

Michelle Ockers:

Hello, listeners, I hope you're all doing well. I would like to commence, as always, by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the lands on which I sit today as I speak with you, the Brinja Yuin people. I'd like to honour their connection to land, sea and community in the beautiful area of the south coast of New South Wales, where I live, work and play, and also pay my respect to elders past and present and any Aboriginal or Indigenous peoples who are listening to today's podcast episode.

This is a relatively short episode where I want to share a resource with you about something that is dear to my heart, which is about communities as a vehicle for social learning in the workplace, and to share a resource that I created alongside Shannon Tipton and Laura Overton when we were working together in a partnership, which we called Emerging Stronger. At the time, we had a publication partnership with Go One. And one of the resources that we developed and they published was called Cultivating Learning in Workplace Communities, subtitled How to Develop and Nurture Learning that Delivers a Rich Harvest. And there was a fabulous kind of theme about gardening and growing crops, vegetables, and so on that we wound right through this resource.

I'll tell you a little about the resource in a moment, but I wanted to give you a little bit of background about some of the conversations that went on between Shannon and Laura and I, which helped shift the perspective on workplace communities that we brought to this resource and consisted initially largely of Laura challenging the perspective that myself and Shannon, who had worked more with communities of practice, which were deliberately constructed from scratch in organizations. You know, we brought that perspective to this resource when we were originally planning it out. Whenever we created a resource together, we would create first what we called a straw man. Perhaps we should have called it straw person, but anyway, straw man it was, which was a document which would outline the issue or challenge, the need we were trying to address with the resource, underpinning evidence about things like the current state of the challenge that people were facing or opportunity that was presented and also some of the underpinning evidence from learning science about what might work, what might help to address this challenge. And we'd lay out basically an outline of the resource. What was the point of view of the resource? What would it help people to do? How would it be structured? And so on. And in the process of putting together this straw man, I took the lead on this particular resource. We kind of divvied up the roles between us when we created a resource. This was one I took the lead on. And I created the straw man and then Shannon and Laura reviewed it. We got into a lot of debate very quickly about what was really going on at the time in workplace communities or with communities in organizations. And this was two thousand and twenty two we created this resource.

Laura took the perspective that with the increasing adoption of workplace collaboration technology like Microsoft Teams and at the time Slack, there are a lot more communities organically taking root in our organizations and people moving beyond their work team and finding others with whom they share a common interest or purpose. So with this uptake in online technology, there was fertile ground presenting itself for learning professionals rather than creating gardens from scratch and building communities from scratch, to look at where people were already gathered around a common purpose and to look at how they could support and enable connection, sharing, reflection, performance improvement to be taking place in those existing communities. And it really did take quite a while going backwards and forwards to get Shannon and my head around this different take that Laura had, this different angle she was encouraging us to take on it on workplace communities. And I think that is

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what makes this resource so deeply useful is that it's really about meeting people where they're already at, leaning into these spaces and looking at how we can cultivate learning in these existing workplace communities.

So very briefly, we've structured the tool around three phases, if you like, using the gardening analogy. The first is to prepare, to understand and improve community growing conditions. Second is to sow, so to determine what seeds to sow if you want to support learning and performance. The third is to nurture, how to water, fertilise, weed and prune the garden in order for learning to thrive. And the fourth is to harvest, to gather and use the fruits of your labour. Do you like the gardening theme strung through this? I'm pretty confident that would have been an analogy that Laura brought to the table as well. She's very good at coming up with analogies that make things interesting and memorable. So the tool is for anyone within an organization responsible for providing learning solutions that deliver business impact. And it basically gives you, for each of these four phases, a set of questions and tips to help you take deliberate practical action to increase learning and performance improvement by engaging community members more effectively.

So it's especially useful for people who are leveraging workplace community technology in their learning solutions for the first time. So the goal is to help you to encourage people to take responsibility for their own continuous learning, to support them to learn from their work and each other, to improve performance through practice, reflection and collaboration, to build and sustain motivation through connection, accountability and progress, and to highlight and spread improvement. So we've got worksheets for each of those four stages, which have key steps to take in that stage and tips and suggestions for things you can do to improve growing conditions, to improve connection, to seed useful activities based on underpinning learning science, to then nurture, to keep the garden well organized, to look for areas where engagement and learning are happening. And how can you fertilize those to utilize them to help the whole garden to grow more effectively, and how can you make it easier for community members to support each other, and then how do you harvest from that? How do you take insights, improvements, enhanced practices, knowledge assets, harvest those and share those either back within that community or more broadly across other communities.

Fabulous resource and idea. And there's a second part, which is a learning calendar with kind of cyclical activities, helping you to plan out weekly activities as well as specific activities over a 12 week cycle. So it's like a quarterly cultivation calendar, if you like. So I encourage you to get into that. We've also got an appendix called Unearthing Learning Science with a number of key underpinning principles, proven methods to seed effective learning and examples of application. So, for instance, spaced practice. is one principle that there's a solid evidence base for the effectiveness of this to support learning. Application in a workplace community, as an example, is to revisit topics in the online space and live events over time, cycling through them in a quarterly calendar. So rather than simply posting content, set challenges, run activities that provide practice opportunities. So spaced repetition, spaced practice over time. I'll put a link to this resource in the show notes. And if you have any interest in workplace communities, and cultivating learning where people are already gathering around common interests and purpose. I encourage you to take a look at this resource and also to think a little bit about opening your mind to different perspectives on something we may already be doing, and thinking about how can we reposition something like communities in this case, but perhaps resources, for instance, in the creation of resources, how might we reposition our perspective on that? So, for example, it's not all about L&D having to do all the work and controlling it, perhaps it's more about user generated content and how you could lean into that and meet people where they're at with that food for thought. So let me know what you think of this resource, how useful it is, and

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any other resources that you think might be worth sharing via the podcast. Thanks so much for tuning in.



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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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