going to be changed and how new jobs are going to be created.

Laura Overton:

And then latest research that's come out them is saying, about 45% of jobs that were being done by humans will not be done by humans by 2025. Suddenly it seems to be accelerated, and the new types of skills, those human opportunities, for us to work with technology and bring our humanness alongside technology. Those opportunities are going to grow, but organizations just aren't equipped to do that at the moment.

Laura Overton:

So again, it's that incredible opportunity that we have got as learning professionals to see through what that means for organizations. See through what that means for teams, and see through what that means for individuals, and to apply our profession to those business problems. Amazing opportunity for us. And hopefully one that we can help each other to take hold off, because it probably seems big, like, "Oh my God, just give me an order for a course. Just tell me what you want from me," but actually businesses need so much more from us now. And that's exciting. We've just got to roll our sleeves up and get going with it.

Shannon Tipton:

I agree. I saw that report too, although my brain doesn't have the ... I don't have the brain you have the make statistics stick. But I noticed that, and they were talking about that dichotomy that is happening. And we saw that in the conversations too that were happening in the podcast about the pros and cons of technology and how we're going to use this and how it's all going to help us all come together as a connected community.

Shannon Tipton:

And what I found to be interesting was the conversation felt very fluid. That we realize that we're not in this stagnant place. So how do we move with it? For me, there were a lot of action words or fluid words, as I'm putting them in my head. Words like community, and moving forward, and networking, and motivation, and growth mindset. So to me, it was all about this fluidity, and technology is taking us for this ride.

Shannon Tipton:

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We're either going to hop on the train or we're not. And when you talk about up-skilling and re-skilling, another term recently came to surface was about out-skilling. Out-skilling, helping those people who no longer will have a place because of whatever reason is happening within the organizations. So now it's not just re-skilling and up-skilling, it's out-skilling. And so how are we working within that and how are we making these possibilities occur for people?

Shannon Tipton:

And so what I'm seeing is, again when you're thinking about this fluidity, is our jobs have become more nebulous than they've ever been before. They're without boundary. So that makes it hard, doesn't it? It makes it hard for us to grab a hold of what we think our jobs are when it's constantly changing and constantly fluid. So I think that that's some of the challenges that we're coming across right now, but to me, that's exciting. To me that's an exciting thing.

Shannon Tipton:

So now we're not stuck in this paradigm box of instructional design, or my hat on for management or whatever. It's, what is it that the business needs and how can we work within that?

Laura Overton:

And I think what was really interesting about that came up in two of Michelle's podcasts this time. Yes, we've already talked about Jos Arets from Tulser. And the same point was made by Seb Tindall from Vitality. And what they were both saying was that we need to be ... As you get pressured and get out of that box of our business model is one of providing an intervention and a course and extending those services that we provide, having new thinking about business models, new thinking about what is the value-added service that I can provide back into business.

Laura Overton:

And both of them had that mindset of saying, let's not try and fix everything with a course, whether it's a micro-course or a gamified one or a piece of content. There are other things that we can be doing. There's these other business models that will allow us to really add value in that new and fluid world. When you talked about us wanting to have a concrete action, they were both talking about it from the perspective of, let's have some new type of service to offer to business at the moment, the types of service that they need rather than the types of service that we used to provide. So I thought that was a really very concrete example of that.

Michelle Ockers:

And I think part of that is how do we support both organizational agility as well as individual agility both within our organizations. And to your point, Shannon, this idea of out-skilling, for setting people up to be able to learn without us to re-skill to move more fluidly through the economy, recognizing that our responsibility as organizations extends beyond the boundaries of our walls as well. It's interesting the thinking around that.

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Michelle Ockers:

You just mentioned Seb Tindall from Vitality, Laura. One of the things that struck me that he said, which I have heard from some other learning and development professionals was that, not much actually changed for them during the pandemic, because they'd already shifted how they were working. And in the case of Vitality, that was very much to performance support as their primary approach, which suited their organization, which is not to say that performance support is the answer, and that's where everyone needs to go. But we did hear from some other guests that they had done the heavy lifting already.

Michelle Ockers:

And they felt really well prepared to make the adaptations. And it was more a matter of scale and intensity than it was of changing how they worked. Geraldine Voost from Bronkhorst talked about, "The crisis has worked to our advantage because we were already on a path to shifting how we worked, and it allowed us to move more quickly through it." So at one end of the spectrum, you've got the likes of Vitality who were already there. And I think maybe AstraZeneca and Brian Murphy's stories were in a similar ilk, that they were already there and well prepared. They were able to be agile and helped the organization be agile.

Michelle Ockers:

You've got people Geraldine talking about, "Well, we were part of the way there, and this helped us to open the door and walk through it more quickly." But then none of our guests, just because of the kind of people we were reaching out to actually said, "Look, I was like a deer in the headlights and didn't know where to go," but I know there were some people who were in that place. And it was such a massive shift for them, but I think that the guests that we had on showed the shifts that they were already making, that were already underway. And I think shine the light on not just specific tactics, but also that the thinking around making a shift.

Michelle Ockers:

What else do you think we heard from our guests that really stood out about the approaches that have worked and meant they were able to respond, not just quickly, not just with scrambling and urgency, but effectively and with good practice? Who else perhaps stood out, some of the stories that stood out, or what do we take out of why they were well prepared?

Shannon Tipton:

I think a common theme ...

Michelle Ockers:

Go ahead, Shannon.

Shannon Tipton:

I think a common theme that I heard aside from learning from failure, picking yourself up and dusting yourself off was also about being aware of not causing more disruption than what was already happening. So how can we provide a solution that is going to help people and not disrupt the business any more than it's already disrupted? And so I think that some of the people that I was talking to, it was about really adding that additional layer of value. Was, we're going to help you get from point A to point B, but we're going to help you in such way that it doesn't create another layer of confusion or frustration or an angst to the business.

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Shannon Tipton:

And so I thought that was a really smart move by a number of the people that I spoke with. Julian Stodd mentioned of this whole pandemic has made him rethink some of his own models, and about how can some of these models be used to help limit or reduce the disruption to the business. So I thought that that was an astute observation that his business made.

Michelle Ockers:

That was a really interesting, and for me, a little unexpected the way that conversation with Julian Stodd and Rachel Happe went around community. And one of the overall impressions I walked away from listening to that episode was, we have been used to approaching building community as something where we needed to shape the community to facilitate it, to craft it. It felt like what Julian and Rachel were saying is, "Hey, the community is already there. What you need to do is to understand the dynamic, and to amplify what's good about that dynamic already, and less interventionist approach potentially." Was that your take on where that conversation landed, Shannon?

Shannon Tipton:

Yes, absolutely. That's absolutely my take. And it was eye opening for me too. Looking at it from a very ... That was not where I expected the conversation to go at all. That was one of the podcasts that surprised me the most. It was not where I expected the conversation to go, but it was a very important conversation to have, really looking at it from a different point of view and being open to looking at things from a very different point of view. So I really appreciated that conversation.

Michelle Ockers:

Julian always prefaces all of his work. Even the introduction to his book around, much of what you were going to read here is wrong. And I really liked that about him, that he acknowledges that our thinking is continuing to evolve, but then we know that there are things that are ... Even if maybe they shift a little bit over time. What stood out for you, Laura, in terms of what you heard during the podcast series about what prepared those learning teams who were well prepared and able to respond very effectively to the shifts this year? What stood out for you? And I'm more than happy for you to draw on your research background to amplify that as well, but interested to see how the two aligned.

Laura Overton:

Oh, no pressure then. No-

Michelle Ockers:

You carry this stuff around, Laura. Come on. There is no pressure in that.

Laura Overton:

No. I'm smiling right now because what I was thinking about is one of the things that we ask all of our guests is what would you stop, start, and accelerate. So I enjoyed having a bit of fun looking at those different comments and doing some little bit of analysis on them, all of that stuff. But the one I was thinking about as you were speaking Shannon there was, when we ask people, what would you start? What would you accelerate? This concept of looking outside of yourself was really high.

Laura Overton:

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It was probably the second highest recommendation across all of the 34 guests. So what Julian was saying about the role of community in going outside, that was also picked up by Harold Jarche who was talking about that we need to realize that our learning is taking place in these communities and going out to be there, but also looking outside yourself was a theme that was picked up a lot. For example, Barbara Thompson, when we were interviewing her and Shai Desai, was talking about, "What's going on outside of the business? Who else has got the same goal as you? Why don't we work together with them?"

Laura Overton:

I think that when we were talking with Lori and Dave in the business value, we were talking about, how do we work with business on the business KPIs? That was picked up by Kevin as well in the session that you did with Trish on data, Michelle.

Michelle Ockers:

Partnerships came up a lot, and the business context and partnerships within the organization, beyond the organizational boundaries. That we don't have to do it all ourselves. And in fact, we can't do it all ourselves, right?

Laura Overton:

And that was one of the things in the last report that I wrote for Emerald Works and the Towards Maturity team. That concept of the high-performing teams were that much more likely to be looking outside. They were going to be benchmarking. They were drawing on other people's expertise. And that all contributed to building up their capability and their knowledge and their confidence to be able to deliver that business value.

Laura Overton:

So it's interesting for me that that seam of, look beyond yourself. Michelle, you and I often talk about that we, not me approach. Shannon, you talked about growth mindset. That also links into that, is actually, I don't have to be right and prove myself the whole time. This isn't about me proving that I can add value, but me working with others in order to co-create value. And I think that really came through in so many different scenes. I just want all the time to just be able to analyse everything through, but that was just that quick analysis. I really saw that was quite powerful for me.

Michelle Ockers:

It was one of the things that Rachel Hilti and Sarah Lindsell mentioned.

Laura Overton:

Rachel-

Michelle Ockers:

Sorry, Rachel Hutchinson from Hilti, and Sarah Lindsell from PwC mentioned in the episode on courage and confidence as one of our sources of courage and confidence is the people that we surround ourselves with, working effectively with our teams. They also talked about the power of our own professionalism and our own skillset, and making sure we know our stuff, because that gives us strength and confidence to stand up when we need to stand up or to make tough decisions, because we've got a body of knowledge behind us.

Michelle Ockers:

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Another thing that came out a lot was the idea of experimentation and running experiments. That was a really strong thing. And I know we had one episode, which was going to be about learning from failure, but turned out ... I think it was as much about experimentation as it was from failure. And I guess that's one way to lean into going in with a hypothesis. Trish Uhl said something in the episode on data, which I just went, "Oh, that is an incredible perspective." And she said, "What if everything we do in learning and development is a hypothesis? What if we treat every solution we create as a hypothesis? We don't know a hundred percent of it's going to work or not. If we treat it as a hypothesis, how might we approach evaluation and the use of data differently?"

Michelle Ockers:

So, experimentation. And I think you had an interesting insight around the idea of a lab book, Shannon, from, I think it might've been Dani Johnson in the episode on technology.

Shannon Tipton:

Yes, it was. Right. To me, that was such an obvious idea about keeping a lab book. What are you experimenting on? What are the results of that experimentation? What did you do? What worked, what didn't work? And I was like, oh my God, such an obvious idea that if you really tracked your experiments, and whether they be LD related or e-learning or virtual, or whatever. And if you just kept track of that, boy, the flexibility you would have would be expedientially lifted, because you would be able to adapt more quickly. You would be more agile if you just kept track of these things. To me is such a glaringly obvious idea.

Michelle Ockers:

I think it also ... Sorry, Laura. You wanted to say something?

Laura Overton:

I was going to say, glaringly obvious, just as you're saying that Shannon, the top thing that everyone was saying, stop, start doing this, or accelerating this was around business thinking. And just as you were talking about the hypothesis, the experimentation, business leaders are not making decisions right now based on hard facts and a hundred percent proof. Everyone is working through this. Everyone is making the best guess, the most educated guess.

Laura Overton:

We're seeing it in the news all of the time about how do we balance out what the science is saying versus the economics? These balancing, these hypotheses, these experiments are part of business life. And I think what you've just described to me is part of our journey into becoming better business thinkers. That things aren't all black and white. We can eliminate as much risk as possible that is appropriate. But given the world that we're working in, we need to be able to take those risks, but also to be able to measure them up, use the right and appropriate amount of evidence to base our decisions on, but then to act.

Laura Overton:

And it just occurred to me, as you were talking about the lab book, that is business thinking. That is one [inaudible 00:48:14] business thinking that we just do not do in learning and development.

Michelle Ockers:

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When you form a hypothesis from ... I haven't done a lot of science since I left high school. Scientific method. When you form a hypothesis, you're not starting from a void of nothing. When you form a hypothesis, you're drawing on what do we already know, and what does past evidence tell us? So it's not a blind thing to run an experiment, but it allows you to move a little more quickly because you don't put the pressure on yourself to come up with the perfect solution. And it also builds in mind, I think two other things. One is nothing is set and forget. You just don't put something out and then job done, brush your hands, I can walk away.

Michelle Ockers:

And the other thing it encourages is this idea of being lean. And that was a theme that came up early for you as we were having our own little back chat around what's coming up as we were recording episodes, Laura. And a lot of our guests talked about simplification. That start, stop, accelerate question. Leave the stuff behind that's not working. Now is a perfect time to de-clutter your offering, your approaches, and really get much tighter and leaner. Which again, Shannon, connecting dots here, your idea around, what's the least interventionist approach we can take?

Michelle Ockers:

We don't want to disrupt you more than absolutely necessary. So it's this weaving. Laura, do you want to talk a little bit more about that idea of lean? Because I think it was you who first mentioned the L&D minimalist almost as an architect.

Laura Overton:

It certainly has come up time and time again, certainly in the past research work that I've been doing. It says, as organizations that are getting better business results, are constantly reviewing, throwing things out, letting go of things. And I think that was really reflected in the conversations that we've had as well. One of the things that came up to me in an analysis that we did about the stop, start, what was the top, it wasn't about stop taking orders. That was high, but it wasn't the highest. It was around the same as stop prioritizing the past, hanging on to the things that we used to do that worked in the past.

Laura Overton:

Now, not saying, let go of absolutely everything, but we're a new circumstances now so therefore we need to approach it with a clean, uncluttered set of concepts to the business problems rather than trying to force our past successes into our future. And I think that really came up quite a lot in the words that we were doing right across the board. I know Sarah Lindsell from PwC was talking about that as well. And I think Lori was in the business case one as well.

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Laura Overton:

Some interesting examples there, but in one sense, that's what we need to own for ourselves because we know what we're being cluttered up with. And sometimes it might be content, but sometimes it might just be ideas. And we might have been overwhelmed with the sheer volume of things that we've had to learn in this. And this now might be the time to say, "Okay, let's unclutter ourselves." I think we have to own that for ourselves and say, okay, what's getting in the way? And what am I hanging on to just in case it might be useful-

Shannon Tipton:

Right.

Laura Overton:

That piece of technology. Those lists and lists. All of those emails and newsletters that we're subscribed to that we know, just in case, just in case. And I think there's a big fear going on at the moment. It didn't come up as much in the podcast, but talking to other people, there's a fear that we might be missing out on something that will make us stronger. So I think we have to be good to ourselves and clean out some of our own ideas.

Michelle Ockers:

The way the world works at the moment, it's like being at a sushi train. You sit there and something comes past you, and you decide, "Oh, I'm not going to take it off this time. It'll come back. If it's good, the staff will be making more of it, and it will be served up again." It's like, you don't have to save every article you see on the internet because over time, if you're part of a community, you're listening to the conversation, you're seeing what people are writing about, talking about, it'll come back if it's good. You don't need to be so worried about missing out. So I often think to myself, "It's okay, it's just a sushi train. Don't fret if you feel like you'll miss something."

Shannon Tipton:

I love that.

Laura Overton:

I think that's why we're sitting here reflecting on 34 different conversations that we've had. And it's what's surfacing? What are the themes that have ... Each one has been brilliant. Each one, you get something. And each should be listened to because it will be relevant to one person or another. But it's those bigger things that are coming together that you say actually they're probably the ones that are worth taking forward rather than absolutely everything that we've heard. What are those bigger meta ideas that have come through and out this process? And that's part of that lean thinking, I think.

Michelle Ockers:

Every time the three of us have a conversation and can get our heads together, I walk away with some new insights and some new connections. So it's the power of the reflection in the conversation, and reaching out with others to do our thinking. At this point, is there anything you're sitting there and you're running through your head, or just sitting there feeling into what we heard, what our guests told us that you're really curious about as a result of all of these conversations we've had through the Emergent Series? What's aroused your curiosity?

Laura Overton:

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Well, I was enjoying listening to John Stepper and Katrina-

Michelle Ockers:

Working out loud.

Laura Overton:

About working out loud, because sometimes you get a phrase, don't you? It says, everyone's been talking about that. But to really understand the method behind that and to think through what are the implications. This wasn't an idea. This was a practical application of how to do something differently. And I think that our industry doesn't have enough practical solutions to address new problems. Because we talk a lot about different concepts and ideas and evidence and everything, but let's just get on and do this. And the way that Katrina had worked that-

Michelle Ockers:

It's Katharina. Katharina Krentz.

Laura Overton:

Katharina.

Michelle Ockers:

That's okay.

Laura Overton:

Don't worry Katharina. The way that she had worked out that ground, your grass roots approach. You're just trying something new. And I think to me, that's just that type of thing that we need to be surfacing and leaning more, and giving us some examples of what we can experiment with and what kinds of outputs we can get from that. So I thought that was particularly interesting.

Michelle Ockers:

I know at one stage, Shannon, you said something which really piqued my curiosity. It was around, well, what's the anatomy of an experiment? How do we run experiments? So I think for me, there's this opportunity in terms of what's a practical approach to doing that. Almost like experimenting with experiments. If I can get a little bit measure about it. I am really curious about leaning into that space. So that's one of my curiosities is how do you run a good experiment?

Michelle Ockers:

And I'm sure there's people who've answered that, that we can pick up and adapt and try for ourselves, but that's one of the things I'm leaning into at the moment is the idea of experiments and what do they look like.

Shannon Tipton:

Right. And that was a note that I had in regards to, what am I curious about? And to me it was more of a question which was as an industry, are we ready to experiment from a psychological, safety perspective, one, but also just from a humanistic curiosity perspective, two. Are we ready for that? And I think the other part that I was curious about was just throwing it back at whomever is listening to the industry as a whole. Do we want to change?

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Are we ready to change? There are tools out there, and those tools have always been out there.

Shannon Tipton:

Are we now ready? Are we able to see and grab the help that we need to reach out for to make those important changes? And that's what's driving my curiosity is, how will the industry use all of this information to emerge if you will, and to use for good? We want to yank Star Wars into this, "Use it for good instead of evil." That's my area of curiosity is, how will the industry now use this information that we have, and how will they sit with it?

Michelle Ockers:

Leads very nicely into the question around converting insights into action, and what this means for L&D teams and professionals on the ground, Shannon. And the three of us have been reflecting on the conversations we've had as we've just done here in this episode. And one of the things we've identified is what we're calling a set of lenses that will help L&D to decide on a course of action to take. And in particular, looking at the question of, well, if the business challenge comes up, how do we apply these lenses that we've become aware of through the conversations and our reflection around them to create practical, workable, relevant responses to those business challenges?

Michelle Ockers:

And while that's a work in progress, we think it's worth sharing our current thinking on these lenses right now. So perhaps Laura, would you like to outline the lenses?

Laura Overton:

Well, I think the concept of a lens is the concept of how do we look at a particular business problem. And traditionally, we look at that traditional problem through a content lens or a training program lens. But what's come out from our interviews with these 34 individuals, and also from our own experiences is that there seems to be four themes, which together allow us to really focus on what's important. And what's important is business value.

Laura Overton:

We've been touching on this for the whole of the podcast. It's not about how many people engage with us, how many likes have I got? How many shares have I got? What's my usage like in my learning management, in my LXP, and my other platforms? That's not what we're talking. We're talking about real business value, and how do we really get that sharply and focused. And the four lenses that we've really surfaced here is a lens of data.

Laura Overton:

What's the evidence around this? And that's came up several themes, several conversations. It's not just purely learning analytics, but what do we know about the situation that allows us to inform a different perspective, a different lens on the situation? The other is the lens of community. We've already touched on that. How would we approach this problem if we had a wider, broader community in which to solve the problem?

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Laura Overton:

The other lens again we've already touched on as well is, what would we do if we looked at this problem when we brought it into focus through smarter experiments? So we're more informed by data, we've got a wider community, we've got a sharper view on. Let's think about how we might do this differently in order to get better results. And then finally the lens which has hit us all the way through, is that role of technology.

Laura Overton:

And I think it was interesting that John Stepper was talking about technology, it's there to be useful, but it's not the be-all and end-all. It's how we use it to hone in and focus in on that business problem. So that's data, community, experiment, technology. It's a podcast and I'm using my hands to hone in where the camera lens is. To hone in on business value. And so, we just think that sometimes we need to be shaken out of our current thinking and look at things from a different perspective, with different people in order to break through some of the challenges that we're facing.

Michelle Ockers:

And that leads us nicely into talking about something that the three of us are planning together, and really excited about. And we want to create tremendous value through an opportunity for learning and development professionals around the world to come together and be part of a special summit. To be part of a community, highly interactive community event to focus on a series of business challenges, applying these lenses and insights, not just from the Emergent Series, but from their own experience prior to 2020, during 2020 to identify practical actions that can be applied to address business challenges of today.

Michelle Ockers:

And we're calling this the Emergent Summit. Shannon, would you like to let our listeners know a little more about the summit?

Shannon Tipton:

Absolutely. When we were all sitting around and reflecting on what we wanted to do, this was not the plan. We came together-

Michelle Ockers:

It just emerged in fact, right?

Shannon Tipton:

Right. It emerged. We came together and we said, a podcast series to help our fellow L&D professionals come out the other side of 2020 being better, smarter, faster than they were before. And as we went through this, we thought, "Let's help. How can we further help this along and bring this practical action that we're talking about and bringing it to life?" And so subsequently then the summit was born.

Shannon Tipton:

And our ideal was and is to have you together with us, bring your problems, bring your challenges, and let's all work on these problems and challenges using these four lenses that we have discussed. And through this, be able to bring a more sharper focus on your solutions. And bringing those solutions back to your business that are actionable, that cause less disruption, but have come together through this community. And this summit is going to help you do that.

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Shannon Tipton:

And we're very excited to be able to bring this together as an opportunity for all of us to learn and grow together. And that's the goal. Can we do this? And we can do this through this summit. And in the show notes is some additional information about the summit and where you can sign up to be part of the waiting list. So we can send you the information as it's further developed, and you can be part of our early bird announcements and be as excited about this as the three of us are.

Michelle Ockers:

So it's going to run for three weeks, from mid-February 2021 through to the first week of March. There will be six sessions, and we are repeating sessions in a couple of different time zones. So we are looking to create a user-friendly opportunity, no matter where you are around the world to join us for each of these six sessions over that time period, and to be part of the community during that period and for a period beyond that to work on being really practical and getting great outcomes on your business challenges.

Michelle Ockers:

The three of us will be there, of course. We're inviting some of our guests to join us as well. And you, the L&D professionals on the ground grappling with these challenges to share your experience and to support each other to create even better solutions using the lenses and insights from the Emergent Series. So, thank you so much, Shannon, Laura. I know this is not the end. We are well in the middle of a marriage here, I think. An interesting and curious modern marriage of thinking and action.

Michelle Ockers:

I've thoroughly enjoyed sharing the hosting with you. I think it's brought, firstly, reach in terms of a wider range of guests through your own networks. It's brought three different types of thinking, approaches to some of the conversations, and simply a scale that wouldn't have been impossible without the collaboration. And it's just been so enjoyable from my perspective to have two great partners to work with on the Emergent Series, and now on the summit together. Thank you.

Shannon Tipton:

No, thank you. It's been a pleasure all the way.

Laura Overton:

Absolutely.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely.

Laura Overton:

Loved it.

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Shannon Tipton:

Loved it.

Michelle Ockers:

And we look forward to speaking directly with people as part of the lead up to the summit, during the summit, and beyond. Okay, thanks everyone. Oh, and you know who we haven't thanked? Our guests. Amazing.

Laura Overton:

Oh, my God. It's not good.

Michelle Ockers:

How remiss of us. Let's leave on that note with a huge thank you to all of our 34 guests from all around the globe who joined us at a range of different times. It was always interesting to sit down. The first thing we talk about in every conversation is, where are you? We have such rich experience in our profession around the world, and a willingness to share, to talk. And people talk quite frankly around, "Here's stuff that hasn't worked," or "Here's something I did in the past that, wow, I've been embarrassed about that. I can't believe I ever did that, but I've learned along the way."

Michelle Ockers:

So we have such a brilliant community to draw upon. And I'm so appreciative of every single one of my guests who has been part of the series. So thank you to them as well.

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