

Michelle Ockers:

Welcome to today's episode of Learning Uncut Elevate with Michelle Parry Slater. Before we begin our conversation, I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and their connection to land, sea and community. Welcome, Michelle.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Thank you for having me back.

Michelle Ockers:

It is a pleasure. You're a practical person, Michelle. You're very pragmatic. And I know that your book, the Learning and Development Handbook, is full of practical guidance. And today we're going to focus all of that practicality on the question of L&D budgets, because they are always under pressure. And it feels there's a lot of talk at the moment. I don't know if we talk ourselves into this. I don't know what you think about that. But there seems to be a lot of talk around things being tight with resources and budget. Are you picking that up?

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Oh, absolutely. I mean, at the moment, the cost of living is not just for people, but it is obviously for organisations as well.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes, it is. So let's flip it on the head. Rather than seeing this as a limitation, a constraint, what if we viewed it as an opportunity to think a little bit differently about how we design, deliver, enable learning and development of our people in our workplaces and improvement of performance. So there's an obvious place to start, which I think we must start with, Michelle, and that is if you have a limited budget, how are you going to figure out what to spend it on? The question around prioritisation.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

For me, it's about getting to know your business. If you don't know what the priorities are in your business, you could potentially be spending your money on absolutely the wrong things. So business alignment is the number one. So if you speak the language of your business, if you understand what motivates people in your business, if you understand what they measure, then you can spend on things that are relevant to them. So people don't really care about learning and development. I'm sorry to say, so if you work in L&D, people don't care about what we do. What they care about is what they're paid to care about. And we need to care about the same things. And that means that we know we're spending the money on the right stuff rather than we're guessing we're spending the money on the right stuff. So if we really align to the business, that's the first place. The other thing that gets us to do is it gets us to sneak into their budgets. So we may have an L&D budget, but most organisations have got budgets within the organisation in the different departments. And if we can tap into their budgets as well, because we're doing things that they

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want to spend their money on, then it actually increases our opportunity. So we need to be able to talk about the value we bring. We need to be able to talk about the benefits of learning and development. I always say that if we're not learning, if you're not moving forward with learning, you're actually moving backwards because your competitors, if they are investing in their people, will overtake you. So it's a strong argument to be aligned to the business, to demonstrate value, to understand why we need to spend, And if we don't shout about our value enough, people will just make an assumption. They'll think L&D is that compliance thing that we need to do. And, you know, I've talked about compliance before and how I think it needs to be the showcase and the best learning that we do. And if we're spending money on things that people want, I think it really benefits.

Michelle Ockers:

It does. And I like the way you position that around the budget and what can we get into their budget, because if they're willing to invest in it, then it truly matters to them. And I've often seen L&D teams in smaller organisations, or not just smaller organisations, but generally, talking about wanting to own the L&D budget. And, you know, that will give them more control over how it's spent. But I think there's some practical wisdom to your suggestion there about getting stuff put into other people's budgets, because that can increase your access to resources. I really like that. Thank you.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

It might shock you to hear that when I was a global head of learning, I didn't have a budget at all. I only ever could tap into other departments' budgets. Consequently, I had to make really strong business cases for why we were doing what we were doing. And it made me a better practitioner actually. I think we can be lazy, especially when we're in the corporate world where we want to spend our budget rather than actually spend it wisely. So I've done a lot of work in the third sector, and in the third sector, they get super creative because they don't have any budgets, there's no money there. So they get that sort of creativity. And it's because we're really keen to demonstrate how do we help people achieve their goals and how do we help people achieve the goals that they have, not the goals that we think they need. Budget holders really need to understand where's the money going and what value is it bringing.

Michelle Ockers:

I think the other perspective here is that if a different area of the business or business function is paying for the development initiatives, they might be less likely to treat L&D like a vending machine and just order courses because it's not coming directly, the costs of that aren't coming directly out of their back pocket. Although there's always the investment at the time of their people. So for anyone who's ever complained about being an order taker or treated like an order taker or a vending machine, tapping into other people's budgets, I think could really help with that.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Yeah, well, it stops us making excuses, doesn't it? I mean, if we're putting on programs that nobody's coming to, there's lots of reasons why that could be

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happening. And what I've done before is I've actually internally invoiced. So I've put a cost to people not coming and they cancel last minute and I'll send them an internal invoice and say, you know, this is the cost of you not turning up for something that you commissioned. Very blind, you know, always doing work that people want, we're not doing work that we're guessing they want, we're doing work that we know that's what they want. And suddenly when there's a number attached to it people are a little bit less likely to cancel at the last minute and deprioritise investing in their people. But again, for me, all of this goes back to making sure that we're demonstrating our value by talking about the same goals, the same things that are important to that business. Nobody wants to put 20 people on a training course and the feedback that comes was, well, the biscuits were tasty or the lunch was great. They want to come back and go, this is going to take on that promoter score from six to eight and we can say we've done that, that's what L&D has offered you as value, this is why we're partnering with you and working alongside you and using your budget wisely, that's the ideal scenario in my book.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, fantastic. You mentioned, what did you call it, the third sector?

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Oh, is that not a global word?

Michelle Ockers:

I know you've recently arrived in Australia from the UK. I think we are more likely to say not for profit or NFP, but I understand what you're talking about. You're talking about, you know, charities. And being inspired by some of the creativity you've seen in that sector, in those organisations. So what are some ideas you can share from what you've seen there around innovative low cost or no cost strategies that you've seen work well?

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Brilliant. Well, the language thing is catching me out so many times. So thank you for the education today. I appreciate it, Michelle. But with the third sector, with charities, with not-for-profits, necessity is definitely the mother of invention. And so when you've got a lot of money and everything looks like a course, because you've got the ability to spend it, you'll often outsource it to a provider. But when you've not got a lot of money, nothing looks like a course. Everything looks like, well, where can I beg, borrow, and steal? And there is so much already out there. So when it comes to content, for example, I question why anybody should be creating content these days. There is so much content. And our role in L&D then becomes, how do we curate great content? How do we know where to go for that fantastic content? And how do we layer the context onto the content? Because it's not just about providing the information. It's about providing the information in a way that your people in your organisation understand. How if we leave our learners, the people that interact with us, to interpret and apply the content, then actually we're not doing our job. We need to help them to do that piece of application because that's where the learning happens, right? That's where they sort of synthesise it to their reality. So one of the things that I see third sector doing really well is networking. They share resources,

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they know people, they get to know people. There's no sort of proudness around not knowing and so there's fantastic WhatsApp groups for example that a lot of charities belong to, there's networking communities, And there's organisations in the UK, like the charity learning consortium, so it's a group where people belong and they sponsor my segment on learning now TV, which is great because what that means is that we can put content out that's sort of got a charity lens on it. And Learning Now TV in and of itself is a fantastic free resource to absolutely everybody in the learning world. So hanging out with good people, that's one way in which the third sector really benefits. But when it comes to that sort of synthesisation, that understanding of here's some content and it's great because it's been shared with me by people I trust. I've not just scraped it off the web, you know, making it make sense for your organisation goes back to what we talked about earlier. If I know my business, if I know what's important to them, then I can take that content and I can add that layer. Now that layer probably needs to sit somewhere, and so that's where it can get tricky because there's an assumption, isn't there, that people need a system. They need a learning management system or a learning experience platform or some system to hang it onto, they don't. We share loads of stuff by WhatsApp. We could share loads of stuff on SharePoint. It's called SharePoint, that's what it's there for. So for a cost-effective perspective, it depends what you want to do with it. Now, SharePoint website, intranet, those types of things are great places to host stuff. But what you can't really do that easily is check for engagement. So you don't know who's looking at it, you don't know necessarily how they can access it or how often or which bits of content are more interesting. So then we need to get good at things like Power BI and reporting. And these are tools that are available to most organisations because they'll have a Microsoft suite or a Google suite. So we've got access to these types of tools. It then comes down to upskilling and reskilling us as L&D. We become curators of content. We become great networkers and we come tech wizzos. I'm not sure I'm personally there yet because the tech's changing all the time. But if you have the curiosity, you can follow and learn this stuff. It's freely and easily available on the web to just say, how do you pull a Power BI report? How do you scrape data? All of that stuff's available to us for free.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. I want to go back to curation for a moment. So I will share in the show notes a previous Learning Uncut episode. This is from way back in 2019, episode 35 with Westpac about their approach, their very thoughtful approach to curation, where they didn't create any new resources, any content. But they would each month put out a new curated pack for people to learn about a particular topic, and they would keep their finger on the pulse as to what was happening in the business and make it something topical, something that people were working on or working towards at the time. And they presented in a really visually appealing way, created some reflection questions around it, some here's what you might try in the workplace kind of questions. So when you talk about layering the context, I think it's a really thoughtful approach.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

I've seen that before, as you describe it there from Westpac. I worked for a chocolate organisation, one of my clients, and that was a great gig, I have to say.

Michelle Ockers:

Oh, I was just going to say.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

My kids loved it, that's for sure. But what they did really well was they sent out a newsletter every couple of weeks. It was the L&D newsletter, and they curated content based literally on what was happening in the business for those two weeks. So when you've got that amount of relevance, people engage with learning. And that platform that they had the newsletter sort of fed into. So it got footfall to their learning management system as a way of sort of accessing. And it's that marketing piece, isn't it? At the end of the day, we can borrow from other departments, other disciplines, other ideas. How do they get their words out? How do they get their messages to people? And that was really working for the chocolate organisation. I think we get too hung up on 'it's got to be a course', 'It's not learning', 'it's not formal'.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes, or it's got to be on a learning platform.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Yeah, it's got to be somewhere.

Michelle Ockers:

It's got to have the label learning on it somehow.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

I totally agree. But actually, to just knit back to the not-for-profits, I'm learning the lingo, see, Michelle, the not-for-profits, one of the things that I see they do really well is, because they have limited budget, is they spend it really, really wisely. So instead of sheep dipping, do you have that phrase here?

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. I have dipped sheep. I went to an agricultural high school, I've done it.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Okay, literally sheep dipping. The idea of putting everyone through a sheep dip to e-learning, for example, because it's cheap to buy that, so everyone needs to go through it. The cost may be cheap, as in the dollar cost may be cheap, at least I'm still not talking about pounds, the dollar cost may be cheap, but the actual cost to the organisation from a cultural perspective is huge. Because if you don't need to go through that, the next time I want to put you through any learning, you're like, oh, here we go again, stuff I don't need, stuff that's not relevant to me. Whereas actually, if you were, for example, to say, well, that's our finer amount of money, we don't have a lot of money, let's target who really needs it. You could, for example, put coaching in as a solution. If it's for, you know, just a few people coaching, yes, it's

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very expensive. But if you're targeting your learning to the right people, that is going to make a big difference to the organisation. It's going to really shift some behaviours, shift some knowledge or skills, then what a great way to spend that money without that sort of cost to the culture, without that disappointment to everybody who's being sheep-dipped. And what an investment. People who are getting coaching, especially if they're really junior, because it's usually reserved for the managers and the leaders, then actually they feel really valued. So it uplifts everybody. If you're seeing, you know, your colleagues be invested in in that way, then there's more than just the dollars here that's at stake.

Michelle Ockers:

That's true. Do you remember what 2012 was the year of? It was the year of the MOOC. Do you remember MOOC?

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Yeah. I facilitated a few of those in my time. Yeah. MOOCs are fantastic.

Michelle Ockers:

Well, and now we're kind of familiar with online platforms like Udemy, Coursera, edX, Future Learn. Where if you don't want a certificate, you can enroll for free. So we actually use these. And when I was at Coca-Cola Amatil, we use some MOOCs, but what we did was we created conversation and application guides to go with them. So the idea was you didn't do them on your own. You did them with a small pod of people or maybe as a whole team. And there was a conversation and application guide, which would get you to have a conversation. Maybe you meet for one hour a week. whilst you're going through this because you don't have to complete their assignments. It's just a way of getting access to what is often well-crafted content. And you have a conversation using this guide that helps you to explore how does this apply in my context? What's one thing I might do based on this? So again, that idea of layering context around curation.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

You're describing to me, what I'm hearing there is community of practice and they are the best ways to get free peer sharing going because a lot of the time the knowledge is in your organisation, you hire good people, like why would you hire, you know, the wrong people in your organisation assuming you hire good people and your recruitment team are doing their job then why are you not putting people in a room together, virtual or real, and sharing that knowledge, getting that knowledge out of each other's heads? Now, part of the challenge was years ago, knowledge was power. That's what has got us promotions, and we would hold on to it. But those times are long gone now. The power comes from your ability to share what you know, and empower others to share what they know and be curious about what they know. So community of practice is hugely powerful. Using your internal experts in that way, our role in L&D then becomes, of course, the setup of those communities. They do need a little bit of massage, a little bit of encouragement. They need that sort of the confidence to be able to share with each other. But it's also about helping our internal experts to be good at teaching. They're not always good at teaching. That's not their job. Their job is to whatever expertise they have, but we can help

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them to understand how to adults learn. How do you get your point across? How do you do as much listening as you do talking? those kinds of things. So then you can set up lunch and learns, or you can video them and put them on your SharePoint page. You can help them to give talks. If you've got a really great sales guy, who's really fantastic at closing deals, get them to do that, demonstrate that, how do they do it? And so this is one of the most important, I think, ways of getting the context. And it's free, it's right there, it just takes time.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. And a little bit of scaffolding and shaping, right? I just keep remembering all of these great podcast episodes, which illustrate some of this stuff. I did an episode with New South Wales Department of Health. Kath Hume was the key contact there. And she was tasked with developing the workforce planning capability of the workforce planners who were spread out across New South Wales in different regional areas, doing similar roles, but not connected to each other. And what she ended up doing was she shaped a community of practice where she got them to share their knowledge and to shape the process that was going to be used and improve the process, which is a lot of what this is about, right? Sharing practice, shaping process, looking for improvements, And one of the workforce planners joined that conversation. Leigh Elligett was her name. And I remember her saying, it took me a while to realise that there was no training program, that we were the learning, that we were learning together and shaping this. So it's a really nice example where maybe you don't have an expert, but you have expertise and knowledge spread right across the network across your people. So perhaps one of the things we can do is just help people to find the right people to have better conversations.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

I absolutely love that. That whole experiential piece, I call it meta-learning, being in the thing is the thing. When you sort of zoom out from it, you realise actually we've been learning all along. And before we had formal training, before we had anything, just human beings, how did we learn how to set fire? How did we learn to build a wheel or whatever? We copied each other. We've done this forever. It's how babies learn, it's all the way through. And so we can put scaffolding and formalisation around that. Things like action learning sets, for example, so where somebody brings a challenge and others ask questions, or even techniques like the fishbowl, where you're having a discussion and it sparks thoughts in others. That can be super useful as well. So there's lots of tools that are out there available to you and I like to use things like Miro and Mural, so you can co-create together and you can put frames around the conversation so the conversation becomes a little bit more useful than perhaps just a free form chat. Even teams now have a whiteboard that do these types of things. So if you are a Microsoft house, they've done what they always do at Microsoft. They've got all the best tech from elsewhere and brought it in house. So we can, you know, you could, for example, put a load of ideas down, upvote those using, you know, thumbs up or emojis. And then those are the things that then become the topics for discussion. So it's all really for me about encouraging better quality thinking in your organisation, building in reflection time to your programs, building in regular thinking opportunities, even opportunities like, what did I learn last

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week? Which is something you could build into your team meetings. So learning becomes just very ordinary, very normal, the thing we do. And to your example earlier, you know, with Kath's team, they didn't realise they were learning. That's because of they're learning culture. And then that's when you're really rocking. And I think when we get out of that mindset is, learning equals formal, then we'll do a lot more with what we've got.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. And recognise where we are learning as we're working. I did a body of work, which some listeners may remember, called Emerging Stronger with Shannon Tipton and Laura Overton, which started in COVID, but we continued it for two or three years. And one of the resources we produced was called the L&D Playbook for Engaging Busy Managers. And it was a set of nine different types of plays, things you could do either with L&D there or managers on their own that you could provide like a simple one sheet guide, how to run a power hour with your team or a reflective session once a month with your team to extract learning, to look at how you could support each other, to learn through work, to support practice, you know, over the coming months. So there were nine of these ideas. So I'll add that as a resource as well, because if it costs nothing to equip managers with something like this, with some simple approaches that they can use to develop their people as they work.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

I think it's a brilliant idea. And I love the fact that what you're doing there is leveraging free content to support people who normally don't get involved in learning. They kind of think that's our job. They push their people to us when actually I think people development is absolutely fundamental to the role of a people manager. That challenge we have where technical experts are promoted to manage people, that they're different skillsets, people management and technical expertise. So helping those technical expert managers to be better at the people skills through resources like that. It's just really fantastic. Pointing them to example, free webinars. There's so many free webinars. Now you've got to sort of, there's always the sell. Most people, you know, there's no free lunch and all of that, but the sell aside, there's useful information shared. And that's where, back in the early days, I met a load of people on webinars like the learning and skills group webinars. And I've met people in the chat that I then sort of followed on LinkedIn and Twitter back in the day. But this is where you can sort of leverage into that social media side of things and networking through social media. LinkedIn is fantastic for that now. The communities on LinkedIn, the groups on LinkedIn, you can generally find other people who have got the same challenges that you have. What are they using? What are they talking about? Keeping your ear close to the ground really with all of that stuff.

Michelle Ockers:

And we can do that on behalf of our workforce as well. For instance, if part of our workforce work in, let's say a supply and demand planning function, actually going out as if we were a supply demand planner and finding communities, finding resources, showing them how to access these communities outside of the organisations, like a learning concierge kind of service.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

It's a beautiful service. I think it's imperative to what we're doing. We need to get out of our L&D bubble anyway. It helps us to, we started with us, understand the language of your business, understand what makes them tick, why are they interested in that? You need to be interested in that too. And when I see L&D in companies who are really flying, they're really doing a great job. They're embedded where learning is not as a nice to have, the first thing that goes when there's economic hardship, but they're really partnering with organisations, that's the sort of thing that they're doing. They're being useful in a way that the teams need them to be rather than sitting over here in the corner, banging the drum about courses that they can put you onto. They're just embedded really into the business. And they're understanding like, where do I go? Who are the go-to people in the industry? Who are the people that they should be following in that industry? And they're pointing people towards that. Now we need to do that for ourselves as L&D professionals. We need to know who are the go-to people for us, and our practice, but by the same token we need to understand whatever, whether you're in banking, healthcare, doesn't matter what your business is, you need to know who are the go-to people, because you can find out when are they on a free webinar, you know, when are they speaking at a conference event, you know, that's then us becoming super useful. I think a lot of this, Michelle, comes down to community, it comes down to people learning from people, which fundamentally social learning we have done forever, you know, since we did learn to create fire and the wheel. And that's realistically, if we can build that into a learning offer, that's realistically where the value really, really comes.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. So, you know, one of my favourite free resources, Michelle?

Michelle Parry-Slater:

I can guess.

Michelle Ockers:

What's your guess?

Michelle Parry-Slater:

My guess would be podcasts because you do a brilliant podcast.

Michelle Ockers:

Because I have brilliant guests. So obviously as part of that curation and scouring around for good quality resources, public podcasts are an option. But I believe you've supported people with standing up internal podcasts as well.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Yeah, absolutely. I mean podcasts without a shadow of doubt there's an absolute bunch of them isn't there, so you can usually curate some external content if you need a podcast. And, you know, they're predicting by 2027 there's going to be 650 million podcast listeners across the world so that there's a lot of podcasts, but you can also make them internally and I've done that for a few organisations, and you

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can do two things where you can use them to leverage your internal experts and then that helps your sales team, so you can put them out publicly, or you can do what you know we've done where you can share your internal expertise and you just record that podcast. Things like Descript are good for that or Riverside, you do have to pay for the studio, but it does really good quality. Or even Zoom, just use Zoom or Teams to record it.

Michelle Ockers:

So we're on Zoom today. I record all my podcasts on Zoom.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Yeah, and the quality is great. The quality, you know, you wouldn't question it. So putting them and then putting them out on your, you know, I tend to use them as the end of a course or a connection of work, as end of a blend, if you like. So helping people to just remind themselves of what we talked about in that program and putting out, you know, just 10 minutes, 20 minutes on helping people to just remember and reflect, that's where I see the value.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. I've seen them used as part of supporting people's career progression where, you know, people get on and maybe interviewed for 10, 15 minutes about their career and how did they get to where they are and what are the tips that they might pass on to others to move ahead with their career. So you could use them as part of some sort of career week or longer initiative supporting career growth and progression and encouraging autonomy in that as well.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Yeah, and then there's the other option of ask your colleagues, what are their favourite podcasts? And then get them to showcase those, so their favourite external podcasts. And that's a great way of the curation piece coming in. So you don't have to listen to a bunch of podcasts about your industry, just get your experts to share what theirs are. And I've done that before where we've had, you know, podcast week. I've done the same with books as well. You know, what are your favourite books? So get them out there and build libraries. You know, I mentioned the chocolate company, and yeah, we had a little library of books that were people's favourite and they wrote little book reviews as well. Why is this my favourite book? How does it relate to the work that we do here? So there's so much out there. You just need to use your imagination.

Michelle Ockers:

So nice. I want to circle back to tech. If you don't have a big budget, you may not be able to afford a learning management system. And how can we function in L&D without an LMS, Michelle?

Michelle Parry-Slater:

I know lots of organisations that function without an LMS. And if you do need to get one, there are some that are really cheap and freely available, like super cheap, and it depends what you need it for. So a lot of organisations use them for compliance,

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tick boxing, that kind of thing, checking that they're compliant, and that's a good enough function. And you can buy them really cheaply for that function. It's where you layer that into the wider organisation. And when I think about the Welcome Trust, which is an organisation based in London, who've done a lot of work with a puppet. And I'm not kidding, if you've not looked up Connie the puppet, she's the conscience of the organisation. And that's how they promote their compliance. So they have this Muppet looking pink character and she's everywhere. She's everywhere in the organisation. She's on email footers and she's on the back of the bathroom door, that kind of thing. Because it's just that reminder of the thing that we learn with our tick box compliance, bringing it to life. So the technology required there is your emails, a printer to print her and her picture all over the building, you know, the stories to share. So you can do this on a really low tech way, you know, photographs, internal enterprise social networks. If you've got teams, for example, or if you've got any facility to chat to each other, what are you sharing in those spaces? Have you got channels that you can be pushing out to? I was reminded recently about technology that's sort of moved on and Salesforce used to have their own chatter channel. So it's potentially embedded in things that you already have. You don't necessarily need something external or something new.

Michelle Ockers:

You get to know your working tech, right? Know your operating systems.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

I always say, go where they are. They're already there. You can reach them more easily than bringing on something new and pushing towards that. So go where the footfall already is. Once upon a time, I was involved with a leadership program for a retailer in the UK. And I said to them at the time, or we said to them, the planning team, like, what technology do you use? Oh, the retail managers, no, nothing. They don't have anything. We've got DOS-based tills, you know, we don't have any technology in the stores. I was like, okay, that's a surprise. I mean, this was, you know, within the last 10 years. And we get to this training room, because we all had to do it face-to-face, drag people from all over the country to a room, and they all knew each other. All of them knew each other. And we're like, oh, how do you know each other? And they go, oh, we have a WhatsApp group. Yes, of course they did. Of course they did. But the L&D team who commissioned us as external providers, had no idea, no idea whatsoever. So go where they are. I mean, this group of retailers, not only did they know each other, they shared photographs of, you know, gondola ends and what was selling well and how they did their promotions and things like that. So this is already out there. So if you've got no idea or no technology or not really sure where to start, go and speak to your people. I would be absolutely dumbfounded if they weren't already on AI spaces, if they weren't, you know, good friends with chatty G using it daily. You know, if it's already in their way of behaving, then you're already winning the battle if you use those facilities, those technologies.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. I remember Julian Stodd posting about or sharing some research. I think it was with the National Health Service or system over in the UK about exploring what tech people were using. And there was way more use of what we call shadow

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tech, unauthorised tech than there was authorised tech. And leaning into those spaces is really important. That's where people are, to your point. If you really want to be in the spaces with them, you know, you can find out if that's necessary.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

You can build relationships with them.

Michelle Ockers:

Exactly. That's where it starts.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

It starts with relationships. You know, community is not a single person. It's community. It's more than one person. And so communities, they can be hard to start. They can be hard to maintain. but they're already in existence. Everybody belongs to community. So if you start to think about, there's two things in it for me, look where they're in community outside of work, and what technology are they using there? How are they communicating with each other? So that might be a running group, it might be a church community, it might be a common interest group like food or cuisine or recipes or whatever. How are people connecting with each other? Can you bring that technology into the workplace in any way? Slack, for example, is really popular in those sorts of group type environments.

Michelle Ockers:

I'm thinking even like private LinkedIn groups, if you have a workforce who use LinkedIn.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

They're all on LinkedIn. Yeah, they're all on LinkedIn. And if you're encouraging your workforce to be on LinkedIn and have a public face to your organisation, which attracts new people to come and join the organisation, then a private LinkedIn group is a free and easy way for everyone to join in on that space.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. And because it's private, you can set it up just for people who are already in the workforce as well, because you can control who's coming in and who sees it.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Absolutely. And you might even want to have it with alumni. So people who've come through that organisation and moved on because of the advocacy, they can still talk freely about that organisation. So there's lots you can do with that. I mean, Andy Lancaster has written a great book on organisational learning communities. There's loads of advice in that. And I think David Hayden and Steve George have written a really good book on adjacent learning. So where can we learn about how things run outside of the workforce and then bring that into the workforce? So they're two good resources. But for me, all starts with relationships. The more you build, the more people will speak freely, the more people will be open with you. You build that trust. You mentioned Julian Stodd does a lot of work about trust. Trusted communities are not difficult when you're in relation. And so that's where that sort of common interest

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that ability to share. So if what we do in L&D is build great communities in our workspaces, we will do a lot for learning on very low and no budgets. And I just want to give you an example, one of the best examples I've heard of this where it's about the common good, the organisation, if you like, rather than the individuals within it. And it's really that culmination of that move from, I have knowledge, therefore I have power, to socialising that power amongst everybody. We as the organisation have knowledge, therefore we have power in the market. And the example comes from an organisation based in Estonia. And I didn't know anything about Estonia at all, didn't know their history or anything like that. And I spoke at a conference in Poland and a couple of people who'd been at my presentation sort of came and found me and were chatting about the presentation and the information. And they were just really lovely humans having a lovely conversation and building relationship. We ended up deciding to travel to the airport together, which part of me thinks, wow, getting in a car with strangers, that's a bit crazy. But this is how easily it was to build relationship with these two chaps. And we went outside of the building, we went to get in a cab, and I said, well, I'll just call an Uber. And he said, no, no, we must call Bolt. And I was like, never even heard of them before. Like, don't they do scooters? And he said, oh, they're an Estonian company. And I support my Estonian colleagues. So I was like, okay, fine, this makes sense. Anyway, what I learned about was he knows the head of Bolt because he turned out to be a tech entrepreneur who had a great organisation, Corsi, I'll give them a shout out. And all of the head of the entrepreneurs in Estonia, when Estonia became a free country, they got together and they put this Slack community together so they could support each other for the good of Estonia. And I was like, I can't understand this. So you're in a community with your competitors? And he said, yeah, sure, all of the tech entrepreneurs were in a community together. And if my team come up with a problem they can't solve, we put it out to the Slack community, Slack's where they run their community. And they put it out to the community and the rest of the community will solve it. And even though their competitors now for me, that is talk about free, low cost learning, you know, is just where you're bigger than yourself where socialised learning is the good for everybody. And I just love the story and I love the humility. Honestly, I had no idea I was talking to somebody who was running a really successful company in Estonia. He was just somebody who came to my presentation and was chatting. And that's how easy it can be when you when you move from an ego system to an ecosystem. You know, that's how easy it can be. And I think that some of the some of the sharing I've seen in the third sector in the UK, in the not-for-profits is very similar, along similar lines. So let's see how we can do that in the more corporate settings, in the sort of more education settings as well, because we're stronger together, hey?

Michelle Ockers:

We are. I love that. Moving from an ecosystem to an ecosystem. That's beautiful. I think that's a really great spot for us to finish the story on. And of course, in L&D, we have a lot of fantastic communities available for people to join. You mentioned Learning Now TV as a great resource.

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Michelle Parry-Slater:

Sorry to interrupt you, but I've got to give a shout out to L&D Cowork because that's the community I founded.

Michelle Ockers:

Oh, did you in the UK?

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Yeah, in the alongside with my lovely colleague Fiona McBride, and they're still running today. So L&D Cowork is a monthly meetup for free for anybody who wants to go along who works in the people profession. And they're all over the country because they're hosted by volunteer hosts. And I should start them really in Australia. Now that's on me. They're all looking at me to start them now. But what I've learned about Australia It's massive. It's a huge country.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes, it is. And there are lots of other communities. I'll pop a couple in the show notes. And of course, I wanted to give a shout out. This episode is going to be out on the 29th of April and on the 23rd of May. Is it the 22nd to the 23rd of May? Is the Australian Institute of Training and Development Conference. And you'll be speaking at that, Michelle.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

I will. Yes. The 21st to the 23rd, I think.

Michelle Ockers:

Thank you. The dates are all a blur for me.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

It's all the way in the future.

Michelle Ockers:

So there'll be lots of good connecting going on there. So listeners, if you're in the UK, get along to L&D Cowork. If you're in Australia and you're going to the AITD conference, find Michelle and say hello. And if you're in the U.S. and you're going to the ATD conference, which is at the same time, I will be there. So DM me on LinkedIn if you're in the U.S. and you're going to be at the conference at the ATD conference in Washington. I would love to say hello as well.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

It's such good learning at these events, not just the conference side, a lot of them do the free exhibition as well. And, you know, you can just go along and instead of thinking, I don't want to speak to you because you're going to sell me something in the exhibition, just be curious and ask the question, like, what can I learn from you today? I'm not going to buy anything, but what can I learn from you? And the vendors really enjoy the conversations, to be honest, they learn as much. So, yeah. You can learn stuff from free events all around the world.

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Michelle Ockers:

So that was packed with practical ideas for stretching your L&D budget further. Thank you so much, Michelle. I knew it would be a great conversation.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Thanks for having me on.



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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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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