LEARNING UNCUT EPISODE 10 - DIGITAL CAPABILITIES: ANNE BARTLETT-BRAGG

Karen Moloney: Hi and welcome to another episode of Learning Uncut. I'm Karen Moloney.

Michelle Ockers: And I'm Michelle Ockers.

Karen Moloney: And today we're talking Anne Bartlett-Bragg, managing director of Ripple Effect Group about digital capabilities in the workplace. Anne's currently in Spain as we record this so we're extending a huge podcast welcome to her today. Thank you so much for joining us Anne.

Anne BB: Gracias, muchas gracias for that.

Karen Moloney: To kick us off then, as part of your doctoral research you looked at digital literacies and that research culminated in the development of a digital capabilities framework, a copy of which we're going to put into the show notes but I was interested to read your paper on this because it's certainly busts a lot of commonly held beliefs around what digital literacy and capability encompasses. Could you give us a bit of a background on the research and the structure of the framework?

Anne BB: Yeah, great, it's funny I wasn't actually researching into digital literacies. What I was trying to understand was how people use technologies when they're learning and it became apparent that at this point a lot of people didn't understand the concepts of sharing, learning, and collaborating, and doing what we're loosely calling social learning at the moment and I started to look at this a little bit further and as I did the framework developed out of it and it sort of fell loosely into these three pillars, that I called pillars, information literacy, network literacy and then participatory literacy and digital literacy literature tends to focus on narrow aspects of it. It's not encompassing what we're experiencing at work currently. It's not addressing how people are experiencing the new technologies. A lot of it in organisations, which you've probably experienced yourselves, is focusing on the skills of new technologies. How do I press this button? What's different with my email system?

                     I just read an article yesterday and I was gob smacked, "how to use email better". I thought "Oh God, are we still talking about this?"

Karen Moloney: I think digital's probably hindered us a lot in our progress rather than helped us.

Anne BB: Yes, I think so.

Michelle Ockers: With the digital capabilities framework it's kind of evolved then out of researching a different question in effect and the series of observations that you had around what you were saying about people struggling with sharing, with learning, and using digital as part of learning. With the framework, what are you

hoping, what purpose are you hoping that framework will serve? How do you want to see it used?

Anne BB: I think when I developed it, as you rightly sort of said, it sort of evolved out of why can't people do this? I kind of thought everybody could naturally do these things and that's what I was actually researching is people's experience of it and then it started to become apparent where the challenges lay so I think, for me, when I built out the framework and looked at it, it's more about contributing to organisations as a guidance framework. I don't like competency and I don't like skill training. I want this to be appropriate. In some aspects it'll be more important to be more participatory mindset than to be someone with technical capabilities or building out networks. So there's aspects of it that are more relevant than others and I think also within that there'll be levels of proficiency, perhaps is a better word than capability even, depending on your role so it's a guiding framework that the three pillars are the three key areas that I think everybody needs at least some, general understanding concepts of. Even awareness training is missing, just the awareness of what it means to share. It's like "Why would I share my stuff with somebody else?" Why wouldn't you?

It's interesting, and I think we're at a point now where there's enough maturity in the market place where people have been exposed in both their personal lives and some of their work experience, to a lot of these technologies and people might look at the framework and say "Oh yeah, that's obvious." Well yes, but we're not doing it so it's not obvious.

Michelle Ockers: We're not doing it.

Anne BB: Yeah, so there is something around that so I think, Michelle, it really is some kind of contribution to help people guide what they're doing. Think about what you're doing to people with the technology. Don't impose it upon them. Experience it first. Understand what the impact's going to be on the way they work, the way they learn and how they're going to integrate those technologies into their daily lives in a positive manner.

Michelle Ockers: Yeah, so you've got these three pillars that form the high-level structure of the framework. Do you maybe want to dive into one of them, perhaps one that people wouldn't immediately think of, or might be less familiar, or they might pay less attention to than the others to building digital capabilities?

Anne BB: Just one?

Michelle Ockers: Yeah one, just a little bit for us?

Karen Moloney: Just a taste.

Anne BB: I think, well actually I'd like to dive into all of them but I shan't. I think the one that probably bothered me the most was the network literacy. The lack of

concepts in people's minds so the lack of mental models about what a network is, not because we hadn't studied networks in their official way, you know, what's a weak tie, what's a strong tie, that's not relevant. It's just to understand that a network is based on contributions, that the structure of a network is about connecting others and connecting information within that so if somebody knows something and connect any information with those people, and who knows that, and how do I broaden my network. Some people do it naturally in their personal lives. They had no trouble in the technology aspect of building out a network. Others honestly sat there and looked at it. It's like joining, say, Twitter way back when you joined Twitter and waiting for something to happen. It doesn't and I think that when you see enterprises talking about enterprise social networks they take work. People have to feed them and also you have to build your own identity within that.

The way you self-represent yourself at your profile. How you build relationships and reputation. It's so critical and people just have no ... They think they have no time to do that. They think they, well they don't understand what it is that you do to do that.

Michelle Ockers: Yeah.

Anne BB: I think that's probably one of the surprises particularly when we're used to, now, social networks in our private lives.

Michelle Ockers: So digital is about much more than the technology in this case. The gap is about an area that's actually not about any specific technology, how to use any tool but it's almost more around the context in which you use it and operating in a network.

Anne BB: Totally and I think the whole framework is actually not about the technology. It's really about how people, it's the mindsets and the shift that is going to be required to get to those mindsets and the knowledge and understanding even, I mean now, look at fake news is everywhere. How on earth do we help people figure out what's fake or not and that's going to take a lot of work because there's some very smart ways that you can be bluffed into thinking it's authentic and how many people have got the time to dig into really testing out that information?

Less likely to happen in organisations but there is a behaviour that just goes "Oh, I found it on the network, therefore it's right." No questioning.

Anne BB: It is, exactly.

Karen Moloney: Just going back to those pillars though. I just think probably that was just such a nice explanation of that first one. We'd like to do the other two as well.

Anne BB: Oh, goody.

Karen Moloney:	We like to make our guests happy.
Anne BB:	Well, the first one is the information literacy and that does actually go back to what we just said, the critical thinking but also the ability and Howard Rheingold in Netsmart talked about this and I was using that during my PhD research around attention and how to manage distractions. How to use the technology to filter those distractions and cognitive overload. When we used to do website design we used to look at the design of the information on the page but we're getting pounded with information. How do we manage that overload and I'm sure we all experience it, excuse me, on a regular basis but we have systems that can help us do that and in a workplace that shouldn't be an issue. I shouldn't hear people going "I've got too much of this or that." They should have their filter mechanism set up so I don't know that people know how to do that.
	Data analytics, big data is getting so big now. We've all got to have an understanding about data at a high level and what it means. What is quality data? What are we looking for? How do we want to use it and again, I don't think people even have a clue what that is. They just keep collecting like out of an LMS, things like completions, woo hoo. What does that mean?
Michelle Ockers:	Do you think with something like data analytics it's a bit like being a responsible car owner and knowing enough about how your car works that you can have a conversation with someone who's suggesting they need to do some work on it and know whether that sounds right or not? The same with data analytics, we don't all need to be experts in data analysis but we need to understand the fundamentals of it well enough to be able to know what we're looking at with the piece that's data analysis and judge the quality of it or to know what to ask for with data analysis.
Anne BB:	Yeah, I think that's a really good analogy with the car although these days, Michelle, you know they've got computers in them and you don't get to play in the engines anymore but yeah, you're absolutely right. It's sort of those fundamental underpinning understandings that are needed and if I'm a manager in, say an L&D department, and I need some data to demonstrate the impact that learning is having I need to understand what data is that, that I need to collect, and how am I going to get it, and how am I going to analyse it to present it back to people outside of L&D that makes sense. It's sort of fundamentals and we don't do that anymore. It's like teaching maths. Why bother, you've got a calculator, but you do need some fundamentals.
Michelle Ockers:	Okay, I was going to ask about participatory literacy which I think you've touched on a little bit about people having a mindset around sharing and knowing how to share but maybe you can dig into that a little bit for us and what that set of literacies looks like.
Anne BB:	Yeah, there's a couple of aspects in that, again, that were quite surprising and there's literacy that talks about internal horizons and external horizons and

there's a nice little test if everybody wants to do this at home. If you write an M for Michelle on your forehead, no actually don't write an M. Write an E.

Michelle Ockers: Yes.

Anne BB: Which way does the E go, a capital E? Are you writing so that you can see it in your internal mind, that's what it looks like, you're facing the E, or are you writing so that when I'm looking at you, Michelle, I can see you've got a capital E written on your forehead?

Michelle Ockers: In my case you would be able to see it.

Anne BB: Yes, exactly so that means you're thinking about me who asked you the question and writing it for me as opposed to writing it for you, an internal horizon, so people with an external horizon tend to be more participatory. They're aware of others and what knowledge they have and what interests they might have. They're the people that will send you a link to an article and say "Oh Karen, remember we talked about that about a month ago. I just saw this and thought you might be interested." That's a participatory mindset. You're very much aware of what's going on and that relates to sort of systems thinking as well. What I do and how it impacts the rest of the system, or the organisation, or my colleagues, or my team members. Not everybody has it naturally. It is able to be learned and drawn out through awareness so that's one of the interesting ones.

The other one in the participatory mindset is also that ability to give feedback loops. I was talking to someone a little while back who was saying their behaviour on Facebook, for instance, they never like any of their family's contributions and I said, "Oh yeah, why is that?" She said "Well, I don't need to." I said "Okay." She said "They know I like them." I said "Well, how do they know you've seen the post or what you think about it?" And she pondered that for a moment and then said "Well, does that matter?" I said "Well, have you asked them about that?" She trotted off and she came about a week later and said to me "Oh my God!", you know, it's the epiphany moment. She said "My sister thinks I hate her because I never like her posts her comment on what she's doing." I said "Because she doesn't know if you've seen it. You're showing, you're not demonstrating any interest in somebody else." So feedback loops. Take them into the workplace, feedback loops, someone spends a lot of effort making a contribution and nobody does anything and you sit there in online land going "I'm really lonely. Nobody likes my work. I'm not adding value to the network, to the ecosystem" so looking at how your contributions, even if they're just likes or star ratings or a small comment, "thanks for that Michelle," just makes you ... We all know that feeling and there's a little bit of joke with me and Russ and he wrote "Oh, that was nice." Right and it's not a competition about likes. This is actually about feedback loops and work in progress. That's fantastic. Actually I was working on something similar. Have you seen this work? No, I haven't. Gosh that's really great. Thanks for that Karen. That is part of participatory mindsets as well.

Michelle Ockers: Yeah, that's a really nice reframe that thinking of things like just an acknowledgements through a like or a star or whatever it is on the media you're using the feedback loop.

Anne BB: Yeah, it's just some of them can be very small actions but without them you have no idea what people think of it so you feel bad.

Michelle Ockers: You know what strikes me as you're talking about this set of capabilities is a lot of the thinking, writing, looking ahead around future skills is talking about the increasing importance of soft skills rather than technical skills into the future and it feels like there is a lot of that soft skill flavour. It's not about the technology. It's about all these other things about mindset and softer skills, Anne.

Anne BB: Yeah, I think so and I think we're also, as you sort of touched on, I think we're doing, not a full circle, but we are reverting back to some of the things like how to write and publish things, you know, write publicly. That's quite hard for some people but reflection comes back into it as well, having those information literally but people really need to sit back and question critically, and I don't mean critically in a negative way, to critique something and be able to give meaningful feedback. We don't have time for that so we don't do it but I think it's even more important than we've ever had particularly at the moment. I think things are getting really out of control and it's time that we regain control.

Karen Moloney: Rein it back in.

Anne BB: Rein it back in.

Karen Moloney: Yeah, when we first spoke about doing this podcast my original angle after reading material was to find out who had implemented the framework because we're all about the practical application of stuff here. I wanted to get some tips from you on how to apply it but interestingly there haven't been many, well, there hasn't been much uptake of the framework in organisations which really surprised me. Can you shed some light on why you think that is?

Anne BB: I think it's a really interesting time that we're going through. There is still a lot of interest in digital literacy training and I remember, Karen, we're still talking about people that are still putting people into classrooms and still training people to use software.

Karen Moloney: Software without workflows but don't get me started. That's a whole other episode…

Anne BB: Without workflows, okay, so again, systems thinking there's no bigger picture concept of the impact that the software's going to have on workflows, on the way they work, and the way they share. How are we going to help people work effectively? I think at a management level and higher, there's only an inkling of

understanding coming through of the impact on people. It's more we've hit some productivity stagnation points at the moment. We've got as many fandangled pieces of technology as just about possible. We're starting to introduce AI, artificial intelligence, and use algorithms to crunch things for us and do bits and pieces, automate things, which is lovely. They're probably very efficient at it but we're still not really looking at the key problem which is looking back at the people. It's not about the technology. It's about the people.

I think that's still an awareness level that is there. Some people, and working out loud has been part of it, working on some of those changes and the way people share and do things but there's still a bigger picture so I think it's early days and we almost have to hit another brick wall before we wake up and go "Oh, maybe we've gotta look at what the people are doing."

Karen Moloney: Yeah, which kind of leads into my next question. It's around that. It seems like it's currently sitting in the too hard basket for most organisations, but if we know that looking at a framework like this would be a benefit, a huge benefit to organisations, how can we help get the ball rolling?

Anne BB: I think as L&D guys, again I go back to the L&D as facilitators, as people that understand the concepts behind how people learn, I think the role, and you have the exposure across organisations, the ability to sort of say "Okay, when we're doing this training we need to do this as well." Some of these capabilities need to be embedded in everything that we're doing and we spend a lot of time in classrooms, or we used to because I don't do classrooms anymore, but you spend a lot of time in classrooms trying to get people to participate in activities. We don't worry about how they participate in the workplace, well why not? We don't sit down, you mentioned workflows and understand that because of all these new technologies we can actually change the way we work, shock, horror. Wouldn't that be nice?

Instead of trying to force antiquated ways of working into modern technologies, so until we start to get that and have those epiphany moments around that, I think this is kind of like "Well, we've done digital literacy" or "We taught them how to use that so they should just know."

Karen Moloney: I think that's an interesting point actually. I mean, coming from a background of I kind of got into the world of L&D through IT training around the time that everybody got plonked at a PC with a mouse on their desk and had no idea what to do with it but at that time you had to do Windows literacy training before you were allowed to go and do Excel training, or Word training, and you had to show certificates before you could go to the next level and things. I feel that I still, to this day, use those tools way more efficiently than many people I know because I was actually shown how to use them from the outset. I think there is a misconception that there is, just because it's a tool everything is intuitive and we should all know how to use things especially the Gen Y's, those younger generations, the millennials that we were talking about previously. It's like this. It's on a phone. It's an app so they should all be able to use it.

Anne BB:	Yeah and in all my research there is no evidence that points to the younger generations being more proficient than the older generations, absolutely none. That's just a complete myth buster and in fact I just got Clark Quinn's new book, Millennials, Goldfish & Other Training Misconceptions, and there's some really great debunking things in there that, yes, but why do we keep doing them? Why do we keep training people how to use email? Why do we keep training people on customer service? There's got to be something fundamentally wrong with the system that creates, you're still not emailing properly, sorry, so it's bigger than that. I think one of the things that's coming through right now that's got a really, well I hope impacts Australia as much, is the GDPR, the privacy regulations being brought in by the EU in a couple of weeks and counting. How many people are aware of the impact this is going to have on the way we work, and what data we're collecting on people, what rights you have as individuals? Impact like that look at what just happened with Facebook and data, private data. We all need to just stop for a moment and go "Whoa." We're hurtling really fast into some of these things and the ethics behind them almost probably need another little column actually on ethics actually. The ethics of what we're doing. We need to just stop for a sec, take stock, put on our sensible brains and talk rationally amongst each other how we get this through. This is big. Do I sound scary? It's big. What's Donald say? It's really big.
Michelle Ockers:	It's approaching where you are and stretching in the ways you can as well though, isn't it?
Anne BB:	Yeah.
Michelle Ockers:	You've talked there about the flavour of what I got you saying there was about if you're rolling out technology then embed some of these other capabilities in the learning solutions around that technology but sometimes it's not even about rolling out technology. It's about looking at a business problem or opportunity and looking at how can some of these mindsets be incorporated in a solution so for instance, very briefly, when I was working at Coca Cola Amatil the engineering manager, the national engineering manager said to me "We've got some long, tenured engineers who are about to retire and we need you to develop some training courses based on what they know so we don't lose the knowledge." But what we did instead was set up communities of practice and we ran a four week online webinar based program and the first two weeks were all really around participatory mindset. It was about what is a network? Why would you participate in one? What are some of the benefits? And we set them up rather than in learning spaces and working spaces to start interacting and start experiencing using the technology in their daily life and building networks so it's about thinking differently about how to solve a business problem in a way that gets people doing these things. Does that make sense?

Anne BB:	Totally, I think that's a fabulous example Michelle. I remember when you were doing that and that's exactly the kind of mindset that I think L&D have to bring to the table with their solutions and a point that you made right at the beginning a lot of people try to fix problems. Very few people at the moment are stepping back, again, I keep going back to systems thinking step back and say "Okay, what is the problem" or actually "Is there an opportunity here to reinvent what we're doing?" We're spending so many times fixing problems that is anyone saying "Well actually, is the problem that we're fixing the same problem again?" Rather than looking at the opportunity of doing something differently but I think embedding it in the way we're working, looking at the workflows is probably the best way and leading by example.
	Now, that means L&D has to step up and lead by example and actually model these behaviours themselves, so that's my challenge back to L&D is c'mon guys - pick up your game and do what we should be doing and offering those solutions and demonstrating how this works.
Karen Moloney:	C'mon guys, be brave.
Anne BB:	Absolutely.
Michelle Ockers:	Sometimes that bravery is around having different conversations with people in the business as well so Anne, do you have any tips, you know, if someone from Learning and Development is listening to this podcast and looking at your framework and saying "Yes, I want to start doing something with this but I need to start engaging some of my key stakeholders around this."? Any tips for how to use the framework to support a discussion around developing digital capability with a people lens, for people to have that conversation with business leaders or other key stakeholders in their organisation?
Anne BB:	Yeah, this is a great question Michelle. I think it's ... I think one of our biggest challenges is being able to engage in those conversations. I think we need to look for, there's no single one size fits all. There's no silver bullet as we all know in L&D but there's being able to identify where there's an opportunity, and your example back with Coca Cola was great. There's an opportunity here to actually think differently about the problem, so it's sitting down with somebody who comes to you and says "I need email training" and sitting down saying "Why do you think you need email training?" Let's talk about what the problem is. Gosh, back in the old days L&D used to do analysis and needs analysis, and understanding the whole system, and I think those conversations have to come back again.
	I think the reactionary stuff, just train them on how to do something, as I said many times before, training is for dogs and babies. We're adults now and we need a whole step more to cope with what's going on and how we're going to manage through this next decade or so of artificial intelligence, of intelligent systems, of robots, of all this sort of stuff. There's a whole stack more out there.

	Blockchain now, how many people understand the concept behind blockchain? How many people understand these-?
Karen Moloney:	I've tried.
Anne BB:	Yeah, exactly, you try.
Karen Moloney:	I keep trying. It's, yeah, hard.
Anne BB:	Keep trying. Don't give up.
	So I think there are conversations that we just have to sit down and maybe it's getting a group together and brainstorming. What are the bigger problems? Marketing's got a problem with this. Production's got a problem here. Well, maybe actually it's the same problem and it's the workflow, the whole system that needs to be re-engineered, re-thought about, reframed even.
Karen Moloney:	Thank you, we did speak about me putting together a small resource that people can download we'll talk about after here but to give you some, give people some sort of questions and some triggers maybe to takeaway just to start identifying those opportunities to start having the conversation because we're by no means saying "Oh, here's the framework, go and implement that." We understand that we're a few steps behind that at the moment so there's a few resources of Anne's that we're going to add to the show notes including obviously a copy of that framework and her article and a couple other bits and pieces as well.
Anne BB:	And, do you know what I did for you Michelle, and Karen?
Karen Moloney:	What did you do?
Anne BB:	One of the things I've been looking at it is self-assessments and knowing that people don't self-assess very well but at least it's a starting point and also understanding proficiency that I talked about before so forget proficiency. For each of the three pillars I put together a couple of questions to ask people to rate themselves how proficient they are and it's things like how do you manage distractions online? What's your ability? How proficient are you at that? How do you know how to manage cognitive overload? How do you visually represent your network? Do you know how many people can't draw what their network looks like? There's a challenge for you? How do you use your networks? Think about that yourself and develop your own proficiencies around that so I put some little questions together and you can come out with an answer.
Karen Moloney:	That would be great, thank you so much.
Michelle Ockers:	Are you expecting us to report back Anne?

Anne BB:	I think not.
Michelle Ockers:	Are you offering remedial support?!
Anne BB:	I could offer to do remedial support on that, absolutely, but no. I think it's there as a little bit of a trigger for your own actions.
Karen Moloney:	Well, on the page where we're going to put all of these, so every podcast will have its own page and there'll be comments on the bottom so if anybody listening is, there and wants to contribute to that discussion then it'll be on the page on our website.
Anne BB:	Fantastic and I'll be there if you need me.
Karen Moloney:	Thank you, so finally just before we wrap up could you share with us, Anne, the biggest thing that you do for your own professional development?
Anne BB:	I have been spending some time, it's a great question because I've always read and consumed a lot of information.
Karen Moloney:	I can imagine.
Anne BB:	I've been challenging myself recently to read things that I know I'm not going to agree with, to force myself to understand the other perspectives because when you are having these difficult discussions I need to understand more deeply why there's resistance and I challenge myself with things like that, blockchain, cryptocurrencies. I'm challenging myself to actually get a deep understanding of it. Even when I'm not technical enough to build a blockchain, what is that? But it's the opposing opinions I'm really trying to understand, to help us be able to work through them. I'm not saying that I've got the right opinion. They might think they're right but why is that? So, I think that's one of the things I'm really challenging myself is stop reinforcing and reading only people who agree with me. Look at others and see what the other perspectives are so it's very broad range and definitely outside L&D. Look at all the research that's happening across other areas to make sure that you're right across the latest thinking around things.
Karen Moloney:	That seems to be a bit of a trend actually when we're talking to people. There's lots more getting outside of L&D which is, I think, where a lot of the innovation is coming from and people that are doing good stuff in their organisations so it's something to think about.
Anne BB:	Definitely.
Karen Moloney:	If anybody wants to get in touch with you to find out more about the research, digital capabilities, I can't even say it, digital capabilities, the framework,

etcetera, what's the best way for them to do that? Would that be LinkedIn or is there another channel that you prefer?

Anne BB: LinkedIn is great. That's the great starting point, email me but of course remember that email is such a painful tool.

Karen Moloney: Apparently nobody's using it properly.

Anne BB: No one's using it properly but it's still a great way to communicate with external contact.

Karen Moloney: We're doing it okay. All right, we'll put a link to your profile on the bottom so that's all we have for now so thank you so much, Anne, for sharing your work and insights with us and really appreciate you taking the time out to be with us today all the way from sunny Spain.

Anne BB: It's not so sunny. Thanks Karen and Michelle. I've had a really great time as well and hasta la vista.

Michelle Ockers: Adios.

Karen Moloney: Adios.

Anne BB: Adios.