

Michelle Ockers

Welcome back to Elevate and our special series on skills development, which we are co-hosting. Ravina, nice to see you again.

Ravina Bhatia

Nice to see you again. Excited to talk about skills development with you again.

Michelle Ockers

Absolutely. We got to talk about it last week in a webinar that we ran, which was really well attended. There's plenty of interest in skills development at the moment, isn't there?

Ravina Bhatia

There absolutely is. And that's what is keeping us going, keeping us excited and wanting to share more with you.

Michelle Ockers

Which we are going to do. We're going to actually run a whole webinar series around skills development. We've decided to wait until early 2024. It's now, as we're recording this, it's mid-October and things tend to get really busy this time of year. So, we're going to rerun that introductory webinar and then do a whole series. But in the meantime, of course, people can keep listening to this Elevate series. The last one, which was episode 20, we talked about the seven elements of skills development, and today we're focusing on one which is really critical. One of your favourites, Ravina, what is it?

Ravina Bhatia

It's goal alignment. Doesn't it seem so simple, though, Michelle? We talk about it a lot. We always talk about goals should be aligned, organizational goals. I'm excited to unpack that with you today.

Michelle Ockers

Yeah, so we do talk about it a lot, but of course, in big organizations in particular, it can be really hard to align personal development goals with the larger objectives of the organization, which is really what we're talking about when we talk about goal alignment. And it's a really critical part of your overall approach to skills development. Why is it so crucial?

Ravina Bhatia

Well, clearly, to get people really interested, to develop their skills, to build their skills, you've got to be able to pull them to what you are putting out there. And in order to have that pull approach, rather than the push approach that we always talk about in learning and development, You've got to have their personal goals top of mind for them. They've got to have skin in the game in order for them to really want to engage or adopt what you're putting out there. So it's as simple as that. And when

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your personal goals align with organizational goals, well, we know that's a win-win, isn't it?

Michelle Ockers

It is. So it's part of business performance, helps with business performance, helps with talent attraction and retention. And it's kind of a really nice balanced equation where what the organization is looking to achieve is clearly communicated in a way that people can line up their personal goals to it and get that matching and take ownership of their goals as well. Now, that all sounds really nice in theory, but as you said before, Ravina, it's something we talk about a lot, but it can actually be harder to achieve than it sounds. So let's talk about how we ensure that personal and organizational goals are actually aligned in the skill development process. There's a number of things we can do to achieve that, right?

Ravina Bhatia

Absolutely. And I think the key that you and I have found by virtue of rolling this out across different organizations, is to build it into the design of it rather than to happen magically on its own. And that's really what we talk about when we talk about intelligent design. So there's really three layers of that intelligent design that we talk about. And I know we haven't talked about the overarching process that's definitely coming up in this series. So keep your I was going to say eyes peeled, but ears peeled or whatever it is.

Michelle Ockers

Keep your ears to the ground. I think it's ears to the ground. Keep your ears to the ground for that one.

Ravina Bhatia

But you'll hear hints of that a little bit as we talk through this. So what are those three layers really, right? So the first layer of building that into the process is when we complete our research and analyse phase. And in that phase, we use a human-centered design approach. We talk to people across different levels in the organization to really hear from them. And when we're hearing, one of the things we hear about is, what are their personal goals? What are the organizational goals? And we try to identify, really, what are those common points? Where are they meeting, really? So that's your first level. of building it into the design, which is firstly finding out what are people's personal goals. And we do that through the human-centered design approach. So that's the first layer. What do you think of this one, Michelle?

Michelle Ockers

I think listening to people is always a great start point, Ravina. And, of course, accompanying that HCD approach where we're talking to people in the organisation about goals, we're also talking, for instance, to business leaders about organisational goals and marrying it up with making sure we have a good, solid understanding of our business strategy and the key outcomes we're striving to achieve to remain competitive and thrive as a business so that we're informing ourselves to match those up, right?

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Ravina Bhatia

Absolutely. And during this human-centered design approach, Michelle, when we've been speaking with people, we often ask that we've got to make sure that as part of our human-centered design approach, we're talking to people across levels. Because a lot of times, what business leaders think are people's personal goals, they aren't. So you really have to hear from people across levels to truly tap into what people's goals are. It's something that is so personal that you have to hear from as many people as you can directly from them. So that's the first level. Moving on to the second layer, which is really part of the implementation approach that we have. And we've briefly spoken about this when we've talked about the kind of development we have built into our skills development approach. And that's the second layer of building that in. So now that we've heard from people during our human-centered design approach, what are we doing about it? We're building it into the development approaches. We're building it into the activities we design to help people develop. And that's how we go about doing it. What are some of the common things that you've seen, Michelle, when we're rolling out or implementing and building in these different multifaceted development approaches, as we call them.

Michelle Ockers

I think giving people choice is really important. Now, sometimes you hear people talking about learning styles, which, of course, we should be really wary of using in terms of the relationship or assuming there's a relationship between learning styles and learning effectiveness, because that has not been proven. But what we do know is people have preferences. They might want to, you know, consume content as part of their learning in different formats, they might be more inclined to actually try things out and to learn more from doing. And it's not to say that one is necessarily more effective than the other in terms of preferences, but offering people choice is really important. So I think that comes, I think that that's consistent with what we're just talking about there, right?

Ravina Bhatia

100%. One of the things that we constantly hear about across employees that we speak with in all of the work that we do, Michelle, is that people today, and really, this is not a generational thing. This isn't about which generation you belong to, Gen Z, Millennials, so on and so forth. The fact of the matter is that we've got choice in every single thing that we do today. So if you can have choice in what you eat, what you wear, how you live, why can't you have it at work? It's as simple as that. So really building that into the process is key. Again, it goes back to get that pull. What we in corporate language call adoption. So if you would like people to adopt, to really, in simple words, use what you're putting out there for them. You've got to hear from them, then give it to them in the way that they'd like to, that includes choice. So that's your second layer that we build it in. And then finally, the third one, which is really key to almost every single initiative that you would ever roll out in an organization. It is and it's the way that manage your managers, your people leaders engage you. And one of the best ways to do that for any skills development approach is the kind of development conversations that are had. And that's where

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your third layer and one of the most powerful layers is built in, because that's where that customization happens, the conversation happens. And our skills development approach recommends how you can go about doing that during your development conversations. So this three layered intelligent design approach, as we call it, really ensures that that alignment happens, not by chance, but intentionally, deliberately.

Michelle Ockers

Absolutely. It's about being very intentional with that design process. And even so, I think there's some challenges or traps lying in wait for people as they go through their skills development journey. And you mentioned customization, Ravina, and the development conversations being a critical part of customizing. The people's personal goals and looking at aligning them properly to the organizational goals. I think there's even a step before that when we talk about customizing. I think one of the traps we sometimes see organizations fall into is they take what can be a very good start point with some of the off-the-shelf skills frameworks that are available either publicly or you can pay for these days. But then they don't customize it. They don't listen deeply enough to the organization, consult with the organization to make sure it matches the real world day-to-day experience of the people who are intended to be the users. Because at the end of the day, the skills framework is not for L&D and HR. It's not meant to sit on the shelf. It should be a document or a model that that your leaders can use across the business, your managers, your workforce, and make sense to them. So you have to work on customizing it to make it relevant to the workplace that they're working in, the language that they're using, the kind of processes that are in place in the organization. So I think that's one of the first challenges. And the solution, of course, is taking the time to customize and get it right for your organization before you then move on.

Ravina Bhatia

Absolutely, Michelle. Some of the common issues that organizations face when they either buy skill libraries or buy into what I call talent marketplace platforms or skills tech is there are too many skills. The definitions of those skills are generic. They don't match the organization, the organizational goal, and therefore obviously people's goals in the organization as well. So there's simply way too many issues with simply buying a skills library or into any of these platforms and not having a strategy or an approach that guides you to use it well for your organization. So yeah, that's really, I think that's a great gem that you've pointed out and we've been called in by different organizations when that has happened, when they've bought into a skills tech platform and they don't know what to do with it.

Michelle Ockers

Yeah, yeah, where to get started to actually apply some of these frameworks. The worst thing you can do is just get stuck and not move forward. So there's another challenge. You talked about development conversations. It's really interesting. That's part of the HCD research that we do, not just for skills development, but also when we look at our strategy, learning strategy. Building with organizations, we always look at what's happening in development conversations. Because even if they are in place, they're often not well-structured and well-conducted to make sure that they

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really do get to the heart of people's goals and looking to align them with those of the organization. I don't mind whether it's what you've seen go wrong or what you've seen go well, but how can we set people up for success with development conversations and goal alignment in particular?

Ravina Bhatia

That's a fantastic thought that you've had there and a question that requires thinking. A lot of times I've sat in human-centered design conversations and we often partner with HR, P&C, L&D team members to have these conversations. And when we ask about development conversations, usually people we are partnering with go, well, but we do have development conversations. That's not true. However, you've got employees sitting there saying, we don't. And that really, the issue there lies in the quality of the conversation, the construct of the conversation and the way that it is set up. So people can truly, or when I say people, employees can truly appreciate and understand what is this conversation that I'm having. This is not a casual catch up. This is not a project status update or a work WIP, work in progress conversation. This is a conversation that is focused on my skills and how I can develop them to help me do well in my career. And so really manifesting that in that way, in that conversation, requires a structure, requires a process. And unless we're setting up our people managers to have that conversation, using that structure and process, it's not going to happen. So that's where usually we find that that's one of the biggest pitfalls or challenges that the conversations either are not happening at all, or if they're happening, they're not happening in order for them to have the maximum effectiveness impact on employee skill development. And a lot of times, more often than not, it's getting mixed with work in progress, status update conversations. And I'm sure this will sound familiar to so many of our listeners listening to us today.

Michelle Ockers

So clearly delineating the type of conversation you're having so people recognize it as a development conversation and really taking the time. I guess this is another really key listening point as well, right? Equipping your managers with a way of handling those conversations that they know that it's all about listening in the first instance and understanding people's personal goals and for the managers to be informed enough about organizational goals to be able to have an informed conversation and guide the employee to line up their personal goals with organizational goals. But sometimes even with the best of endeavors, what can come out of that conversation, and it's not necessarily a bad thing, it just creates a new opportunity, is a realization that people's goals are heading in a different direction to what they've got opportunity to do in their role so that that role fit might not be right for people to be able to align their personal goals with what's possible and appropriate in their role, Ravina.

Ravina Bhatia

Absolutely. So if you're having a conversation in the right way to your point, you will not only be able to help with that alignment of goals, but also identify when there is a complete mismatch of that person's skill set or where they'd like to be in their career with the current role or area that they're in. As by way of example, if I currently work

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in the contact center and I'm using a matrix or having a development conversation that is focused to a customer service oriented skills area. However, my career goal is to say be in a sales area. there will at some point be a mismatch. Now, all isn't lost when that happens. What that simply means is that there is a realignment to what does that sales skills metric and development opportunities look like there and to guide the employee onto that one instead. So that there is that alignment that happens again. So if you see over here, there's always a conversation that is focused to how do we make alignment happen. for the employee and for the organization in order to get that win-win and not just pay lip service to the word goal alignment.

Michelle Ockers

Of course, you're probably looking, well, you are looking at two time horizons when you're talking about setting goals. One is for the job now that the employee is in. And if you're in the contact center and that's your job now, and you need skill development in that environment, then by all means, that's important to have on the development plan. but also recognizing people's career development aspirations, whether that's, you know, progress up in a role, whether that's sideways moves as people move around the organization to create new opportunities for them. You're probably looking potentially to mix of both goals for development goals for now and development goals for the future. And you know, one of the things I get really excited about with particularly the skills, and I know we will talk about this at some point in the series, skills development toolkits and the way we set them up, is the transparency and the visibility it gives people right across the organization as to, you know, what skills the organization is looking for, even outside of their role now and opening them up to ways of taking charge of their own development to build skills that may not be part of their current role, but might be things they're interested in developing for the future, Ravina.

Ravina Bhatia

I love what you've pointed out there and what's just come up so organically in the conversation. And I'm hoping that people who are listening to us can hear the power of using skills development in the right way to allow for career development, to allow for people to be able to get to where they want to in their careers, because we know that is severely lacking. So there's obviously two clear things that you pointed out there, which is that building skills for now, but also into the future, but also that transparency of which of these skills just because you're in a customer service role right now doesn't mean that there are no skills in that role, in that contact center role, that are not transferable to, say, a sales role. So what is that? What are those common skills that are transferable, as well as what are those new skills that you need to acquire to move into that role? And that's the beauty of, one, goal alignment, but really also the power of using a skills-based approach in your conversations, in your development, right from the way that you're hiring people to the way that you're developing them to the way that you're moving them around. I think there's clearly, it's very obvious from our conversation right now, how it can lend itself to that.

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Michelle Ockers

So I think that's a great point for us to wrap on goal alignment. In the next two episodes, we're going to be talking about two more critical elements of skill development. So I encourage everybody to keep following, keep listening in for more insights and practical tips around skill development. Ravina, we've created a new resource since we last spoke, which I am having added to the show notes for our previous skills development conversations. Let's talk about that new resource, the Before You Begin checklist.

Ravina Bhatia

Absolutely. One of the most common questions that both of us get asked whenever we're talking about this subject is, where do I begin? How do I get started? What is everything that I need to have in place before I actually start this journey or undertake this journey? We've got the answer for you. in the skill checklist. So this really is a list that you can use. It's an actionable, it's an interactive checklist that allows you to go through, reflect on what you already have in place, reflect on what you do need to have in place, but also has prompts for you to go ahead and identify your next steps, your action plan. Doesn't that sound exciting?

Michelle Ockers

It is exciting and there'll be a link in the show notes for that for anyone who would like to download it. The other thing I wanted to put out there as an offer, if anyone missed our webinar, an introduction to skills development and is interested in viewing the recording, DM message either Ravina or myself on LinkedIn and we'll make sure that you get access to view that as well as keeping an eye out for the new webinar series which is kicking off at the end of January next year. Any last words for our listeners before we sign off on this episode, Ravina?

Ravina Bhatia

The only thing that I keep saying is if you don't know where to begin. If you're confused and if you need help to even think through where you want to get started, simply reach out to us. Michelle, we've got our details in the show notes, don't we?

Michelle Ockers

Absolutely. Including a link where people can book in a conversation if they'd like a chat. Fantastic. Okay. Until next time. Thanks, Ravina.

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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.

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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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