

Learning Uncut Disruption Series
Charles Jennings and Vivian Heijnen – Supporting
Learning in the Workplace
Hosted by Michelle Ockers



Michelle Ockers:

Welcome to another episode of the Learning Uncut Disruption series. Today, we are talking about improving L&D support for learning in the workplace with two well-known expert practitioners in this field from the 70:20 Institute. We have Charles Jennings and Vivian Heijnen with me today. Charles, welcome.

Charles Jennings:

Thank you very much. Thank you for the invitation, Michelle.

Michelle Ockers:

Thank you for joining me and Vivian, welcome and can you please introduce us to what the 70:20:10 Institute does?

Vivian Heijnen:

Okay. We started the Institute five years ago because we thought that the L&D profession could use some maybe support also, in terms of how to move from traditional L&D professionals towards more business partners for instance. And we think that the 70:20:10 methodology that we've developed, both on a conceptual level but also on a very practical level, could be of use for people. So, what we do is two things actually. We help L&D departments or academies or similar companies for instance, to develop towards more business partners and on the other hand, we also help them to execute projects, for instance, where we ourselves apply the circumstances and methodology with the five rules as maybe some of you are familiar with.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay, so what then is learning in the workplace if that's the topic we're going to talk about today?

Charles Jennings:

Michelle, I think there's a lot of misconceptions about learning in the workplace because a lot of L&D people believe they're involved in learning in the workplace and actually what they're doing is, they're taking formal learning into the workplace. Now, that's one very small part of it, but the way that we look at learning in the workplace, is the fact that the vast majority of learning happens whilst people are working. Estimates go right up to 98%. In fact, some academics have done research showing that the amount of work or the time spent working... learning is actually, is part of work.

Charles Jennings:

So, the way that we look at learning in the workplace, is how do we help people to continuously improve? How do we help organizations to innovate faster? How do we help organizations to do better by utilizing and capturing that learning, which is occurring as part of daily work? So really, it's around learning from working rather than learning to work. [inaudible 00:02:48] learn to work, but the point is, it's moving it from a total focus on formal learning into a wider focus on informal and organizational learning.

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Michelle Ockers:

Okay. And I'm assuming you would say use it whenever possible, but in the context we're in right now, where of course, there's still a lot of organizations using face to face learning as their predominant delivery mode, formal structured face to face learning or structured e-learning, and we're introducing this at a time when we're asking people to consider using other options at a time when the ability to do face to face training basically has been largely removed from organizations for a period of time. When is it going to be most useful right now? Under what sort of conditions, circumstances would you encourage people to start using it right now?

Vivian Heijnen:

I think Michelle, that's indeed actually already started, that you should have done it already. Of course before, but if you didn't, this is a right time to start with it. But then, look at it maybe slightly different than just moving from face to face training to something like online or doing things digital because how we look at it is, you should first align with the business and talk to people in the workplace, what they really need at this moment, what is most critical and then you can see what kind of opportunities you have to facilitate them.

Vivian Heijnen:

And sometimes it's even nothing. Or just bringing some people together who can learn from each other or maybe some very tiny little things. And that's what we see also. For instance, and some of our clients, they are doing this in a very natural way now it's the crisis. That's really interesting. You could do that also, not only now, but also after that, the same principle. Take a look at what do they really need now to be able to survive this situation. Take a look at what are critical tasks and how can we support them in the flow of work, so we shouldn't stop the flow of work. We should just integrate it in their work.

Vivian Heijnen:

And then you come up with all kind of creative ideas. We see this also happening in the world around us where people do bootcamps every day from eight to nine and that's face to face by the way. But it's very focused on what they need today to be able to, in this case, help their patients for instance. But you could also think of, if you take a look at home care, it's a very difficult situation at the moment. What could you give them that they can bring to their clients and also show them how some things work? Maybe they can do some things themselves and those are very easy to adapt and to use. Well, tools and so on that people can use in the workplace right away.

Charles Jennings:

Sorry Michelle, I'm getting a bit of an echo there with Vivian. Are you getting that or not?

Michelle Ockers:

I am getting a little bit of lag so maybe we should turn off the videos to protect the bandwidth.

Charles Jennings:

I just wonder whether that, if we do that... Yeah, that's right, because I think that it's just a little problem there. That might be an idea.

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Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, it is. All right. We just have to make sure we direct the flow of the conversation to each other.

Charles Jennings:

Sure. Sure. Okay.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. All right. So Vivian, I was going to ask you next for an example. When you say talk to people, go out and take a look, find out what they need, are you able to give us an example, a relevant example that someone has done that at the moment?

Vivian Heijnen:

Yeah.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. So I'll just pause for a moment and I'll pick that up. So Vivian, one of the things you said then was that it starts with understanding what people need. So you talked about going out and talking to people, maybe doing some task analysis to understand what they need. Can you give us an example of what that looks like?

Vivian Heijnen:

Yes. At this moment people are, for instance, currently looking at how can we do some quick skill building for people who are not working now in healthcare but could be of help for people who are doing now home care. It's a very good example where you can have a look at, what are the basic care tasks that people can do without any health care education for instance. And what we do is, gather together all the information we have from, on the one hand side, basic information from educational programs, but also talk to people in the business who are working as home carer and say, we have most difficult situations in, for instance, helping people to eat. Let's say something like that.

Vivian Heijnen:

And then we say, what can we do to transfer the knowledge and the skills they already have to people who are not doing this right now? How can we do it very fast without having to give them a lot of background information about food or safety or that kind of things? Of course, at the same time, make sure that they can work in a safe environment and that nobody's harmed if they do something that is maybe not really as it should be. We see that it works by focusing only on the most critical things that they need right now. It helps very much in also making priorities in the right way, but also keeping up to speed and being able to adjust to the needs today and tomorrow instead of next month or maybe within three months.

Michelle Ockers:

So, it's very much about timeliness of getting people what they need when they need. And I think we might come back to that example and take that a little further as we proceed through the conversation. Charles, if we talk about getting started and basics and essentials and what people need to know, what might they need to know to start supporting learning in the workplace or to do that more often or more effectively?

Charles Jennings:

Michelle, in your first podcast, Laura Overton talked about the fact that more than 50% of L&D services are delivered in classrooms and Laura and Don Taylor both talked about

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change and the need for change. And I think with the current landscape, it really does require us to take a step back and think about how are we going to approach these things differently. We need to step out of the, what we call, I guess, the formal learning bubble and support the learning that's already happening in the workplace. So, to a certain extent, one of the first steps is actually just start to think differently.

Charles Jennings:

And Vivian talked about critical tasks and a lot of our work is focused around identifying and extracting or understanding the critical tasks that need to be carried out in order to achieve success. And so, the first steps really, I think, there's a set of steps that need to be taken. The three important steps that L&D can take is first of all, to help make all learning that's already happening in the workplace, much more apparent and visible to workers and managers. And then capture that learning, which comes from working and help share good practice. And this is things we always should've been doing anyway, but we need to do that.

Charles Jennings:

L&D can also help identify learning in terms of improved processes, faster innovation cycles, improved efficiencies. Thinking again to Vivian's point about understanding what's happening in the workplace, understanding what the critical challenges of our stakeholders are and actually that doesn't require us to be face to face. We can do this, a lot of this sort of stuff, remotely in the current climate. By doing this, L&D can then make workplace learning much more productive and transferable. The first step is to think differently. Think about what is critical for the organization, what is it that's going to make the organization more resilient and how can we help everyone perform the tasks that are going to lead towards that?

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. So Charles, you said one of the first things that after... Obviously, there's the mindset shift that is so important that you're talking about there and thinking about what's critical and critical task analysis. You talked about L&D being able to help make workplace learning visible to workers and managers, accepting and acknowledging that the vast majority of real learning actually happens while people are working. What can we do, how do we make learning visible? I guess, how do we A, identify where learning is happening and then B, make it visible?

Charles Jennings:

Sure. And I think if I can pass across to Vivian to answer this in some practical terms, but a lot of our work is around using techniques, which have been around for years. So for example, how can you understand, capture the critical tasks that anyone in a particular job or particular role needs to undertake. How can you distil it down, distil all those tasks down to the critical ones? In a way, we could almost start by looking at our formal learning and then matching what we're providing in formal, so our face to face training, matching that to and thinning it, effectively thinning it down to what the critical tasks are. So, we're talking really about how do we build effective performance support and most so-called performance support and micro learning practices currently in my experience, really don't address the challenge of capturing and sharing those critical tasks in the best way possible. So Vivian, maybe you can give some examples of where this is being done and where we've been doing it.

Vivian Heijnen:

Yeah, and I think it's also all the way around it. It's so interesting what's happening now in this crisis. If you take a look at healthcare of course, who does now have a speed of

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business, which nobody could have imagined a couple of weeks ago where we were right now. And what you see is, and that's also interesting for L&D, is you also have to be aware of what's happening around you. If you take a look at what's happening, for instance in terms of innovative ideas, you see here in the Netherlands, we have a large hospital who came up with the idea to install a mobile CT scanner to keep patients out of the hospital and scan them there before they enter. And so they can keep out and the different kind of patients separated and that's a very innovative idea and you see that other people learn from that.

Vivian Heijnen:

So, they are copying that idea in other places. It's the same, for instance, with this shortage of masks, they came up with a very good idea to sterilize the used mask, which of course, is out of the box thinking and we wouldn't define it maybe as learning, but it is learning. So, from a natural point of view, in these kinds of situations, you would see that people learn all the time, every day. And how can you capture those things and make sure that you maybe transfer to other situations where they didn't have heard from it. So, that's something that L&D could play an important role in, I think.

Michelle Ockers:

So, part of our role is to be close enough to what is actually happening in the workplace to identify practices that are being innovated, improved and then to help to spread those more rapidly?

Vivian Heijnen:

Yeah. And the thing is that, this is a difficult one because you see differences between L&D departments and companies who already are there and already are close to the workplace and companies who are not because you are not the first one they would call if you have such an issue. That's the most difficult part, I assume, that you have to have the right contacts and that should be with people in the core processes and not per se with other supporting departments.

Michelle Ockers:

Right.

Charles Jennings:

Michelle, one of the core principles of the 70:20:10 methodology is around starting with the 70 and what Vivian is talking about is exactly that. If we start thinking about how can L&D help people improve, not just through individual performance, not just departmental performance, and how can L&D help organizational performance improve. And the way we do that is by working very closely with our stakeholders, understanding what their challenges are, understanding exactly how we can help them capture and share good practice. How they tackle the critical tasks that they need to do. How we can help them share their insights. So, all of these sorts of things we can do without extra technology. We can do it just by changing the processes and changing our approach.

Michelle Ockers:

So, what are some suggestions you would have for learning professionals if they do spot examples of improved practices and they do want to be able to transfer them? How do you go about that if you see something you think others elsewhere need to know about this? What are the practical steps?

Vivian Heijnen:

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Of course, first of all, get in touch with the right people. You have to have your networks and then also provide them with a structured approach. Because what we see also right now in our practice, is that just people don't know where to start. They don't know, so they think, we have to do something because we have an issue today, how can we solve that tomorrow? And they are very action oriented. One of the things L&D could do is to structure this and make sure what are the first three steps to take? So for instance, what's the most difficult situation that you have to solve right now? What do you expect from people in terms of critical tasks and how can we facilitate them?

Michelle Ockers:

Charles, did you want to add anything to that in terms of transferring learning across the organization?

Charles Jennings:

I've always talked about two pillars for L&D. One is standards and the other one's methodology. And what Vivian said is absolutely right. A lot of L&D departments don't have or don't work to a set of standards and explicit methodologies and I think we're seeing [inaudible 00:18:45] they suffer from this and particularly with our methodology, with the performance detective role, which some people will know, which is really the performance consulting piece. If an L&D person goes and talks with a senior stakeholder or any stakeholder, if they don't use a standard approach and then one of their colleagues comes along and uses a different approach, it sort of suggests that we're not professionals in a way.

Charles Jennings:

One of the key elements is a methodology. And as Vivian mentioned, we need to have this methodology where we can go, we can understand exactly what the challenge is. Not in terms of what I'd call rather loose HR behavioural indicators, but actually what is it that people need to do? Our experience is that when you talk to an exemplary performer, they will often talk a lot about what they do and they'll say, well, we need to do this and this and this and this. But you can usually bring it down to four or five critical things, critical tasks that make someone an exemplary performer than a good or an ordinary performer. And L&D needs to have a methodology to be able to capture that.

Charles Jennings:

And then behind that there's having standard approaches, for example, for developing support materials to be used once that's been captured. I think there's quite a bit of work. I see this current period as being a real opportunity for L&D to change in a very positive way to say, hey, let's run some pilots. Let's do some experiments to see how we can really help our people working out on the front line or out in the field. How we can really help them to improve. How we can provide... I guess it's the old courses to resources model. It's a real opportunity, particularly as most of the courses, particularly the face to face courses are being stopped. It's an opportunity to expand into that area.

Michelle Ockers:

It certainly is a good opportunity to run experiments. And I think what you're suggesting there is to go into those experiments, not in a haphazard way, but with some sort of methodology or process that you can use. You can test it out, you can iterate. I've understood you correctly?

Charles Jennings:

Absolutely. That's absolutely right.

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Michelle Ockers:

So, are we able to share in the show notes? Are there any getting started tools that we would be able to share with listeners who are interested in running some of these experiments or perhaps putting in place quickly some sort of basic methodology for that performance detective piece of work?

Vivian Heijnen:

Yeah. I would say first of all, execute a performance detective, what I would call, light. So, of course you don't have time to do an extended analysis and that kind of thing but ask three questions. What is most critical thing that you have to solve right now? What do you expect from people in terms of very practical tasks and what is going to cause, for instance, harm if you don't do them, so you can prioritize which one you should take? Once you've done that, you have to ask one more question and that's what barriers do people face in the workplace to be able to execute those tasks. And you could think of something like, if you have to put personal hygiene in place and you wash your hands, for instance. That's another situation if you're in home care, in a situation at somebody's home where maybe there are no clean towels or whatever, that's a different situation, so you have to know that.

Vivian Heijnen:

You also have to remove those barriers. So, you have to make sure that people have the right sources to do their jobs in that situation. That's first of all. So, you could do that very quickly. It doesn't have to take too long. Then secondly, you make a design of the solutions where you start at the workplace. You just first think of, what do people really need in this workplace if they have to execute those tasks and what could be of help. So then, you possibly are going to choose something like performance support and that kind of things. And then from there you derive what is needed in terms of instruction and if you can do that online or face to face.

Michelle Ockers:

Vivian, if we can stick with the home care example. When you say start at the workplace, what are some examples of support you could provide at that point of work in this example?

Vivian Heijnen:

For instance, if people need help with their stockings. I'm not sure what's the right word of that.

Michelle Ockers:

That's a good word.

Vivian Heijnen:

Okay. You can provide them with, for instance, a checklist which they can bring on their iPhone or on their phone and they can even show them to their clients to make sure that they do the right things. Because if you give them a short instruction just beforehand and it's not said that if it's in the afternoon and that's the first time they have to do it that they remember. So, you can give them some easy memory cards or that kind of things of performance support, which they can use when they are at the client's place.

Michelle Ockers:

Understood. Charles, I think you were going to add something there.

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Charles Jennings:

I was going to add to what Vivian said in that I think it's a really good opportunity for L&D people now to take a step back and think about innovative and new ways in which we can provide support to help people do their jobs better, which is really what L&D is all about. And the example that Vivian has given is a very, very practical example about how we can provide the right materials. And I think it's also a really good opportunity for L&D people who haven't explored the whole area of performance support and particularly in the current environment.

Charles Jennings:

For example, to look at the work by someone like Atul Gawande who's a surgeon, an American surgeon, but have been working with health services around the world and Gawande wrote an excellent book a few years ago called the Checklist Manifesto. And he's been working, I certainly know in the UK with the NHS. He's been working where he's reduced mortality rates or his practices reduced mortality rates by more than 40%, simply by using checklists in order to make sure that people follow the process correctly and that they carry out all the critical tasks in the right order and so on.

Charles Jennings:

So, I think that there's a real opportunity here for L&D to look at what we've been doing, which we maybe can't do anymore in terms of our face to face classes and to take out of that content, take out the really critical pieces, which are going to support people in the workplace, in the context of their particular role. And it's well known that a lot of formal learning has got a lot of material in it that is either only going to be used occasionally or never going to be used. So, it really does open up an opportunity to take the gems, the diamonds out of it and utilize those key pieces, which will support people to do their jobs better.

Michelle Ockers:

Good opportunity, yes. It's clear from a lot of what you've said so far that this is a very human centric, a very people centric activity. But there must be a role somewhere in here for technology to play. What do you see as the role of technology in helping to support learning in the workplace?

Charles Jennings:

Well, technology always helps overcome the richness reach conundrum. In other words, it allows us to get greater reach. That's why one of the reasons e-Learning has been so useful. It breaks down that trade-off between a rich experience and reach. It helps us break that. In terms of the actual tools, of course, there are specialist tools around, but really any communications technology can help. And the main role that technology plays is actually to facilitate the capture, sharing and learning and improvement across organizations. Most organizations will have communications and collaboration tools in place.

Charles Jennings:

It might be Microsoft Teams or Slack or Jive or Yammer or SharePoint or Skype for Business, Zoom and so on and so forth. And so really, it's whatever works for you in this situation. If you're going to play the role of the performance detective and you're going to uncover what the key challenges are and where they're being addressed and the people who are addressing the best and identifying the exemplary performers and gather that, you'll need some communication technology, particularly today. In normal circumstances, you

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would probably go and meet with them face to face and spend a time doing that. So really, we can do that.

Charles Jennings:

Then when we've done that and we've carried out, in our context, the performance architect work of designing the best solutions, getting those solutions out. Vivian mentioned, you can just simply just put them onto people's or send them to people and put them onto their mobile devices. But again, it could be through almost any technology can help in some way, although there are specialist technologies. I think in the current climate trying to do this fast is not the time to go off and try to identify the best performance support platform for your purposes and so on. I think that's something maybe down the line.

Michelle Ockers:

I think our IT departments are probably busy with other things right now too, right Charles?

Charles Jennings:

Yes, yes. Exactly. That's right, yes. So really, go with what you have. Of course, there's a key role for technology. Use it as much as you can and use what's at hand.

Michelle Ockers:

Vivian, I'm going to pass to you to help us with the wrap up and then give Charles a chance for one last word if there's anything he wants to add. Just final words of advice to learning professions who are having to figure out how to support learning in the workplace more effectively right now.

Vivian Heijnen:

Well, I would say keep cool. And bring structure for people. And just make sure that you always follow some four or five easy to understand, also for the client, easy to understand steps so that you can speed up work agile and make sure that you have results in a very fast way.

Michelle Ockers:

Thank you. Charles, is there anything you'd like to add?

Charles Jennings:

Yes, I think that the current climate really is an opportunity to change the way we've been working. To replace some of the time and effort that we put into designing and delivering formal learning to get much closer to the challenges that our stakeholders are facing, especially in the current time. Thinking about how we support our colleagues in achieving their work, identifying top performers, work with them to capture what they've learned and help them make learning accessible to others. I think if we do that, we can become much more value creators. We can create a lot more value than simply sitting on our hands and worrying about what's going to happen because we can no longer get out in amongst our folks and run our face to face courses and so on.

Charles Jennings:

So, I think that it's a real opportunity for change and this is what happens. We've known for years, this is not what happens just with COVID-19 but this is what happens when organizations, when there's M&A activity or when there's changes in organization, it sort of unfreezes the organization and allows us to get new approaches embedded. And this is a real time to do that.

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Michelle Ockers:

I love the call to action. Thank you so much Charles and Vivian for joining me for this special Learning Uncut episode.

About Michelle Ockers

Michelle Ockers works with business and learning leaders to realise the untapped potential of learning in organisations. She is an organisational learning strategist and modern workplace learning practitioner. Michelle works with organisations to develop and implement transformative organisational learning strategy, and to build the capability of their learning team. She delivers keynotes, workshops and webinars for learning and broader professional or workforce groups at both public and in-house events. Michelle also mentors learning professionals at all career stages on career planning and professional development.

Michelle received the following prestigious industry awards in 2019:

- *Australian Institute of Training and Development Dr Alastair Rylatt Award for L&D Professional of the Year – for outstanding contribution to the practice of Learning and Development*
- *Internet Time Alliance Jay Cross Memorial Award – for outstanding contribution to the field of informal learning*

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