

Michelle Ockers:

Welcome to another episode of Learning Uncut Elevate. In the spirit of reconciliation, I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community, including the beautiful coastal area that I come to you from today, the lands of the Brinja Yuin people. I'd like to pay respect to elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who happen to be listening to this podcast conversation. And I'd like to welcome Michelle Parry Slater joining us all the way from the UK today. Hi, Michelle.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Hi. Thank you for having me on your show.

Michelle Ockers:

It's a pleasure. I've actually been looking for an opportunity for some time. Of course, our paths have crossed through the global L&D network, through the Learning Technologies UK conference. I think back in the day we probably met on Twitter. Do you think that's possible? Remember that? The good old days, hey, the good old days when that's where we went to develop our network. So, Michelle, would you like to give a short introduction to yourself and the work you do for listeners?

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Well, thank you for inviting me. I am based in the UK at the moment, and I am running a learning consultancy, which I've been doing for 10 years. And we specialize really in helping people to move towards modern ways of thinking when it comes to learning. And a lot of the work we do is based in organization development, organization design, getting the foundations right, so that we then can layer on fantastic learning programs on top of that.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay, so Michelle, the reason we're here today talking compliance is off the back of a post I did on LinkedIn a few months ago about an incident, some comments that someone made, actually a manager rather than an L&D person, about compliance training at a workshop I was running. And their comment was, well, look, it's just compliance training. We just got to suck it up and do it. And I was kind of appalled at that. And when I posted a story about that, you chimed in very passionately with some views about compliance training. So I know you're a bit of a champion in this space. I thought this was a good opportunity, which you jumped at to talk compliance today.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Most people now listening are probably reaching for the off button. Don't do it. We need to talk about compliance. Because that's exactly the response, isn't it? That eye roll. Oh my goodness, I have to do my compliance learning. And that's really not where we should be at all. So yeah, I do feel very strongly. And I was fortunate enough to chair the session at Learning Technologies this year about compliance

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and we really revved up that audience. So I'm hoping that we'll do the same for your audience today.

Michelle Ockers:

So why should people get revved up to use your words about compliance training? Why does it matter?

Michelle Parry-Slater:

I think there's too many reasons. And the first one is the reason we have compliance is because it's about keeping people safe and healthy and legal. Now, why in learning and development do we not think that that's important? Why in our businesses, in our companies, do we not think that's important? And the reason we don't think it's important is because L&D need to step up. We need to be better at making sure that that learning is the best learning that we offer because everyone has to do it. Now, if anybody in sales or marketing, for example, had the entire of their potential customer base going through an activity, they would make that the best activity in the world. It is our shop window. So we need to make that learning the best learning that has ever been seen, because what we're doing is we've got the eyeballs of the audience for at least two or three different compliance sessions every year. And yet Click, click, click, quiz at the end, eight out of 10, tick a box, you're done. Why do we not put more effort into it?

Michelle Ockers:

That's a really good question, isn't it? Do you think we're just kind of a little bit lazy because they have to do it anyway? So it's not like we have to entice them or encourage people to do it because it's mandatory and they're forced to do it. So we think we can get away with sloppy work. What do you think?

Michelle Parry-Slater:

I'm not going to let L&D off the hook, but I am going to give them a little bit of a pause because another thing is that we're lazy. I think it's that our organizations are more obsessed about ticking the box than they are about learning. So our stakeholders will not let us have the creativity or the budget required to actually create something that's amazing. And so we need to push harder. So get off that hook now, you know, L&D, you are on it for this. L&D need to push harder to create something that people are interested in. What I liken it to, and Don Taylor, the chair of the Learning Technologies Conference, calls this exactly the same. It's our shop window. And so in our shop window, we should put our best wares. But in our shop window, what often happens is we just put the boring stuff, the stuff that everyone sees is the e-learning. And what makes it worse is it's not always our e-learning. It's not our wear at all. We bring it in from the outside. Sometimes, to be fair to L&D, we're not even the procurer. We're not the buyer. It could well be somebody else in the organisation that just buys this terrible e-learning. OK, so then let's blame the e-learning companies for creating something that's dull and boring. You know, we can blame everybody, but ultimately, at the end of the day, it is a lost opportunity for learning and development if we don't think that keeping people healthy and safe and legal is the best thing that we do all year.

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Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, that's the first really compelling reason why. And it's not just about making sure that we can show if anyone comes to audit the books that people have gone through training. It's actually about making it impactful, making it work. The compliance shouldn't stop at, have we pushed people through training, but are people doing the right thing in the organization? Are they staying healthy? Are they staying safe? Are they following the code of conduct to create a respectful workplace? And so on. So it goes beyond, as many things do in the learning domain, it goes beyond knowledge to actual application and behaviors back in the workplace, right? We need to bring that lens to it as well.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

So then what that does, Michelle, is it actually helps create a healthy learning culture. Because when you're talking about learning outside of the activity of learning, when you're applying learning to your everyday work, you're helping to create and sustain a learning culture. Now, I know you've had James Woodman on this podcast before, and he's talked about the Code of Conduct at Channel 4. And what they did there was they used a hook. So they had the, is it okay? And that hashtag was plastered all over the place. There were stickers in the bathrooms and it was on the e-learning banner, sorry, the email. It was on the email banners and it was on screen savers and things like that. So once it's all over the place, you're using those techniques for marketing. People talked about it. It just stuck in their mind. Now, one of the challenges I think with compliance learning is we make people read a policy, but then they have to do the heavy lifting and apply that policy to their work. So we are not making it relevant enough in order for the application of that learning. And that sort of cognitive dissonance is where the distance of application will fall down because it's just too hard. People don't really understand the relevance, but if you put in front of your audience, somebody who has fallen down the stairs at work because they were carrying a box the wrong way. Actually, now I'm interested because that's a human story and that's ultimately what we're talking about. The difference between ticking a box, because let's remember Channel 4 were legally compliant, they actually had ticked all the boxes, but the ethos, it's the difference isn't it, the spirit of the law and the letter of the law, And that spirit of the law comes from the human stories. So that's not always too hard to find. If you can speak to a customer who talks about how really great code of conduct impacted them, that's way more interesting than a click next quiz at the end, yes, we're compliant.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. And I've seen that in other examples as well, the idea of using scenarios based on real world incidents to make it realistic. So apart from the episode with James Woodman, which is episode 144, you know, I've had another episode with the National Australia Bank with Deb Van Rensberg about how they reshaped their regulatory learning and they actually draw on real scenarios and they update those scenarios every year. So the scenarios are fresh for people. Multiplex as well. That conversation was only about six months ago. I think episode 123. I'll put links to all of these in the show notes. But they also used real scenarios and examples both in e-learning, which was a precursor to live virtual sessions. And then in the live virtual sessions, which it was about appropriate workplace behaviors and creating a shift in

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the construction industry in workplace behaviors, they actually created a, you know, a psychologically safe environment for people to share their own examples, which really brings it to life, in terms of behavioural change. So I think that, you know, providing stories, using scenarios, making it realistic is certainly a way of improving compliance training. What are some of the other ways in which compliance-related training often falls down? We've talked about the old tick-in-the-box learning about reading too much policy. What are some of the other key ways you think compliance training lets our organisations and our people down at the moment?

Michelle Parry-Slater:

I think that nobody in the organization gives it enough weight and therefore enough time. So it becomes something that's on the to-do list. It doesn't tend to bubble into that urgent and important box. And so it just sort of sits there and languishes. And so, you know, so many hours are spent from sort of people, profession, HR, people and culture, learning and development, sending out dashboards and chases to managers. And that's just a whole waste of time. If that time was invested in actually marketing that learning more effectively, helping people to understand why it needs to have the way, you know, it's only here to keep you legal and safe and healthy. Why wouldn't we want to invest time in that? So I think there's a bit of pressure that needs to go on managers in order to help us to deliver on this target. But there's also this symbiotic relationship. Managers will only promote stuff that's great, that's good, and that people want to and can easily apply. So we need to be better and they need to be better as well. I think that this issue of time, you know, there's no time for that. If your managers are saying there's no time for you to be safe, I mean, what is it even that? That just is, it's crazy.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. Part of the challenge, I think, is relevance, right? And we've talked about scenarios and stories, but the number of times you see and may well have experienced yourself, as I have, people being pushed through stuff that they don't need. I mean, I've had to do in certain organizations safety related training that is talking about environments that are never even visited in those organizations, let alone worked in. And when there is just this overwhelm, often we hear there's just so much content compliance related content that is being assigned to people that they're struggling to make the time for it, particularly if it's not relevant and they can't see why they're doing it.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Yeah. I totally agree. That relevancy is one way that we can help with the time issue. Similarly, we can be clear on not everyone doing everything every year, but actually how often do they need to do it? And that's about keeping better records, because not everyone needs to learn how to pick a box up safely every year, potentially. And if they do, can't we ask them some questions about it in the first place so that they don't need to get through the hours worth of e-learning? but they can actually skip it because they've demonstrated they have that knowledge already. So there are options open to us.

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Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, there certainly are options. I think there's a governance issue in there as well, right, Michelle, in terms of who gets the say, who in the organization is making the decision about so-called compliance or mandatory learning being pushed out to people and who is challenging that decision. And also the whole idea of keeping a map like some sort of map or central way of looking at all of the stuff that's hitting people at different times of the year. So I know Deb Van Rensburg in the episode with National Australia Bank talked about the process they went through, which I've heard many other forward thinking L&D teams have gone through with their stakeholders of setting up a compliance governance group of some sort to make collective decisions about whether something really needs to go out to people and what sort of audience it needs to be prepared for and distributed to. Have you seen that in organisations as well as an improvement?

Michelle Parry-Slater:

The important thing is who's governing the compliance is often not L&D, like you say, and they just want the list of names with a box ticked. But actually, we're still looking at it from their angle. What if we were looking at it from the other angle, and the outcomes driven angle? What are the outcomes? So I want to be collecting data around more reporting of incidents or more reporting of, I don't know if this is legislation everywhere, but in the UK, anti-bribery and corruption, you know, we can't take presents. So let's just the presents are arriving, the gifts are coming. So let's just report the gifts. It's not that you can't have that bottle of wine or that box of chocolates. We just need to know about it. And so we can monitor that this same supplier is giving everyone a lot of wine. This is not good for an organization. So we need to look at it from the outcomes focus rather than the inputs focus is really one piece of advice I'd suggest.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, absolutely. And I guess with that in mind, compliance. learning, I'm going to call it learning instead of training. One of the other traps is treating it as a one-off event, once done and that's it, as opposed to the more campaign style of approach, which was something we did see in the conversation with James Woodman, which was a case study you brought to me, thank you very much, through your book, the L&D Handbook. But if you really are serious about doing the right thing for your people and organization in terms of compliant behaviors that meet regulations, which really is what we're talking about here with compliance, it's not that you outsource all of that to the training team and tick the box and that it's done. You know, you have ongoing communication campaigns, ongoing reinforcement. You look at behavioral change and learning transfer the way you would any other significant behavior program in the organization, right?

Michelle Parry-Slater:

That's the key, isn't it, Michelle? Any other learning program in the organization because we do look at compliance learning differently and we shouldn't. And I think that that's really my campaign about this is that we shouldn't, we should treat it. It's literally the most important learning in any organization. It's more important than how to sell your product better. It's more important than relationships and organizations.

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Okay, I might say it's equal weight to that. But it's about keeping people healthy and safe and legal. It's important.

Michelle Ockers:

It's part of your license to operate, right?

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Yes, it is. And we just don't give it the weight that it needs. And so the campaign learning approach, I think, is a really good one for compliance, because one of the challenges is it's stuff that doesn't happen very often. And because it's stuff that doesn't happen very often, we forget about it. So actually, it's how do we learn it in the moment? Now, nobody, nobody is going to read your policy. Nobody. Let's face this truth. The policies are written because we have to have them. But what's the essence of the policy? I've got a book case full of books. Now, I've read them. And I've loved them, but I can't tell you word for word what any of them say, even my own. You know, sometimes I read my own and I go, wow, I wrote that. Wow, that's amazing. And that's me as an author. So nobody's going to remember, you know, 3.1.6 sentence in the policy in the moment. So how do we make that relevant? How do we help people remember? And this is space learning practice. This is neuroscience. These are the things that we apply to our relational or our behavioral change learning, we need to apply the same to our compliance-based learning.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. Now, you raised a really good point earlier, which is around the fact that we, as in L&D, don't do this alone. It's a much bigger we, right? We've got stakeholders that we work with. And I have seen L&D leaders who genuinely are pursuing improvements in their compliance learning approaches in the organization and have struggled with stakeholder engagement to the point where I once had someone working in a big telco here in Australia say to me that they had actually sat down with owners of the different compliance areas and pulled out the legislation with them and said, show me where it says XYZ. like really challenged. And, you know, she got really courageous and just said, we can't keep doing this to our people. And it's not helping you either stakeholder. So there's quite a lot to do this. Well, there's quite a lot that we need to draw on in terms of our stakeholder engagement skills as well. Right.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

A hundred percent. A hundred percent. I absolutely love that story because the perception and the reality and the truth or maybe, you know, there's a lot of assumption around this, we must make people read policies. There's a story I've heard at conference many years ago, which made it into the book because I loved it so much it was an oil company and this really is an example of how you must push back to your stakeholders and work with them well. So the IT department of this of this oil company came to L&D and said, we must run an e-learning about cybersecurity because everyone's opening phishing emails. Everyone in a global oil company. Everyone. Really? Everyone? So what the L&D department did was they said, It can't be everyone. And if we push everyone through a cybersecurity e-learning program, do you know the cost of that? This is not free, actually, to push

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everyone, even if we have the content, just the time it takes for everyone to do it. But there's not just a financial cost as well. There's this impact on learning culture. There's a cost of opportunity that's lost. There's so many costs involved in it. You're just going to annoy everybody. And the next time you need to do any other learning, they're going to be like, oh, you know, the eye roll stuff goes on again. So what they did was they took a data and evidence-led approach. So they asked the IT department to put out a fake phishing email, and they followed the data. So they could prove it wasn't everyone, and they like all good data-led activities, they had a hypothesis of who it might be, And they thought maybe it might be new people coming into the business. Not at all. The data demonstrated that actually the new people coming to the business had most recently gone through some cyber security training as part of their onboarding. It wasn't them. It wasn't the people at the top end who were very close to the risk because their whole lives were wrapped up in risk. It was actually the middle managers who were comfortable. They'd been in the organization for some time. probably didn't have quite so much to do as compared to others. So they were there opening all of their emails. And so they targeted the learning just at them. They targeted, if you open the fake phishing email, you then got an automatic response to push you through to some e-learning about not opening fake phishing emails and cybersecurity. Now, for me, that is such a great story of an example of following the data of not annoying your entire workforce, of making it relevant, of targeting the right people. Now, you might think, well, they're a global oil company, of course, they can do that. But it's not that difficult. It's not that difficult anymore, to follow that type of activity through to fruition. And so if we can target more effectively, actually, then we will be will be more effective in all of our learning because you know, that that group of middle managers that it's almost like a sort of sit up in your chair moment for them. Wow, I did that. And I didn't kind of realize and okay, well, I'm grateful for now being in this learning experience.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes, yes. I'm smiling because I once had one of those emails that I clicked on when I shouldn't have clicked on it and I had to do the training. So, I've been one of the people who ended up being targeted, just moving too quickly and not thinking carefully enough. So, that was a good lesson.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

That's the point. When you make people feel something, when they have an emotional reaction to any learning experience, then it sits with them for much longer. You know, I once, in VR, burnt down a place I was in because I picked up the wrong fire extinguisher. There was a fire and I was supposed to be putting it out and all the rest of it. I still feel like, I still feel bad that I burnt down someone's fake VR place.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes. And there's an example of an activity where you actually got to have an experience and got to practice. So the practice piece is really important as well. Not all training needs to be done by e-learning either. You know, there's nothing wrong with and you can keep compliance records around. You know, if you're working in a warehousing environment, you know, having someone do demonstrations and then get people to actually use equipment, lift boxes, you know, do it in the real world.

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You do have the challenge though, with compliance training, even if you get quite targeted and make sure only the people who really need to be doing it are doing it, particularly as you end up in larger organizations, there's a scaling challenge. So how do we address, what have you seen that works for addressing that scaling challenge while still providing a positive experience and a good outcome for the business?

Michelle Parry-Slater:

So one of the people that spoke in the session that I chaired at Learning Technologies was from a major UK retailer. And they were talking about how they switched their compliance training into micro learning, so very, very small. And of course, with a retailer, a lot of the people that needed to take the learning were on the shop floor. They were on the tills, they were, you know, they're not in an environment where they're sitting at a computer. So it became quite a challenge. And so they looked really hard at what was the environment that people were in? What was the opportunity? What was the time opportunity? How can we ensure that people get their manager's permission to sort of come off the floor and get involved in that? And so it was like a, I guess it was a whole campaign, but what I thought was really important with what they did was they were very clear about what, what are we trying to achieve here? So they gave a definition of both the learning and the outcomes. Why are we here? So making sure that everyone understood the drivers for the behavior change that was required, you know, the reason why we were doing the compliance in the first place. They also looked at their technology capabilities. Were they in a platform which could host micro learning? The idea being that they'd be off the shop floor for a very small amount of time and therefore, you know, managers could rotate a whole team through within a short amount of time. But what was also really key was they shared case studies. And those case studies were real stories from within their organization. And I think that they're just so much more powerful. So when it comes to scale, yes, you can roll out externally purchased e-learning, but we've talked already about how that really isn't the answer. So the personalization piece, you know, really making it relevant, making the activities quite short, I thought that they did a really good job. And they won awards for it, which they deserved to win awards for it. And they did a good job of kind of exploding it, if you like, making it more relevant to everyone. But then, of course, they were talking about it. And that's definitely the key, especially for scale. It just becomes normal. This is what we do. We talk about this stuff, find a way to make it part of the ongoing conversation.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. And of course, technology is critical to scaling in large organizations. So using it well, you gave the example before of people being asked some questions, particularly if it's a refresher as part of a recurring requirement, ask them some questions up front, but don't make them so easy that they don't demonstrate anything. Give them a scenario and ask them some questions and then being able to branch them. I mean, the ultimate is if you've got an adaptive learning platform that can actually do that sort of personalization real time as people move through the learning. And there was an example we had on episode 57 of safety training for Danish road workers where they introduced an adaptive learning platform. And

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without reducing any of the content or removing content, the average time for people to get through the knowledge component dropped from eight hours to a median of less than three hours with everyone getting through it to a level of proficiency before they went to the practical training. So I know that you may not have an adaptive learning program, but even with simple e-learning, authoring tools, you can do branching based on scenarios and just get people to do the stuff they really need to do, right?

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Yeah, and you can make it really impactful. Lifesavers.org is a great example of branch video where it's talking you through what to do in the case of an emergency if somebody has to have a heart attack. And I killed the guy, I made the wrong choices. And again, another thing that I remember and I feel, and so branched stuff, video or activities can be a way round finding out, whittling down, do they really know what they're doing or do they not? So you don't have that sophisticated technology if you don't want to or you don't have access to it. Ultimately, it's like any learning that we offer. It's got to be the right activities for the right people at the right time, delivered in the right way. And just don't think we question ourselves enough when we trot out, because we're looking at it from the wrong end. We're looking at it from, let's tick the box. And it shouldn't be, it should always be, why do we have to do this in the first place? So your example earlier of the person saying, you know, show me the, the legislation, you know, really understanding why are we putting this learning out there, I think is going to help us to decide what is the best activity that we can put out that can really help the people in our organisation understand that this is really important.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, so it almost feels like the compelling reason to get this right is twofold. One is because you want to look after your people in terms of safety, in terms of respect for workplace behaviors, in terms of keeping everybody on the right side of the law and the business on the right side of the law and doing the right thing by your customers. There's a stack of good reasons in themselves related to the compliance training. But also you use the term the opportunity cost and the impact of learning culture before. And what it boils down to is if we just adopted the same mindset as we use to approach other learning and the same evidence informed practices to get it right and create a great learning experience, which delivers business impact through behavioral change. You know, you can't go too wrong.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

It's our shop window. We need to put the best stuff in the shop window. Stop putting the tatty old rubbish and thinking that, you know, when people don't come to your leadership program because they go, oh god yeah learning that's just click next boring oh you know but actually we want them to say wow I really enjoyed and I really remember the experience that when I did my health and safety training and my anti-bribery and corruption training or my safeguarding training yeah I can't wait to get involved in this leadership program or whatever it is that you're trying to push out there it's no wonder they don't want to come

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Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, people want to feel respected as well, right, as adult learners. And, you know, if we're for whatever reason pushing out click next day learning, they don't feel respected at all. No, no.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

We're going to have all of the e-learning providers on our back. But you know what? So they should. And they should be questioning themselves because they're putting this stuff out there and they're letting people buy shelves full of compliance, you know, make yourself compliant here, fill your LMS with all of our stuff. They've got to take responsibility to make it better. And we've got to be better discerning customers when we buy it.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. Absolutely. So there's the call to action. When I share this on LinkedIn, I'm going to ask people to share their great examples. And we'll put out some of those as well. And I think it's just through showcasing what is possible. And you've shared several good examples there. I think that helps people to be able to mount the case as well.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

We had a few at learning technologies, and you know I asked people to share in the audience and there were some stories around how they're doing things differently so yeah let's get those out there Michelle because it doesn't have to be the boring eye rolling, oh my goodness how you know how do I have to do this again. type of experience.

Michelle Ockers:

Not at all. Not at all. And I think there's plenty of people who do want to do a great job with it, Michelle, but it's just like the getting the momentum and getting the buy in. So we're going to encourage everybody to take action on that. And if your efforts to improve your outcomes with compliance learning in your organization have kind of waned because you've just gotten tired of pushing the barrow, fight the good fight, because it's absolutely worth it on so many fronts.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

And I'm here behind you, like, get in touch. I really want to shift the dial on this. It's been so long that we've just not put enough effort into understanding how this is important.

Michelle Ockers:

OK, and I'll pop a link to your LinkedIn profile in the show notes if anyone would like to follow up and get in touch with you. But I'm sure there'll be plenty of conversation on LinkedIn about this. Thanks so much Michelle.

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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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