LEARNING UNCUT EPISODE 18:
DEVELOPING CONTINUOUS LEARNING: THE MAKING OF LEARN2LEARN – ARUN PRADHAN

Michelle Ockers: Welcome to another episode of Learning Uncut. I'm Michelle Ockers.

Karen Moloney: And I'm Karen Moloney.

Michelle Ockers: And today we've to the pleasure of talking to Arun Pradhan about Learn to Learn, an app he developed to help build a culture of continuous learning in organizations. Arun has the distinction of being named the Learning and Development Person of the Year for 2017 by the Australia Institute of Training and Development. Welcome, Arun.

Arun Pradhan: Thank you very much for having me here.

Michelle Ockers: We're delighted that you're our guest today. The Learn to Learn app is something that you developed for us by anyone anywhere. It wasn't a project within a specific organisation, so it is available for anyone to use.

Arun Pradhan: Yep.

Michelle Ockers: What is the need you were trying to address and how did you notice or become aware that this was a need?

Arun Pradhan: Definitely through my work doing, creating performance solutions for organisations and creating learning solutions as well. And just seeing the state of change. It was my experience that change just seemed to be happening at a more rapid rate. There was more expectations that people had to adapt quickly to new situations and this whole competitive edge of, for example, around customer service, people needed to keep on innovating and creating change to get that market edge.

And then certainly my research around the fourth industrial revolution, the idea that we're living in a period of accelerated change, it was very indicated. So I saw real need there. This idea that people were going to just be trained once at school and university and then be in a predictable career, I just felt like that's gone. So it seemed to be real need there to support people to help reinvent themselves constantly.

Michelle Ockers: Yeah. Absolutely. And I think a lot of our guests have talked to us about wanting to let go of control of how people learn quite a lot more, but perhaps not having the wherewithal or the tools to help support people to develop continuous learning skills. So it kind of plays nicely into some of the other conversations we've had here on the podcast.

Arun Pradhan: That's good for me to hear.

Michelle Ockers:	So there's three aspects of developing Learn to Learn that we'd like to talk to you about today. Content, the format, and also how you worked as you developed the app. So let's start with content if that's fine with you.
Arun Pradhan:	Yes.
Michelle Ockers:	So you decided to use 70:20:10 to structure the content, although with different labels or titles. Why did you decide to use this structure? What titles have you used and what kind of content is in each section?
Arun Pradhan:	The structure of the content is based around initial learning basics which cover all sorts of basic principles around focus and attention and mindset, and there's a section I really like there on learning smart, which puts learning in perspective. Because this is a work context, it's all about how can you augment yourself rather than just learn. So performance support and so on. So it tries to get learning in a bit of a context there that you don't have to always learn stuff. Sometimes there are other hacks that you can do to get stuff done.

But then the guts ... and then there's a piece on memory which, around memory hacks and so on. But the guts of it really was how do you learn more from people, how do you learn more from investigation, and how do you learn more from your experience? Which is, I called investigation rather than formal learning because people have still got to have a sense of agency in that. And it was really trying to give people a bit of a holistic view of learning. I think L&D will often use learning as a term for training, as you know, but even in broader society, I think, people are used to schooling being trained. I just tried to broaden that out. |
| Michelle Ockers: | So what kind of content? I mean, if we break that down. You've got your learning basics which you've talked to us a little bit about. Then you've got people. What kind of content have you included under people? |
| Arun Pradhan: | So for people, for example, there's a lot around how you collaborate and how you actually build up a network more consciously, and so there's different ripples to that network. It's like how you actually work in your team, how you actually augment yourself with coaches and mentors. And then how you actually develop a broader network. And definitely that sort of principle around working out loud or sharing your work is a big part of it.

There's two aspects to it, I guess. One is how you collaborate more and how you actually work out loud and actually develop those relationships. This is a crucial one for me because I often use the term that teams are the new courses. I think as things develop, people will start choosing what project team they go on based on the project, how challenging the project is, whether it moves them closer to the skills they want, but also who else is on that team. Because that's where most of your learning really comes from, that experiential learning with other people, so I think this selection of teams is going to be a crucial thing. I |

don't know how far we'll go but the gig economy impact will start shaking things up more. To be able to be skilled, to get the most from those teams and those team experiences, is a crucial part of it, I think.

Michelle Ockers: Okay. And that leads into the experience section. Is there anything else you want to say about the experience?

Arun Pradhan: In terms of experience, I think for me it's largely about being conscious about deliberate practice and as Ericsson's work around deliberate practice and not just doing stuff and turning up. But it's actually really focusing in on your gaps. I'm actually re-reading Peak at the moment and it's just, I love the stories in Peak. If you've read Malcolm Gladwell's stuff around ten thousand hours, you've really got to focus on reading Anders Ericsson on his book Peak.

But beyond that, methods of reflection which I think are also very ignored, just because of people's busyness. I've got a few different models. I've got a simple model which I use there and then a more complex model as well around reflection. And then obviously, it leads into the whole aspect of learning from failure, which is a whole topic as well. And how you prototype and how you maximize return on failure.

There's a lot in it really.

Michelle Ockers: Yeah, there is a lot in it. The investigation section. Obviously at the heart of that is courses and some of the more traditional approaches that we use, too, in organizational learning. Beyond courses, have you covered anything else in that investigation section?

Arun Pradhan: Yeah, I don't even call out courses that explicitly. It's more about saying, when you need information, when you need to develop a skill, when you need to learn something, how are you going to structure your approach? So some of the models I reference are the Feynman Technique which is a really great simple one in terms of learning complex concepts, which I can explain if you want me to go there.

Or there's another model which I've developed myself which is like, it's captured in a diagram, which is really about trying to identify you biases and trying to have a filtering process. It's a decision making process, really. And that's a big part of this. I call it Learn to Learn because that's what people understand in the market, I think, but really I think it's actually more about learning to think and learning to think more effectively. And developing those more creative problem solving skills.

As so that investigation, there is stuff on how to search the web more effectively, but the crux of it really is how to actually develop critical thinking skills.

Michelle Ockers:	So it's not really the equivalent of the 10 in the 70/20/10 framework.
Arun Pradhan:	No. I use that as a high level structure. Like buckets, but there's a lot more in it really.
Michelle Ockers:	Yeah. Absolutely. And we can put a link in the show notes to the Feynman Technique was it?
Arun Pradhan:	Feynman. F-E-Y-N-M-A-N. He was a physicist who had lots of great ideas, and the Feynman technique was one of my favorites. It's basically, the very quick principle is that, when you're listening to a concept, that you're actually imagining this eight-year-old child, and you're imagining how you're going to explain it to that eight-year-old child. And there are bits you can't explain to that eight-year-old child, that's what you do the follow up investigation on. I go a step further. My eight-year-old child that I talk about is Myrtle. I've actually got a picture ... it's a made up person. But I do the Myrtle test in my head. Can I explain this to Myrtle? Every time I try to pick up a concept.
Michelle Ockers:	You'll have us all walking around with imaginary friends now.
Arun Pradhan:	Yeah. It's working for me.
Michelle Ockers:	So you've talked a little bit about mental models and you use a number of mental models throughout the approach in the app. What is a mental model and what role do mental models play in learning?
Arun Pradhan:	That's probably one of the biggest emphases through the app in terms of what I really encourage people to get their heads around. Mental models was developed ... Peter Senge mentioned it in The Fifth Discipline, but the reference I really use is Charles Munger. Charles Munger, who's one of the richest people in the world, he's Warren Buffett's right hand person, and they really talk about developing this lattice work of mental models. Because the world is so complicated, we use these mental models, these shortcuts ... you might call them heuristics, you might call them rules of thumb, you might call them concepts or even models like the GROW model is one, the desktop interface on a computer is a mental model. It's a way that we understand. The computer was actually much more complicated than desktop. It's basically like a model that we use in our head which allows us to make sense of either the world or ourselves and allows us to take action. Because our brains just can't handle all the complexities, so it's just like a shortcut, really. And for me, that is a crucial starting point. Rather than just putting information in our heads, it's consciously developing that list of mental models in our heads and testing them out. Mixing them up. So stealing one from marketing and throwing that in HR. And just mixing up those sorts of things as well to try to drive innovation.

Michelle Ockers:	Yeah. And we are starting to see a bit more of that in learning and development, borrowing models from elsewhere and applying them to our context.
Arun Pradhan:	Totally.
Michelle Ockers:	Thank you for that overview of content. I think we'll move on to our form now. Karen.
Karen Moloney:	Yeah, okay. Arun, so you talked us through the content and what was contained in the app, but could you just talk through how you organised and delivered the content in the app and why you chose that approach?
Arun Pradhan:	I started from a place of thinking about myself and my needs. And I'm just a very impatient person. I've got a lot of stuff on. I'm feeling overwhelmed, I mean, who isn't? Who hasn't got too much on their to do list? Who isn't' just so busy? And personally, even though I've designed some of it, I hate these big gamification kind of roll outs and the stuff with the big narrative. I just want the stuff I need to get the job done and then I'll go watch bloody Game of Thrones or play a game in my own time. I don't want that as part of, integrated into my, like packaged in my learning. I just want efficiency when it comes to learning.

So, that's what I went with. I went with efficiency, so they're broken up into learning bites. Every learning bite, even at the top, again I thought, what would I want? I want to know if I want to even go here and so there's a spoiler alert at the top of every learning bite and the spoiler alert has two things. It has the WIIFM, so what's in it for me, like why should you bother. I think it actually says, 'why bother?'. And then the other one is the key actionable takeaways, and there's just three points. So if all you want to do on each learning bite is just look at the why bother and just take the three actionable takeaways, if you just take one of those actions and actually implement that into your work, you'll be going pretty well.

Theoretically, you could go through the whole experience in, like, like there's 19 learning bites, so you could do that in about 10 seconds per learning bite. As long as you're taking action, that's what you could do as a minimum. Then, if you want to go further, there's a video, which is a three or four minute animation, to explain concepts. And there's an infographic article. The infographic article gets into a bit of detail. You could read that for about ... you could scan it in a few minutes or you could go for about 10 minutes. That's the key content concepts.

I went with those forms because, to me, concepts, you communicate them through visual representations. So infographics is really powerful. And then there's more, so you can actually go search other sources and books and stuff. And the key thing for me is this list of actions, recommended actions. And you can just keep adding those recommended actions to your personalised to do list. |

It's all very action focused. It's all very, this is what it means for you, this is how you're going to turn this into something in your work.

Karen Moloney: That's what we like here is that little bit of practicality. It's not just here's what you should be doing, but here's how you do it and this is how I'm going to help you do it.

Arun Pradhan: There's one learning bite which is a bit more academic, which is about understanding your brain and how memory works and I almost cut it, but just from user feedback I got, people wanted to know that. And it does help conceptualize the memory hacks later. So I've got in part of the spoiler alert, I've got, like skip this one if you are totally action orientated. I'm being very up front. I try to just minimize it in one learning bite as well, the more abstract one.

Karen Moloney: I think people really appreciate that because it's not just about, then it becomes something that people can actually use and see value in as opposed to just some content that you want to shove into an app and give to people.

Arun Pradhan: Exactly. I hope so. That's the feedback I've got so far, is that people are enjoying the way it's very practically and action focused.

Karen Moloney: Awesome. Building an app isn't something you've done before personally. How did you go about planning out that project and working out what needed to be done?

Arun Pradhan: First I started ... so my initial business plan was to focus B2C (*Business to Consumer*). So I actually mapped it out. I actually mapped out what my ... I used a model called a business model canvas, which is a design thinking kind of tool around startups and so on. Which is a one page plan. You can google it, business model canvas. I did a couple of versions of that to try to get my plan together. I looked at it the other day and it was interesting to see how much it's changed.

Karen Moloney: They're quite live, those things, aren't they? You think that's how it's going to be and then it just shifts from week to week to month.

Arun Pradhan: The fact that my original model was B2C and now my focus is enterprise, because of feedback I've had and just the way it turned. The content's similar but the delivery's different. But what I did is I charted out different areas. So I had technical requirements, I had content, I had starting a business, I had marketing. They were the four key ones, and I think there was a couple of other smaller issues. I rated myself, I ranked myself on those different areas. And tried to identify my skills gap and then I identified what resources and what people I could access to supplement myself for each one. Mainly the people. I actually identified two to three people in my network or people I'd worked with before who I felt could help me overcome those challenges as well.

Karen Moloney:	Learn to Learn, so that's your own personal project, but to go out the people there and I did find your skills gaps, you involved a lot of the L&D community in the actual development of the app. So what was behind you decision to do this and what approach did you take?
Arun Pradhan:	It was interesting because the app itself was developed in ways that I'm recommending people work. One of those as I said was about collaborating and working out loud. Any new concept I had, I shared online, on LinkedIn and I basically would say ... you've commented on a few, too. There were so many people. It was so generous. People were, like, every time I posted a model, I probably have at least 30 comments and one of them got about 100 comments. From people all around the world giving me feedback. Then that just helped me get it, improve it each time. It was a very transparent process.
Arun Pradhan:	I crowd funded this project in the beginning of it. People gave me money, but actually the more valuable thing was, money was great, don't get me wrong, but the valuable thing was the crowd sourcing of ideas. Being actually able to put up a concept and say, what do you think. This is what I've got. Or I've got these two versions. I did that throughout the process and it helped, I think, me improve the produce and helped me keep going. Because it was very isolating work. And the third thing was, it's really created a bit of community around it, too. People I think feel some level of ownership around it. That they contributed, and they did. I thanked a lot of people in the About section of it, too, to acknowledge that.
Karen Moloney:	I think it's a very interesting point actually because I think, particularly if you're talking about something is essentially a commercial idea ... people are sort of wired that if they work out loud and if they share those ideas that somebody will steal the idea and run away with it. And I think that's probably ... we've kind of moved off from that now. I think people are more happy to contribute something and be part of a bigger thing than everybody trying to do their own individual learn apps.
Arun Pradhan:	I do think there's an element of that and there's an element. One of the criteria I used, and this was based on one of my mentors in the business world, he was making the point that you don't want to create something that one of those big multinationals can just add a button on their system and then wipe you out. It's got to pass the button test. One of the things I went to was, okay, this content, theoretically, other companies can add this to their content libraries. So I went, what have I got as an individual. It's almost that attention to detail. Its' that artisan approach. I felt like that is not scalable, that artisan approach. That's why the infographics are so bloody labour intensive. I can't imagine like a LinkedIn Learning paying that much for one course. They wouldn't do it.

That was my point of difference, so when I had my point of difference and I felt comfortable about that point of difference, I was more able to share. I realised that I wasn't just handing this on a silver platter to another big company that's just going to take it. |

Karen Moloney:	To take it and that's fair enough. But you're right, I think the sense of ownership that ... it was really lovely to be a part of that whole process, even in some small way. Just by a bit of comment, a bit of feedback. And like you say, I think the learning community feel like they kind of own it and therefore more inclined to talk about it and use it and share it with others.
Arun Pradhan:	Yeah, I think so. Like definitely in my experience in more performance consulting, the whole co-design process, it just transforms ... like sometimes after a performance consulting process, a co-design process, the key stakeholder will say, well, that was about 80% of what we were going to do and I say, do you think that the co-design was a waste. And they always say, no, because if I just came in and did that, it wouldn't' have worked. But the co-design process actually helps people come along. But also, in my case, it was a better product for that co-design process, for that working out loud process.
Karen Moloney:	Something else that came out of that as well was thinking about the actually, the use of an app as a solution. So that was something that we talked about in the prep round. I suppose this is going back to the shiny object syndrome, which we have in L&D. It's like, oh, let's build an app. And it's not always appropriate. So can you just talk about why the app was appropriate here and what people need to be careful of because I think there's a danger that people can go, alright, we've got some outlines here, as to how we go about building an app. Let's just go and do it. Where do they work best? What context is good for that as a solution?
Arun Pradhan:	I went with an app because I started from a place of trying to really consider how to be more, have really easy access to this information. I used designers as part of the design process, and when I worked through their life, it was the predictable thing. People were accessing it on the job, but also accessing on the train and in different situations where they were just having that five minute moment between moment ... experience.

So really it was about convenience and flexibility. That was my kind of key focus in terms of how can I get this to people in the easiest way possible from wherever they were. Having said that, I think there is a risk that people can go with apps too many times or for too many things and I think you do need to really prioritise some long lasting content that's going to be used in the workflow and to really help frame up those experiences. I think they're the ones that you want to prioritise to that. And obviously it depends on the context as well. Some workplaces don't have the culture of using mobile delivery.

And so one of the changes I made actually was the business version is actually a web app, so they can actually access it via desktop as well as mobile. Just to have that flexibility because that was some of the feedback I got. In some contexts, it was just too hard to do the mobile thing. Just trying to hedge your bets, too. |

Karen Moloney:	Yeah, that's very interesting. So just one last one from me. What tips would you give to anybody thinking about developing an app to be used to support learning within an organization?
Arun Pradhan:	I'd say firstly just start with the user and start with that user centric design, and basically consider what their workflow will be and how they would most want to experience it. And then I would say, prototype the hell out of it. Envision was the prototyping tool I used, and I basically would whack up a prototype. At one period I think I had churned out about four different prototypes to test in a period of about two days when the design was very fluid. And even just people access it ... the prototyping tools are fantastic. You can actually have, like, they seem to be working kind of apps. You can build them in like an hour.
	I just say prototype the hell out of it and just test it with your audience group in the context that they're going to be using it to get some reality check. For example, one of the prototyping outcomes I had was, the original version of Learn2Learn had this whole journal element, where you were going to set your goals. You were going to put in a big image to focus on your goals and you were going to journal around it and you could share with people. That died in the prototyping because people just said, no, not using it. I use Evernote or something else. So I killed that off in the early stages.
Michelle Ockers:	Yeah. I think people are wary of anything where their data, especially something like their learning information might be locked away in an app rather than something they can just access wherever they want.
Arun Pradhan:	Yeah. The feedback I got was, the very few people that did journal were already using a journaling app and the other people said, well, yeah, it's great idea, but I'm not going to do it. I'm too busy. I just want to get what I need and run.
Michelle Ockers:	But one of the things that's really struck me when you talked about how you worked on the development of the app is the level of integrity with how you worked related to the content and the methods you were trying to capture in the app for developing rapid skills. So kudos for that. I really like that.
Arun Pradhan:	Thank you.
Michelle Ockers:	And that kind of leads into the final question we like to ask all of our guests. Could you share with us the biggest thing you do for your own professional development?
Arun Pradhan:	Just on that point, where you're saying integrity. For me it was actually more being a guinea pig. I was actually testing out these ideas as I was trying to develop them. Because if it didn't work for me, I thought, what's the point. It was really testing out the process as well.

In terms of what I do for my own development, I go through different themes. There was a period there in my work where I was just thrown into so many different large projects using co-design that it was all about experience. It felt like a stretch project every week. So that was the key thing. That was probably about even seven months ago. It was an experiential stretch projects was all of it.

Now I would say I'm in a different phase. I'm not into so many stretch projects just because of the way my work's gone. And my main focus at the moment is just I'm reading everything. I've got Kindle, I've got Evernote capturing key concepts. I've got my Linkedin feed perfectly so there's always something of value there. I feel like I'm just getting this channels of amazing content which have been developed for me by my network and I'm just am going through content at a rate of knots in terms of reading at the moment.

Michelle Ockers: So if we asked you that question in six months time, depending on what sort of context you're working in, the answer could be different again, right?

Arun Pradhan: I would say it's always going to be one of those emphases. It's going to be the experience, people or investigation. Now it's investigation, but as I say, previously it was experience. A time before that it was me focusing on, like, when I was learning design thinking, I was focusing on relationships with this guy from IBM who was my mentor in design thinking. It's really, I probably go through about two or three months kind of themes, where I sort of focus in on one aspect.

So right now, it's investigation and reading.

Michelle Ockers: Fantastic. Arun, thank you so much for making time to be our guest today. I always learn lots of things in a conversation with you. Really appreciate that. We're going to include a link to your Linkedin profile in the show notes, as well as several of the resources that you've mentioned. Thank you so much for speaking with us, Arun.

Arun Pradhan: Well thank you very much. It's an honor to be on the show and I really love the work you both are doing as well. So thank you very much.

Karen Moloney: Thank you.

Michelle Ockers: Thank you.