

**00:00** Welcome to this Learning Uncut Elevate episode, where we explore a skill, topic, or resource to help you elevate your practice and impact as a learning professional.

**00:13 Michelle Ockers** Yes, listeners, we are back with Learning Uncut Elevate. We did have a series some time ago, and we've decided to reinstate this particular format. I've got my Learning Uncut co-founder and our chief design officer, Ravina Bhatia, with me today. Hi, Ravina.

**00:30 Ravina Bhatia** Hi, Michelle, I'm very excited to be part of your podcast.

**00:35 Michelle Ockers** Our podcast. So Elevate is our podcast. It's a place where we're going to be talking about one practice or skill at a time for learning and development professionals to lift your impact and practice. And we're doing a special series on skill development to kick us off. Ravina, why have we picked skill development? Why is this important?

**01:01 Ravina Bhatia** Why have you? That's a loaded question. So it's interesting. I've only heard people talk about skill development, say, in the last couple of years, especially around the pandemic, COVID, and right after it. But it's interesting because it's been an area that I've been working in for the last, I think, 15 or 16 years now. It's been current. It's been evolving a lot. So the shape and form of it 16 years ago and today is quite different. But the number one issue that I'm hearing again and again from every single organization that I'm speaking with is I want to attract and retain talent. How can I do that?

**01:44 Michelle Ockers** Yeah. So there's been a lot of discussion around, you know, the debate around, well, isn't skill development what we're supposed to do anyway? Isn't that the heart of our job in learning and development? But I think with the pandemic and some of the shifts that that's engendered and the tight talent market and the fast pace of change now, right, with technology in particular constantly moving on, the challenges of skill development, the context has changed, and that's what's different. It's not that we never were responsible for it before, but there's new challenges that we're trying to address.

**02:19 Ravina Bhatia** Yes, absolutely. Quite right. There's new challenges that we're trying to address. People have become more conscious than ever before about the need to have career mobility. Yes, for their own people. Also shift the focus from content consumption, to capability building. And that's a shift that we've seen. And that works great for us in L&D because we've been talking about it forever. So the fact that it's coming from organizations, people's entire organizations, entire business strategy is focused to that. Really, if anything, it builds our case.

**02:57 Michelle Ockers** So, Ravina, we've talked a little bit about the idea of talent attraction and why skill development is so important. What other triggers do you see with people wanting to get started or do more with talent, with skill development?

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**03:10 Ravina Bhatia** That's a great question, because one of the most common reasons is just curiosity, because it's been a bit of a buzzword. Upskilling, reskilling, skills development, and with the launch of so many new talent marketplaces, tech platforms, skills tech, as it's called, people are even more curious about it. So there's that bit about where it's a bit of a buzzword and people want to know more about it, which is great, because curiosity can do always lead to great things. And then there is the age old question of how do we build the capability we need in our organization? How do we go about doing that? And what are the ways to go around doing it? And that is a great shift to have and a great question to have in organizations because it will lead eventually to the conversation about skills, knowledge, and so on and so forth. But that's a great starting point that people come to us with, want to talk about, and pose as a challenge that they're facing. both inwardly as well as outwardly from the industry as well.

**04:22 Michelle Ockers** Yeah. So can you give me some examples of like some of the specific triggers? So I know, for instance, with one organization we've worked with, a financial services firm, there were some key critical roles that they wanted to uplift. So it wasn't sort of let's uplift everything, but they really wanted to focus in on skills development for a couple of key roles, as an example. Is that the pattern you see or are there other triggers like specific in organizations?

**04:48 Ravina Bhatia** Yeah, it changes from one organization to another. That's a great example you talked about for another organization, where we're doing some skills development work, it is targeted specifically to leadership, because their leadership areas have been so hungry for structured learning. And they're undergoing growth at massive scales, they've doubled their employee base. So to be able to manage that employee base well, they know that they need to have the right skills and the leadership and to scale those skills and to really create the right leadership across the board. And that's why they wanted to invest in skills development over there.

**05:33 Michelle Ockers** So let's talk about some key questions that people should be asking when they're looking at how do we approach skill development, some of the fundamentals.

**05:43 Ravina Bhatia** Awesome. This is a great question that I actually ask when somebody actually comes to us and says, all right, this is what we want to do. And my first question is, talk to me a little bit about why. One of the key differentiators for the way that we approach skills development at Learning Uncut is this is not meant to be a purely academic exercise. This has got to be commercial. It has to create business impact. So talk to me about the why. Why do you want to do this? What are your desired outcomes? What are you looking to achieve? As well as what is the case for change? Why have we changed? What is this change? What is this trigger? What has caused the need for you to reach out and say this or inquire about this? What are you seeing around you, either in the industry or in the organization? And this gives me a lot of insight into the way that the organization is thinking about it, their urgency, their impetus to do this.

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**06:44 Michelle Ockers** I think it can help you go from we need an enterprise-wide skills framework and we need to be developing everybody to really thinking more critically around are there specific skills that are causing an issue with performance in our organization or are going to be important for our competitive advantage? Where do we start? So, I think that leans into the why. Well, it's also a matter of scope, right? You know, what do we need to bite off here and in what order?

**07:12 Ravina Bhatia** Absolutely. And what I'll add to that is, where are you in your journey? So clearly articulate, where are you in your journey? Do you have a skills frame? Do you not have one? And in either case, it's fine. It's almost just identifying where specifically are you? What's your starting point? And clearly articulating that. The more clarity you have in thinking before you jump into something, and you articulate it, document it, describe it, the better place you'll be to realize your goals. Even if you don't have one, like you talked about, what's the scope? Is it for the entire organization? Are there some specific skills, specific areas, like the leadership example we talked about? Or it could be critical roles in the organization, roles that are critical to your success, to help you achieve your organizational goals. And how do you know this? And that's the other important thing. So if you're saying leadership is an area we want to focus in, how do you know this? What makes you say that? Is there any data? Is there feedback you've received from the organization? In what format? Is it word of mouth? And so on and so forth. And what's your sense of urgency? What needs to happen when? And if it doesn't happen now, what are the issues? What could happen? That's a great question to ask, which is, if we don't do this, what are we going to lose?

**08:45 Michelle Ockers** So a lot of this is around your goal setting, your scoping, making sure you're moving towards the right things first. So the effort will pay off from a commercial perspective. I like the way you put that. So we talked briefly, we touched on competency frameworks or skill frameworks. Do you need one of those in place before you get started? Or is there anything else you need? Can you do this without those frameworks? Let's talk about that hot potato.

**09:11 Ravina Bhatia** So my answer is actually going to be quite left field in that because I actually get asked that, do I need to have one in place? No, you don't need to have one in place. What you do need and what is non-negotiable is buy-in from the business. Getting business stakeholders, getting a business sponsor. I don't mean a head of people and culture sponsor. I don't mean an HR sponsor or head of L&D sponsor. That's a given. You've got to be in the game, but get buy-in from the business that this is the route we're taking, and this is why we're taking it.

**09:46 Michelle Ockers** OK, so obviously, this isn't something you do alone. So who needs to be involved right up front? Who do we need to get on board and align with right up front? You've mentioned, obviously, a business sponsor, a business leader.

**10:01 Ravina Bhatia** Yep, absolutely. And second, someone who has expertise in this space. That's the only combination I see working. Trying to wing it yourself without having that expertise will mean that you are likely to take longer, you might

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complicate it. And we've seen that in a number of cases. So try and work with someone who has expertise in this area. This is a niche space. It doesn't seem like it, but it is. And often I've seen people make these, this is one of the most common issues that I see, that people set out to do this. One, the first most common thing is they complicate it; too many skills, too complex a framework, not choosing the right fit for the organization. And that could take various shapes and forms. For example, you've decided to take a role-based approach to skills development or skills framework. But there are way too many roles in your organization. You've got too many cross sections of roles. And that's a very common issue that organizations have. You're not setting yourself up for success. That's a common issue that you'll face. So in terms of who needs to be involved, someone who has experience working with skills, as well as someone from the business, obviously, a person who will lead this for you from the learning team or from the P&C team. The more you do this in partnership with the key people who touch people experiences, who touch employee experiences in the organization, the better your outcome will be. So as an example, I think this is about two years ago, we did this work with a global insurance provider. We worked directly with their team, their business team, in doing it. The L&D person who was involved was more from a project management standpoint, but also setting up the L&D team to replicate this across the organization. So there were two motives there, which was you get the expert to help you do this, set it up for you, make this scalable for you. So this doesn't mean that you have to get outside help all the time for every single role, for every single job family you have in the organization. You want to create a strong foundation. And most importantly, you also get the opportunity to test and learn.

**12:39 Michelle Ockers** Okay, so in terms of one or two simple next actions, if we've got people listening, and they're thinking, yeah, I really know I need to kickstart my skill development journey, or the things we're doing right now aren't working, and I want to try something different, one to two simple actions for people.

**12:57 Ravina Bhatia** Awesome. I do have two. So I'll start with what we talked about early on, which is identify your purpose, ensure that the purpose is aligned with your organizational goals. That's the very first thing that you need for success, clearly articulating that. And second, identify what is your specific starting point? Where are you in your journey? And where do you want to get to? What do you see as desired future state? Again, it doesn't need to be a very detailed picture, but a broader view of what are we trying to get to. Because the journey will be determined by what your end point is. So if you start with the end in mind, you build a plan that is specifically tailored to you where you are in your starting point, that's tailored to your organization, that's tailored to the context of your organization. and the employee conditions within your organization. So these are the two key things that you've got to do irrespective of where you are in your journey before you get started.

**13:59 Michelle Ockers** Wonderful. And we're going to keep building on this. We've kind of laid some foundations here - Where do you get started with skill development? Our next Elevate episode, which will be out in two weeks time, will be about the key elements of skill development. So look out for that one. And if you are listening before the 11th of October, 2023, we're running a webinar on introduction to

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skill development on that date. You can find the details for that at our website, [learninguncut.global](https://learninguncut.global), and go to the events page. We'll pop a link in the show notes as well. Ravina, thank you. Looking forward to our next conversation about the key elements of skill development.

**14:43 Ravina Bhatia** I'm excited to talk about the key elements of skills development too. Thank you, Michelle.

**14:49** Thanks for listening. Head to the [learninguncut.global](https://learninguncut.global) website to access resources mentioned in this episode and more to help you elevate your practice and impact. If there is a topic you'd like to cover in the Elevate series, contact Michelle Ockers on LinkedIn.

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Learning Uncut are learning and development consultants that help Learning and Development leaders and their teams become a strategic enabler so that their businesses can thrive. We work in evidence-informed ways to drive tangible outcomes and business impact and are strong believers in the power of collaboration and community. We specialise in helping to build or refresh organisational learning strategy, update their L&D Operating Model, enable skills development, and conduct learning evaluation. We also offer workshops to shift learning mindset and practices for both L&D teams and the broader workforce – as well as speaking at public and internal events.

Learn more about us [at our website](#).

### About your host, Michelle Ockers



Michelle is the co-founder and Chief Learning Strategy at Learning Uncut. She is an experience, pragmatic organisational learning strategist, L&D capability builder and modern workplace learning practitioner. She also delivers keynotes, workshops and webinars for learning and broader professional or workforce groups at both public and in-house events.

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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