

Michelle Ockers:

I'd like to welcome Donald H. Taylor to the Learning Uncut Elevate podcast episode. Don, welcome back.

Donald H. Taylor:

It is a pleasure once again to be here.

Michelle Ockers:

It's always a delight to have a conversation with you. Today we are, of course, talking about the Global Sentiment Survey for 2024.

Donald H. Taylor:

Yeah, incredible though it may seem. 11 years of the survey.

Michelle Ockers:

That's fantastic. Well done on sustaining that as a body of research. And Don, look, I just have this view that everyone in L&D must know who you are, but sometimes I come across people who don't know who you are. So would you like to do a brief introduction and just kind of tailor it around? Oh, see what I did there? Tailor it. Tailor it around the context of today's topic.

Donald H. Taylor:

Thank you, Michelle. And of course, there must be hundreds and thousands of people who don't know who I am. So I'm Donald H. Taylor. I have chaired the Learning Technologies Conference in the UK for the past 25 years. That's probably what I'm most famous for, so it's from 2000. I've actually worked in L&D as a practitioner and done just about everything you can do since the mid 1980s. So I've done classroom training, produced classroom and online courses and so on, all the way up to setting up companies and selling them and being chairman of the board. I chaired the Learning Performance Institute in the UK for 10 years. I now focus on three things, the Learning Technologies Conference, research, like the Global Sentiment Survey, and working with a handful of startups via Emerge Education, which is a VC fund in the UK for supporting new startups in Europe. Key thing for me is that that business of having been in technology and learning since the mid-1980s, means I've got a big perspective. I've got a long-term perspective on things. I hope that means I don't get too excited by the latest shiny thing and I can offer a bit of perhaps even wisdom about what's happening.

Michelle Ockers:

It's interesting that you have that history in the industry. You've got the perspective. And I think very much you keep your finger in the pulse through the research that you do and the insights that you're able to help people to draw from that. So always a great person to have on as a guest. So let's talk about the Global Sentiment Survey. It's been going for 11 years. So let's just start with why do this research? What's the purpose of this research? And a little about how it's done.

Donald H. Taylor:

It started off just as an idea down the pub, to be honest, but very rapidly, just in the first two years, became something that I thought, this idea has legs. And the reason it has legs is that it's got a self-selecting body of people responding to it. So we ask people to respond, and we go out by email and by social media to do that. But it's self-selecting. So the people who

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respond are the people who are excited about technology, and they pitch it, and they want to have their voice heard. So this means it's not representative. Probably the early adopters and the innovators on the Everett Rogers innovation curve. And what happens is, and this is the reason for doing the survey, these people talk about stuff they're super excited about, but very often we can't see that there's much happening around it. But then three years later, yep, we start to see that stuff being used. Maybe two years, three years later, we start to see that stuff being used. It's not the case that everything that people feel excited about goes on to become more widely adopted, but it is the case that everything that is widely adopted was at some point thought of as being exciting by a small group. And those are the things I'm trying to spot. I'm trying to sort out the wheat from the chaff, what's actually going to take off and what's just noise.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. Now you mentioned specifically that these people are self-selecting and they tend to be excited about technologies, but not all of the options in response to the primary question on the survey, which is what's going to be hot in L&D in the coming year. They're not all just about technology, right? So this isn't just a tech survey and what's coming up that people are interested in technology. It's much broader.

Donald H. Taylor:

Thanks for pointing that out. Yes, I try to alternate each year. People choose up to three things from a list of 16, including other, and each year we'll take one thing off and I'll put one thing on. I try to take off and put on a methodology or a technology in alternating years. So this year I put on cohort-based learning, having taken mobile learning off. And last year we took off, I think it was, curation and we put on the metaverse, which was a terrible mistake. If we put the metaverse on a year earlier, it would have been super popular. But after the year that passed, everyone was pulling out of the metaverse and jumping into AI. And of course, last year, the metaverse barely got off the ground at all, especially in Australia, actually, where people seemed very sceptical.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes. So, interesting. I don't want to go down the rabbit warren around cohort-based learning and why it did so poorly as a new entrant. I think that's a conversation for another time, perhaps. But, you know, in some ways it's a little bit predictable in terms of the key headline, right, for this year?

Donald H. Taylor:

Yes, this year, more than ever this year. I mean, look, in case you haven't guessed, listeners, the answer to the question, what will be hot in workplace learning and development in 2024 is AI. Yes, no drumroll needed. What's exciting about this is to get an idea of just how much, to be able to stick a number against the excitement, and also the confusion that people are feeling around AI at the moment in L&D. And the number is pretty big. People are absolutely, I was going to say fascinated. I think it's more than that. I think they are excited and worried by it. And there's lots of evidence around that. 21.5% was the vote for artificial intelligence this year. In all of the previous surveys, to get to number one, you had to have between 10.5% and 13% of the vote. So it's an absolutely enormous vote. And of course, it's accurate. If you look at Google Trend searches for AI for the past 12 months, it's not just that they are high, it's actually they keep getting higher. Interest has gone up progressively since the end of November 2022, when ChatGPT was launched to the public. Since then, it's been going up and it's just kept going each week, sometimes each day. If I'm about to do a presentation, I have to check the night beforehand what's the latest, because if I don't, I'm going to miss something which is just broken on AI. So the excitement

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is there, the reality of the news is there, and the confusion is there because people wonder what on earth am I going to do with this thing.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes. The thing about AI, Don, when you compare it to a range of the other technology options that have been on the Global Sentiment Survey lists over that 11 years, many of those other options are very specific to learning and development. AI is not. It is ubiquitous, not just in our working lives, but in our personal lives. It's something more than just a technology. It's a bigger shift. than just a learning technology, right?

Donald H. Taylor:

It absolutely is. And it's also true, even that, you know, that this, the options are a real mixture. It's not just you're not comparing apples and oranges. You've got a mixture of a whole shopping basket of vegetables and fruit here, none of which is properly comparable. So you've got microlearning, the metaverse, coaching and mentoring. It's a bunch of methodologies, technologies, and so on. I don't worry about that because for me, I want to discover what people are excited about. And if people think it's something else, they can choose other, but it's always about 1% of people or less that do. But yes, artificial intelligence, is dominating people's thinking because it will change the way we live and work and learn. No question about it. The thing is, it's not quite clear yet. It's not that AI suddenly appeared with the rise of chat GPT. It's been around for a long time. But it came into public prominence, and it seemed to be doing something magical. It wasn't, but it seemed to be doing something magical. And I think that sparked off the interest, which then, with subsequent these weekly releases of new functionality that I've been talking about, have just fed people's interest and confusion around it. But it's undoubtedly going to be super powerful, but we're not going to know the true extent of it, I don't think, for at least five years, probably 20 years.

Michelle Ockers:

That's interesting because the technology itself, as you say, it's evolving rapidly, but AI has been with us for decades already, right?

Donald H. Taylor:

Yeah, since at least 1957. So we've been around, we've had it for a long time. If you use Siri, if you use Alexa, you're using AI. When you do your Google searches, you're using AI. So it's been around for a long time and we use it and we become accustomed to it. I think it's moving now from the stage of something that's been used in certain point solutions or something that's going to be an underlying technology that supports almost everything else we do, not everything, but almost everything else we do in one way or another, a bit like electricity. So in the Victorian era, electricity was initially regarded as something quite scary. So Frankenstein is brought to life through electricity. you had the mesmerism, you had people doing tours of the United Kingdom and going to town halls and showing how if they applied electricity to a dead animal it would appear to move and that was scary. When they started putting electricity into buildings for industrial use, it was done on a straightforward substitution method. So you put in a big electric machine where a big steam engine used to be. And then people worked out, actually, it's better to have small electric motors in a variety of small machines. And the way we worked changed. But that whole process took decades. We're going to see the same thing with AI.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes, we have a long way to go with our understanding of what it looks like, shaping it, how to use it. And one of the findings from your report is it's seen as a challenge as much as it is a benefit. So how do you move from people are interested in it and it's a very hot topic that

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people are saying, well, we're thirsty to find out more about it, to the conclusion that it's being seen as much as a challenge as it is a benefit. Where does that insight come from?

Donald H. Taylor:

Well, you're right about the challenge thing. So we asked one obligatory question, which is what's going to be hot next year, and three other questions. Where do you work? Where do you live or where are you based location-wise? And one free text question, what's the biggest challenge in L&D for next year? Now, in the past couple of years, 40% of people have answered that question. But this year, 94% of people answered it, which does indicate that people are concerned. They're concerned about a number of things. I think a lot of it is precipitated by AI technology as a category of answers. And we're able to categorize about 84% of the answers people give us. It was an extraordinary number, it was like 27,000 words of answers that we had, which is like a novel, a short novel. We categorize those into nine categories, and the technology category, which was ninth of the nine categories in terms of the number of people mentioning it last year, was number one this year, driven by AI. But it wasn't just AI. Actual use of the word technology and things around technology, separate to AI, also increased this year. So it's almost as if people's concern about AI has driven increased concern about other things. Meanwhile, the other categories that have always been present in the top three, skills and talent, actually, they were still important this year, but they were less important than last year. It's almost as if people are so focused on AI that they can't think about all the other things they're normally worried about. So it's really dominating people's thinking. Now, you would say, well, of course, sorry, I say, of course, but we haven't mentioned it. It is the first time that something has simultaneously been the thing people are most excited about and the thing people are most concerned about. It's just bizarre. So you ask the question, Don, so what? Right. How do you move from being excited about this to actually getting your hands on and being able to use it? And I think the answer six months ago was just go and play with it. Go and play with chat GPT, see what you can do with it. Lots of people have been doing that. And I think now the answer is go and follow what experiments other people have been doing and replicate those yourself. See if you can use those. Not much point starting from scratch. But if you look at, for example, Ross Stevenson, Ross Stevenson on LinkedIn is endlessly putting out stuff about the use of AI in L&D. And he did a great thing this morning talking about the use of a specific GPT that he's created as a learning and performance support. So you can ask him questions about how can I improve learning performance in my organization, and this GPT will come back with answers. There's two things that happen here when you do this, and I've done this myself, create a GPT. The first thing is it is absolutely amazing. Give it a body of information, and it is like you're talking to somebody who knows, I put a bunch of my writing into it, who knows your work and knows your thinking and feeds stuff back to you. Absolutely extraordinary. The first time you do it, it's mind blowing. And then you realize it's not quite as smart as it might appear to be. It's like a very articulate politician who doesn't quite have all the answers, but is able to convey his answers with a three point list and rhetoric that will carry it through, which we've all seen. Now, the trick is to make sure you put the right data in to your GPT and then, of course, to make sure you ask the questions in the right way, just as you would ask a politician the right sort of questions to get to the truth. So I think play with it. Look at what other people have done playing with it and try to find case studies, if you can, of people who've done actual good stuff with AI in L&D. But those case studies are a bit rarer than hen's teeth at the moment.

Michelle Ockers:

And I know that you are doing some research around that to try to dig out the early examples of good case studies. I will, for the benefit of listeners, I'll be putting together a listening list of the topics on this year's Global Sentiment Survey and where I've got case studies where people have come on and talked on the podcast about their work in different

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areas, which are relevant to each of these topics. But I really have none that are... AI is on the periphery of, because it's been built into some of the tech we've been using for a while in L&D, but it hasn't been kind of the central topic around any of those case studies. So I'm keen to follow some of those, Don. We may need to get you back to talk about what you're discovering as you start unearthing.

Donald H. Taylor:

Very happy to do that because I think the sooner we get the information out there, the better. But there's another implication as well, which we should be aware of. It's not just a question of how L&D uses AI, but how the organization uses it. And one thing I don't think people are paying enough attention to is co-pilots. If you use Microsoft 365, there's a whole bunch of AI built into it, which enables you to work more effectively. That's kind of L&D's job, helping people work more effectively. But now, if you're using Word, for example, you can compare two documents, summarize them, change the tone of how the summary is done, make it jocular, more serious, and so on, all to the length, all within Microsoft Word. Now, this is a great improvement to productivity. You can do great things with Outlook. I think the co-pilot in Excel is a bit more challenging, but you can do great things with these co-pilots as a worker, making you more productive. L&D is nowhere in that process. So what should we be doing there? Should we be giving people top tips on how to use their copilot effectively? Maybe. Should we set up communities where people can share how they've used their copilot and use collaborative learning to support a better spread of good practice throughout the organization? There are lots of things we could be doing, but it's using probably traditional L&D techniques in a new working environment. What we're not going to be doing is writing courses on how to compare documents in Word, because they can do it with the press of a button. So something we used to do has gone, our traditional skills help us do what we always do, which is help people work more effectively.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. There's still plenty of other skills that need developing beyond how to use these new tools, Don, to be more productive and efficient. So I don't think L&D is dead yet. I want to ask about one prediction you have around what will happen with AI in 2024 before we move on to another really important insight from the report, and that is that there will be an anti-AI content reaction.

Donald H. Taylor:

I wanted to call this a backlash and I thought it was probably too strong. I'm convinced it's going to happen. Do you remember the early days of PowerPoint? You're too young, Michelle, probably to remember the early days of PowerPoint, but I can. I'm sure some listeners can do. PowerPoint comes out suddenly. Well, not suddenly, but like a year later, there's a whole slew of articles of people saying PowerPoint is the devil's spawn. It's people are creating. No, not people are creating. It's responsible for these bad presentations. No, it's not. The people are responsible for bad presentations. And guess what? 25 years later, they still are. But the tool gets the blame. You're going to be able to create such an enormous amount of stuff with generative AI, video, audio, and of course, text, that you can bet your bottom dollar everyone's going to be doing it. There'll be people in L&D and people outside L&D creating learning content, which isn't very good. And there's going to be a backlash, I feel absolutely certain. Maybe not this year, maybe not this year, maybe next year, but it's going to happen.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. And I think that speaks to the counterpoint to the argument you were kind of running before around, well, if people have all these tools that they can use to be more productive, you know, with the work they're doing using the Microsoft 365 suite and so on, what is the

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role of L&D? Well, similarly, you actually need a certain skill set to use these tools well to apply them in your domain to create a good quality output. So I think there's still plenty of skills, as I said before, that we'll need developing, that we won't necessarily just be turning to AI to help us develop. Noting, of course, that AI can coach us on all sorts of things if it's got the knowledge about the domain. So I think we could go on for a while on that one, but let's move on to another key headline from the report, a new data focus. What is the point you're making with the section called a new data focus?

Donald H. Taylor:

If you look at the table for 2024, the top five and the table for 2020, they're pretty similar. There are a couple of things which are new on, which are in the top five this year that have come onto the table since 2020. That's re-skilling, up-skilling and skills-based talent management. So those are new. Otherwise, the other three in the top five this year were in the top five last year. What's dropped out is collaborative and social... Not last year, sorry. They were in the top five in 2020. What's dropped out is collaborative and social learning. It's almost like we are... Well, I think we are in a long-term trend of shifting away from a focus on the delivery of content and the methodology around it. towards data and data-supported activities like personalization and skills-based talent management. I think that's a long-term focus of L&D that's shifting that we haven't spotted because a number of things have happened. There's been a pandemic and that absolutely affected the way people were thinking and feeling. And there's been AI, which is like a superstar rocket on a fireworks night or New Year's Eve. But underneath that, you've got all the other fireworks going on. I think the whole firework display is really about data and how we use it, of which AI is a part. And I think that shift towards that as a way of seeing what we do with L&D rather than the business of consulting with the business of cohort-based learning of all the other things which are traditional parts of L&D, those seem to be less important at the moment. We'll see how things shift. I think it's a long-term trend that I don't see it going away, but I'm also always wary that L&D is quite fickle and can change its views from one year to the next quite quickly.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes. And you can't hand everything over to technology, of course.

Donald H. Taylor:

No, absolutely not. We know that at our peril. I'm a firm believer that learning comes first and learning is a process or a series of processes that exist within people. That's what matters. But I think, for me, the issue is that in the past, L&D has seen its role as being creating and distributing content, which is certainly what it was when I started doing stand-up training in the middle of the 1980s. We didn't have the World Wide Web. You got your information from people or from books, and trainers did that. That's still the mindset. There's so much more that we can do to make that more effective, to make the content which we help people get to more effective by using data, But the fact still remains, yeah, that's our job. We shouldn't believe that reporting on numbers is our job. We only look at the numbers and the data in order to do our job better.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. So it's around being evidence informed or data informed. And it is something which I will say in the work I do on strategy with organisations, it's just coming up constantly around utilising data more effectively.

Donald H. Taylor:

What sort of conversations are you having with people about that? What do they want to do?

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Michelle Ockers:

They want to use it right through the value chain for learning and development at different points in the workflow to understand needs in the organization. Where are the skill gaps? What's the data telling us? What data can we use to understand that? They certainly want to use it to shape solutions. They want to use it to be able to evaluate solutions more effectively. So, they're looking right across and even to be able to take data and feed it back into the learning process in those who are more sophisticated. So, it goes right across the value chain. In parallel with that is something very interesting, knowledge sharing and collaborative learning comes up just as often as data.

Donald H. Taylor:

Into conversations you're having?

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, absolutely. And I think the tight labor market is driving a lot of the concern around knowledge sharing and collaboration as well. You have to use what you've got inside the organization better. It's also driving the questions around data and internal mobility because we're having to, you know, we've always been in the business of skilling people, but we're having to take people perhaps without prerequisite skills or look at how can we adapt skills in people from one area to another and do more internal development to support mobility. So I think data helps with that. But similarly, I wouldn't write off the importance of collaborative learning alongside data-driven approaches.

Donald H. Taylor:

I completely agree. And I actually think that collaborative learning to surface the tacit knowledge in organisations, which is so essential to organisational success, is, I would imagine, with a tight labor market, with skills being more important than ever, with human capital being a driver of the value of organizations, surfacing that technology is crucial. And I am amazed that collaborative and social learning is dramatically down this year. Amazed doesn't cover it. I'm actually horrified because I think we are being bamboozled by technology to forget everything you've just said and how important it is. I'm hoping it's going to bounce back next year. We'll see.

Michelle Ockers:

We will see. These things do move around a bit, right? So let's move on to the final part of today's conversation, which is around challenges. And you talked about the staggering number of people actually took the effort to share challenges with you. Why do you think you've seen that leap in people sharing challenges?

Donald H. Taylor:

The whole AI thing has just created this wave of uncertainty across L&D, and this is what's being reflected. So AI sparks it. Yes, people are super concerned about AI. In fact, in answer to the question, what's your biggest challenge this year? 60 people just put in two letters, AI. That's all they wrote. But generally, it was the most popular term. Of all the terms that we searched for, it was the most popular term. But people were concerned about technology generally, not just about AI. And that definitely came out this year. And they were still concerned about the traditional things, which we're always concerned about, even though that was less so this year. So there was a drop down in concerns around delivering skills, a drop down in the proportion, I should say, of people saying they were concerned about skills, a drop down in the proportion of people saying that they were concerned about training. That's always a word that comes up, training/delivery. That whole category was again, a major point of concern this year, but proportionally less because AI was so big. So the

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concerns in many ways remain the same, but they've all been fueled by this confusion and the noise around AI.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. You also mentioned in the report two other concerns which are kind of tied up together, and that's around budget and resources, is something that stood out as well.

Donald H. Taylor:

Well, it's interesting. That's always been a concern, but the ones that have changed most over the three years that we've had this question are technology, obviously, which was number nine last year, number one this year, external factors, which actually has become progressively less important each year, because we've had COVID, then we had war in Ukraine, and that's become less important in people's minds. Obviously, these two things are still with us. The one that's become the only category that's become increasingly important year on year is resources, which is still only seventh out of these nine categories. But it's interesting that the phrase that comes out again and again when people talk about resources is being asked to do more with less. And the constant theme is, I don't have enough time. The people I'm trying to train don't have enough time, and I don't have enough people on my team, and the people on my team don't have enough skills or enough time. So there's this sense that we're always trying to do too much. Now, there may be a way out of this with AI. If you are producing content, perhaps you can get AI to help you, and you can reduce the amount of time you spend on that. Give yourself some time to do some other things. But for goodness sake, if you have 10 hours a week that you're using to produce and manage content. And you can now do that in one hour because AI helps you. Please do not spend the remaining nine hours on producing more content. Nobody will love you for it. Use it to do something different.

Michelle Ockers:

I think we're going to end on that note, Don. I think that is a great spot to put a full stop or a period if you are in America at the end of the conversation. Don, I'm going to encourage people to download the report. It's a really interesting read, as always. And one of the things you've done this year, which I really like, is you've included some conversation starter questions. So you can get together with colleagues at a networking event or pull your team members together, have a look at the data, there's some good conversation starter questions. And really the value in a lot of ways of this survey is to look at what are the topics we need to be talking about and have better quality conversations around those topics.

Donald H. Taylor:

It doesn't give you many answers, sorry, but it does provoke questions. And let's hope that it can be a conversation starter for you over a coffee or a cup of tea or something else at some point in the next few months.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay, so for listeners, I'm going to pop that podcast listening list against all of the topics that are in the survey, in the show notes, as well, of course, as a link to where people can download the report. I'll also, Ross Stevenson is an interesting character, I'll also pop a link to his LinkedIn profile as well as your own, Don. The other thing that I will be popping in by the time this episode is published, Don, you will have done very generously a webinar for us down here in Australia to talk about the findings and also to do a little bit of a spotlight on the findings for Australian listeners. So I will pop a link to the webinar recording for those who are interested in seeing some of the data and hearing some more of the conversation around the data.

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Donald H. Taylor:

It's always great to have that webinar, chat with the Aussies and perhaps the Kiwis as well, talk about how the results have changed locally. And you say it's generous. It is something I'm delighted to do. And I want to thank you for your generosity and your hard work you always put in to rallying the Aussie vote for the survey each year.

Michelle Ockers:

Thank you. It's an absolute pleasure because I like having a good conversation too, Don. Thank you for joining me today. And I look forward to continuing to follow the research that you do and to share that more broadly.

Donald H. Taylor:

Thanks so much, Michelle.



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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