

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Welcome to a very special, very special edition of Learning Uncut. We've got an Elevate episode. So for those longtime listeners and those new, Elevate is when we get special guests in, and there's no more special guests than our special guests today. We've got Laura Overton from Learning Changemakers and Michelle Ockers of course, Learning Uncut, to talk about their most marvellous book that was published by Kogan Page, last October 2025, The L&D Leader came out. So just wonderful to have you both here and what an honour to be able to talk to you today. So hello, Laura.

Laura Overton:

Hello. Good to see you both. I'm loving it. Both Michelle's in my screen at the same time. Hello, Michelle, it's lovely to see you again.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes, hi again, Michelle.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

It's only a few hours ago I think we might have spoken to each other but it's all good now, I'm just loving working together. So this special edition doesn't go without everything that we do here in the Learning Uncut podcast so there will be contact details at the end. And of course we're going to be talking about the book. And I want to offer this as a sort of the listener's point of view, the reader's point of view. So before we get started, let's welcome not just our guests, but let's always in the spirit of reconciliation, acknowledge the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. We pay our respects to their elders, past and present, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples present today. Listening. I'm joining you myself from the land of the Kombumerri people. And Michelle, where are you joining us from today?

Michelle Ockers:

The beautiful lands of the Brinja Yuin Nation, Michelle.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Wonderful. And Laura, of course, you're over, are you in England or are you in Spain? I know you enjoy both locations.

Laura Overton:

I am at the moment shivering in the UK. My favourite time of the year to talk to you guys when you're enjoying the gloriousness of summer.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Well, I'm melting, so I won't tell you about that as I'm melting without the air con on. So we don't get any interruption on the recording today, but I'm sorry that you're

shivering. But I have seen the snow in the UK and I'm just reminded why I live in these wonderful Kombumerri lands because it's freezing over there in the UK. Anyway, we are here to celebrate your book. And as an author myself, I know exactly what it takes to get a book out into the world. It's not an easy feat. And to do that as both co-authors, whilst you are on opposite sides of the world, what an extra huge achievement. So I just want to offer all of the readers congratulations to you when they get the book and realize just how hard that must have been. How do you two know each other? How did this whole writing journey from so far apart actually come together?

Laura Overton:

Wow. How do we know each other? I mean, we've known each other through social media. So we're just so grateful for that. But it must be 10 years now, Michelle.

Michelle Ockers:

2014, 12 years, I joined a Twitter chat where the topic was benchmarking for learning and who else would be the special guest but you, Laura? And of course we've used the benchmark data from the wonderful benchmark that you established many years ago, about 20 years ago now as a core body of evidence for the work. So it's really fitting that it was that body of evidence. I think the benchmarking that brought us together, I started using the benchmark in my work at the time with Coca-Cola Amatil with my team. And, you know, we just had these ongoing touch points fuelled by the benchmark, but a friendship forged by many other common interests. And of course, Laura, during COVID, there was an opportunity for us to come together and use our networks and the Learning Uncut podcast and your insights to kind of do a body of work, it was both a community contribution, and a piece of research. Did you want to pick it up at that point?

Laura Overton:

Yeah, I think that what I love about working with Shannon, when we were working on the Emerging Stronger project, we were also working with Shannon. So that was an extra logistic challenge. Shannon Tipton's based over in Chicago. But being able to explore new ideas with people who are in a completely different environment, but share the same passion for the industry. And I think that's the thing that I really enjoyed the most. Michelle you know that I've been asked to write this book five years ago.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

I remember having a conversation with you in a lovely Wimbledon restaurant somewhere and we talked about it and I was really keen to encourage you to do it. I heard you were doing it with Michelle, I was like this is perfect.

Laura Overton:

Absolutely and you know it just made sense to me because you know I've been working on my doctorate program, been thinking about the industry in a different way, but really wanted to keep myself grounded. And I couldn't think of anyone else who would be better at keeping my feet pinned to the floor of reality.

Michelle Ockers:

Stop laughing.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

I can't believe it, it's so funny. Now I've been working with Michelle for a few weeks and yeah, the most organised person I've ever met in my life. Every document has a title, every document falls with the next one. It's wonderful we're laughing but we're not, we're laughing with you because you're dear to us.

Laura Overton:

And that's where the strengths come in, is being able to recognise and acknowledge each other's strengths. I think that's really kept us sane through this process. And Michelle's incredible forgiveness for my ability to deviate in my thinking in order to grapple with what is actually a really complex and profound change in our industry at the moment. It was something that I personally was grappling with. And Michelle, you were thinking about it as well through the interviews that you'd been doing previously with Learning Uncut. And I think that's what pulled us together, is that passion for the industry, a recognition of each other's talents and our own weaknesses, and our opportunity to be able to work, to be honest, towards the end of the deadline, 24/7 around the globe.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

That's what it takes people to get a book out of the door. Now, it's my job today to wrestle both of you so that we don't have this podcast go on for four hours, which I know it easily could. And I have to say, you just talked there about the passion for the profession. And what struck me with your book when I first read it was exactly that. I mean, you've both spent the past 10, 20 years giving back, encouraging the profession, learning about how our profession can progress, And, you know, I know so much about you but to frame your book from the starting position that you did was both surprising and beautiful in equal measure to me. So for those that haven't yet read the book, I'll ask you to give us a little bit of the backstory, you know, because it felt odd to me to read something that was so removed from our day-to-day reality, yet I found it really inspiring. So help us out, talk us through that backstory, talk to us about briefly about how the book sort of start started, talking about a story of navigating the earth.

Michelle Ockers:

I think you have you have to say this one, Laura. And of course, you're talking, Michelle, about the Polynesian Voyaging Society metaphor and opening with that in the introduction, which Laura did a beautiful job at spotting, introducing to me. And it took no convincing that this was going to be a wonderful metaphor for the book and really relevant to learning and development. So over to you, Laura, around how it came to be that we started the book with the Polynesian Voyaging Society and the navigation metaphor.

Laura Overton:

Yeah, well, I think that the challenge, we mentioned it already, the fact that as a learning and development professionals, we are working in a continually changing

environment. You know, it's not just the tools and technologies, but the whole economic global environment that we're working in. And it's almost like we can't put our feet on solid ground anymore. And I felt as though we potentially might have been losing a little bit of our identity, our true value back in the organisation. Many people looking at us as an industry to say, ok, who are you and what can you do for us? And it was that mindset that I was kind of searching out for this desire to understand how we might be able to navigate that world and make a difference and that's really what captured my attention with the Polynesian Voyaging Society story. We don't want to share too much of it here because it is a metaphor that runs all the way through but it's a metaphor of a people, a Polynesian people who've been able to, as you say, they've been able to navigate a third of the world, the Pacific Ocean, with intent. But they did it without tools, without technology as the original Polynesians. They did it by having a vision in front of them about what they wanted to do, what they needed to do for their society in order for it to survive and they harnessed the wind and the rays and they understood how to learn how to navigate in that environment by observing, by responding, by continually adjusting and that was just lost over a period of hundreds of years until the 1970s when the Polynesian Voyaging Society decided to say okay well let's try and see if we can get back to that original way of navigating, prove who we are and that incredible story which you must read for yourselves is all about a renaissance of incredible pride in a people and being able to achieve what they're able to achieve. And they have adapted over the last 50 years, the Polynesian Voyaging Society, in actually what they do in the world now in terms of how they articulate what we need to be doing as people around the globe to be able to protect ourselves. And that resonated with us as a learning and development story. You know, that renaissance, that back to first principles and allowing us to be able to reclaim ground that we should, but maybe in a completely new way than we originally thought.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

I've been very fortunate recently to be on that ocean. I have to say I was thinking about you both a lot because when you literally are surrounded by the blue and it was a gorgeous azure blue and you're surrounded by the blue and you wait for it to go dark and then there's all these stars and they're not in the same place. And I just thought about you a lot. And it did make me think about sort of the book as a whole is a call to action. It made me wonder about, you know, how do you start with that? What do you want your readers to sort of take away? Because I was in the middle of nowhere. I had no idea. Fortunately, there was a captain on the ship who was navigating it and that was fine, but it felt really quite overwhelming if I was going to let it. So what do you hope your readers do sort of as a result of reading your book? This, as I say, I feel like it's a whole call to action. You've talked about the Renaissance. What does that look like, do you think?

Michelle Ockers:

So I think it starts with how we want them to feel. And that is the foundation for what we might hope that they do as a result of reading the book. And Michelle, you use the word overwhelming, that being in the middle of the ocean can be very overwhelming, just as working in today's environment of continuous changing can be very overwhelming when things are shifting around us in our organisations with

technology and on and on it goes. So for me, I'm hoping that people will read the book and feel less overwhelmed as they read the book, have more of a sense of the importance of their role in today's environment and feel more able to take action that makes sense in their own context, more able to figure out what that action is. So there's kind of two things as kind of first steps that I personally would hope readers would take. And one is an action to take before they finish reading the book, while they're reading the book, which is to keep what we call a field notebook. Right throughout the book, we make lots of little suggestions around reflection questions, questions that will help you to notice and observe what's happening around you, just as the Polynesian navigators using the ancient navigation methods would be observing what was happening around them in order to make choices about moving forward. And just keep a note as you start kind of doing that reflection or trying some of the small activities we suggest to track in a field notebook. Keep a note of something that might be useful in your context. And then at the end, create a sail plan. It's really around deliberately planning your own development in a way that really aligns with current work activities or initiatives. So I think if people are noticing and keeping some notes in a field notebook, using the prompts that we give them, it should help them to feel less overwhelmed, to generate some ideas of what might make sense in terms of action in their context, and then looking intentionally at their own development and how they want to grow in a way that makes sense for building, having impact straight away through the sail plan at the end. Laura, your thoughts?

Laura Overton:

Yeah, I think, you know, what did we want to do with this book? I mean, first of all, we wanted to say, ok, there's a lot of evidence from the learning and development community about what great navigation looks like. And we had millions of data points from the learning performance benchmark, the Towards Maturity benchmark. Michelle had hundreds of interviews with learning professionals around the globe. Together, we did 40 additional interviews with different people. So we had a lot of evidence from our community. And what we wanted to do was to use it to build courage, to encourage the industry, and to say, actually, this isn't what somebody else can do. This is what we can do. This is what we can do together. And what's more, we've got loads of evidence to show how it's worked in the past and how it could work in the future. So for me, this book is all about encouraging and building courage in the industry

Michelle Parry-Slater:

I love the fact that you've talked about encourage so much, but I want to just really iterate. It's practical as well as encouraging. And Michelle, you've just talked there about the field notebook and you're not the first as a concept. We've heard about that from Nigel Paine. We've heard about it from Stella Collins and other practitioners because it really works. And as I said, I was thinking about you and I was in the middle of the Pacific Ocean because it looks the same. It looks like blue and there's the sky. But actually every day was different. Every day was different. And I think perhaps we get blind to it. And I think we also get blind to the confidence we need to actually take notes, jot it down, realise and challenge what we are seeing. I was once that lonely professional sort of stuck in the order taker role, very much reacting to more senior voices. They were paying my mortgage, they're paying

my rent, that kind of thing. What do you say then to them seemingly unable to do anything? They've noticed what's going on around them, as you've encouraged them, they've jotted it down. How can they use the book and the concept of the field notebook and other aspects of the book sort of to tackle the challenge of speaking up, of being a bigger voice in their organisation? Any thoughts? Do they do it alone? Do they go to a team? Do they go to a community? What do you recommend?

Laura Overton:

I think one of the things that all of us can do every day is understand that we have got influence in our own field of work. We're not necessarily having to navigate the entire ocean, but we are having to navigate our day. We are having to navigate the next meeting. We are having to navigate the next request for something. And so for us, you know, when we were really distilling down the principles of high performing learning teams or the benchmark programme, you know, that was the hot, in one sense, it should have been the easiest part of writing this book. As Michelle has already said, we've been living these benchmark strategies, the high-performing strategies for literally decades. But really honing it down and saying, ok, well, how can it be applicable for everybody in our day-to-day activity? That was probably the toughest role of this book, and it took a lot of grappling and a lot of deep thinking. And what we realised in the end, that actually there were three things. There was, we need to be able to tune in. We've talked about this already, but as an individual in my next meeting, in my next day, in my next week, how can I tune in? How can I tune in to what's going on in the organisation, to what's going on in the world, to what's going on with individuals, to what's going on in my environment, in my culture. What am I noticing? How am I tuning in? That's really important because that leads on to the way that we respond, our responding on a continual basis. you know, as a professional, how do I intervene in this situation? What value can I bring through a comment, through a suggestion, through a recommendation, through a design strategy, through a decision to do nothing and to recommend something else? That responding and the way that we engage others in our responding is a really vital part of something we can think about every day. And then also, which is that reflection process, is the improving. That's the tri-principles in this book. Tuning in, responding, improving on a day-by-day basis. How did that go? Where can we improve? Now we can use data, we can use evaluation, we can look at this from a programme, but we can also apply these principles to the next meeting that we have, where we want to be seen, we want to be heard, we want to make a difference. We can apply these principles, we're recording this at the beginning of Davos and the World Economics Forums, big think tank, whatever you think of that. But you know, a lot of information comes out about global ideas and thoughts. Are we looking at that? Are we tuning into that? Are we seeing what's happening in the bigger wide world and seeing how does that actually relate to what's going on in our own organisation? We don't need to be the head of learning and development, a director, a CLO, to have that curiosity to start doing those things in our day-to-day work.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Wonderful to hear you explain both the small and the huge, because that's the value and I think that's part of the value of the book. One of the things you did talk about in the book is the L&D value spectrum, and this whole shift in language that we have

from L&D bringing value, show your value, especially in an economic downturn, because otherwise, you know, we're first out the door and that kind of thing. Can you talk us through a little bit of the L&D value spectrum, that sort of shift from learning value to business value? Because I'm not sure that, you know, everyone will have been familiar with that. And I recommend them get the book, read it, find out about it, but give us a sneaky peek. And I wonder, is there ever a case to just hang out at the activity end?

Michelle Ockers:

How about you introduce the spectrum, Laura, and then I'll talk about the, is there a case to hang out at the, what we call the learning value end?

Laura Overton:

I think the learning values, L&D value spectrum for me was just me trying to grapple with how, how some individuals, some teams, some organisations can really deliver great business value through their learning interventions and others can't. And, you know, not for want of trying. And it really occurred to me that it's often how we see our own value, how we describe it. Michelle, like you, I've done a lot of judging on awards and people come and they're so proud, rightly so, of the amazing work that they've done. But how they describe how they've been successful really grabbed my imagination. Some of us describe our success through our activity, our engagement, the number of people through our programmes, our completion, how people love us, how much money we're saving the organisation, even our NPS scores, the extent to which other people think we're lovely. And that is good and that's an important part, but we call that the learning value end of the spectrum. At the other end of the spectrum is where it gets messy. It's where the value is no longer just owned by us and can't just be achieved by what we do with our systems and our programmes and our platforms, but it's the value that actually takes place back in the world. So the value linked to performance about change, about the way people have been able to adapt in the organisation, value linked to talent, value linked to the culture of the organisation, The business value end is about the value that the organisation is looking for in the business, not necessarily from the learning and development department. It depends on which way you are facing on that value spectrum that really opens up your own mind. So, you know, Michelle, you and I have both seen that, you know, you can be operating at the learning value end of the spectrum, but it's which way you're facing.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes. And it's interesting, we've got a set of thinking habits in the book, patterns about how we think about our role, our relationships with others and a number of other aspects, which are really important to shape our practice. But this one around thinking business first stands out as a little bit different. At any point in time, we get to choose where we place ourselves on any of these different thinking habits. And normally Laura and I will say, our thinking has evolved on this actually, Laura. We used to say there was a right end of each one of these spectrums of the thinking habits, but we no longer say that because we've learned that it's a lot more nuanced and where you choose to operate, what thinking habit you choose to bear at any point in time is going to vary depending on where you're at in a project, depending

on the people you're working with. There's a whole range of factors as to where you choose to put yourself in terms of many of these thinking habits. The one exception to this is thinking business first. And we're really clear now that if you are going to navigate to business value, you need to always start at the business end of the spectrum. When you're looking at, you know, understanding a new request for your help in learning and development, when you're looking at a new business challenge, even when you're evaluating the effectiveness of your work, thinking business first is really critical so that you're looking at, you're getting that vision. Where are we headed? And in the book, we talk about being able to see Tahiti as part of this Polynesian voyaging society metaphor, even if you can't literally see it, being able to see it in your mind. So having this shared vision of the business value you're trying to create, and by shared that, sharing it with stakeholders. But that does not mean that it's not important to understand what's happening at the learning value end of the spectrum. And Laura talked about being able to stand on the spectrum and look towards either end knowing that in order to achieve business value, we need to be able to be really good at the things at the learning value end of the spectrum. There's no point designing a program or initiative that people don't engage with. You know, our learning knowledge, our ability to create effective learning solutions, which we evaluate with learning metrics, is critical as the stepping stones, the pathway towards creating business value. But we must always start with business value. We're kind of pretty clear on that, I think, Laura. And I think our thinking has shaped up, has firmed up around that over time.

Laura Overton:

Absolutely. And I think just one other thing that I would add is that when you're maybe operating at learning value end, but you're hungry or constantly you've got your eye on the bigger picture.

Michelle Ockers:

Line of sight, right?

Laura Overton:

Line of sight. Exactly. It's line of sight. But it's the difference between us wanting to prove ourselves versus improving. And when we're operating at the learning value end, but we're facing that direction. We say actually, although we're currently measuring this and everything, we're doing that because we want to improve performance or we're looking at helping to make a shift in the culture or working with a team in a different way. They're stepping stones. Those learning value metrics are stepping stones into the future and opportunities for us to continually improve. But if we're operating, we might think we're operating in the business value and thinking, oh, look at us, we're so good, we've got great performance or whatever. But we're constantly looking to prove what we have uniquely done. Then actually, that's when we're still facing business learning value. And that can hold us back. So it's this kind of like, you know, the direction we're facing is the direction we're pulled in and it's where our curiosity lies. And we want people to be curious about the amazing difference that they can make in the business, not just with their programmes.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Exactly like you say there, Michelle, isn't it? It's very nuanced, that difference between prove and improve. Two tiny letters and a huge, big difference. And I think there's a constant call throughout the book to have that level of professionalism, to continually learn, to grow. I absolutely agree with it, obviously. You know, I do believe that we do need to grow as professionals. We've got to walk the talk. We are sort of notoriously known as the cobbler's children or the plumber's spouse or whatever the Australian similar phrase is. I'm not sure. But where we don't sort of invest in ourselves and we're too busy helping others to learn. And there's so many ideas in your book that you've shared to help people, professionals invest in themselves. Are you allowed a favourite child? Do you have a favourite idea? Any thoughts to share? What's the one that you think, yeah, if you do, you know, for me, prove to improve, there's one right there. But what would you pick if you had to pick one or maybe I'll let you have two children?

Michelle Ockers:

I'll throw in one for the individual. And you talked before, Michelle, about individuals like working on things ourselves in teams and communities. So one for the individual and one for as part of a team for helping people, professionals to kind of invest in themselves, real and day professionals to invest in themselves. And the first one is to simply start with noticing. And I know this is something that's already come up in our conversation today. And I think the field journal really helps you to notice and to make small adjustments and identify those small pieces of improvement that you can make to fine tune your practice on an ongoing basis. A lot of this improvement doesn't have to be massive, but one thing we do stress is about it being deliberate and intentional. And that starts with noticing what is and isn't working or identifying something that you're going to try doing differently. Maybe start doing a little shift in practice and then using your field journal to track that. How did that work out? What might I continue to improve upon? And I know no one can see this. I've got my purple field notebook up here and I've got kind of 18 months worth of notes in here and I flick through it and I use it on an ongoing basis. And it's amazing if you just review it even like once a month, once a quarter, how many things you can pick up that you'll find tuning or adjustments you feel you've made. And I think as a team, my favourite idea probably comes from Justin Sterns. There's an example from Justin Sterns, who was working in Westpac at the time in Chapter 12, where we give a little example of the work he was doing with his team to intentionally develop people through their work. So to be really conscious about where the opportunities were or the needs for the team as a whole or for individuals to develop, to use the work itself, to allocate people to stretch assignments, mentorship within the team and outside of the team. And then they did these monthly deep dive sessions into a topic or a skill that was relevant to the work of the team at the time, and they'd really unpack you know, what are the first principles? What are the key takeaways from here that we can use to improve our practice? And then they'd look at how they're going to adapt their work. And they kept a team playbook, which they would update out of these deep dive sessions. I think there's just a couple of simple practices that you can use to continuously invest in yourself.

Laura Overton:

Yeah. And I think for me, I mean, I love those and, you know, keep coming back to reflection, which I think is really important. And it just occurred to me while you were talking there, Michelle, was when I was last doing the CIPD's learning at work research, it was really interesting that a lot of Learning Leaders with a capital L had a lot of budget opportunity to be able to go to programs, whereas those that didn't have that same level of official authority within the team were investing themselves by reading books or listening to podcasts or all of those types of things. And it really occurred to me, it's like, what are we investing in? What are the foundations that we have? And in our chapter on our ability to respond, our responding, we talk about being grounded in our professionalism. And the two things that we emphasise, particularly looking back on high-performing learning individuals and teams over the years, is learning science and having a digital curiosity. So it wasn't about necessarily learning, but how do people learn? How do we as humans learn? And some of the new research that came out from World Economic Forum last month, I think, was talking about our curiosity and our lifelong learning capacity around the globe is one of our lowest human skills that's reported. And yet as learning professionals, you know, our understanding of how we learn and how we can be motivated is so vital. So going back to that kind of concept of digital curiosity, I think for us, we need to be hungry to find that out. And last week, Michelle, I was thinking, I was talking about you because I saw your journal just then, and I know you journal. And I am not the journalist. So I always feel like the naughty person when Michelle talks about journaling and keep a little field notebook and look what I do. And it occurred to me last week that I actually don't journal in the same way. But what I have done particularly over the last three years is I have been using my AI of choice. And that has been my journal. Every time I have a thought, every time I have a question, I dig in and I explore with the AI. And I just when I realised that that actually is in a form of journaling for itself, I thought, okay, I'm back in the game now on this conversation. Because actually, not all of us are writers. But all of us can be curious. All of us will say, actually, I've got a question, I wonder if, I wonder how, but all of us have now got a technology that will allow us to be able to dig into that. And what's more, it can help track our thinking over a period of time as well. So get curious about the foundations about what makes us human and use all the tools and technologies to lean into that curiosity and build those skills.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Thank you so much for sharing your ideas. It's this type of level of practical support that I just find really interesting in the book and I'm grateful on behalf of the community I want to dig a little bit into community because we all met on Twitter, and that community just doesn't exist anymore. And I'm just curious about community now you've talked about, you know, your Polynesian and the community that they've got, you've talked about the learning and development community. Where would you suggest, I mean, how are people meeting people? How are people learning from each other? What sort of community options do we have? What would you suggest? Because the notebook is fantastic. Noticing, love it. Very personal. You know, chatting with Chatty G, very personal. What about to the broader context?

Michelle Ockers:

Really important. And, you know, there was a time and place for which all three of us are probably nostalgic where we could develop community very readily on Twitter back in the day, but that's no longer a space that is useful for us professionally. I think you still have to find a way to reach out and find your community. And there's all sorts of different L&D communities out there. You can find them in a number of ways through LinkedIn, through looking at who's talking on LinkedIn about learning and development. You can do hashtag search. You can use LinkedIn like a search engine. I don't know if people are aware of that. You know, people use hashtags for posts all the time. So if you're interested in, for instance, learning technology and you want to find a good learning technology community, you can actually enter hashtag learning technology in the search window where you would otherwise enter the name of an organisation or person you wanted to find, and it will take a bit of filtering, a bit of working through, but you'll figure out who's talking about learning technology. Are there groups of people? Are there communities? Or you can ask others, or if you go to a conference or to a professional association event, professional associations in themselves can be great communities and offer a lot of really amazing networking activities. And Michelle, I know that when you first came to Australia about 18 months ago now, one of the things you did was join just about every L&D association or institute or networking organisation you could find. So, you know, there are ways of testing out communities and finding communities to figure out what suits me. And Laura, we actually include some criteria for choosing communities and how to choose your community wisely in the book for people as well in the last chapter of the book. Where would you suggest people start, Laura, with finding their community?

Laura Overton:

I think there's a difference between finding their community and finding the right community, because what we need to do is avoid an echo chamber. And as you say, there's great institutions that are around and absolutely love those. But, you know, equally, every institution, every institute that's set up to build our community can also be quite closed down. I know that in the UK there are certain, you know, I struggle to become, for example, a fellow of the CIPD because I wasn't a practitioner in the same way that you were, even though I spent 30 years in my career, working with learning and development professionals. And so, you know, being open-minded I think is really important with this and choosing your right community. Being in community with your suppliers, being in community with those who are sharing freely using LinkedIn and being in communities, some great communities. I know that Darren Dan in New Zealand has got that amazing community. We've got L&D Shakers and the people with Lavinia over here in Europe. You know, open-minded, open access communities for people to not only mix with people like themselves, but those who also have got adjacent knowledge and skills that we can learn from, get somebody else's view and perspective on the challenge, rather than just keeping within our own crowd. And I think that's really important. With that in mind, who are the communities that share our goals and interests within our own organisation? If we're looking business first, who else is interested in getting more AI literacy in the organisation? What is their angle? What is their lens? who are the people we can be in community with in our own organisation as well. So I think curiosity is important,

and being open-minded, which is a critical aspect of our bold thinking that we talk about in the book, being, as you said, Michelle, business first, being open-minded, leading, experimenting, and being deliberate in our choices. And I think deliberate is really important about the communities that we choose to be in and the way that we assess them.

Michelle Ockers:

I was just going to comment, build on something Laura said there about, you know, if you have the opportunity in a larger organisation to be part of different communities within the organisation. And Michelle, I think you talked a little about the lone practitioner. You know, not everybody works in a big organisation with lots of different communities or even other L&D professionals around them. And it can be a pretty lonely place. And, you know, ironically, I do find that the lone practitioner is more likely to develop an external community than those who are working inside an organisation with lots of different L&D professionals. And if you are in that organisation, please your internal community and your external community matter to bring fresh ideas back into the organisation. But it truly, it can genuinely be very lonely. It's a challenging position when you've got, you know, you're the only LND person, there's time pressure in your head. There's all sorts of things that might be holding you back. But, you know, developing your community is part of what we call your safety net, finding others who can encourage you, who can challenge your thinking, who can perhaps be peer mentors for you, who can even support you with well-being practices. There's all sorts of value for the lone practitioner, but also for those who are in parts of bigger teams and reaching outside of your own organisation to get some of that diversity of thinking and input as well. I think it's really important message.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

And that's one of the things I loved in the book, your bold encouragement, your bold compass. So for those that were listening and heard what Laura just said, perhaps you want to dig a little bit deeper or explain that as specific. You're not just generally asking people to be bold and to step outside their own office and speak to people either in their organization or outside. But that is an acronym in the book, isn't it? Bold. And in case it just slipped by unnoticed, I think we need to spend some time thinking about it because I think it's a really important part. You encourage us to develop our superpowers. And I'm particularly drawn to that kind of the L&D superpowers, the presence, the influence, the expertise. You list all of those in chapter 10. And I'm personally very influenced by organisational development and the community of organisational development that, you know, they're very welcoming humans that have welcomed me in because I'm not an OD practitioner at source. I'm an L&D practitioner, but there's so much overlap. So what you were saying there, Michelle, about, being bold, stepping out and developing that superpower from all of the different inputs, not just sort of one singular lens. So is there anything that we haven't talked about when it comes to bold, that bold compass that you want to share perhaps, Michelle?

Michelle Ockers:

So what was interesting and this kind of unfolded during COVID when we ran the Emerging Stronger podcast series and we were exploring what is it that those L&D professionals who have adapted well and who are managing to have a bigger impact in their organization through this period of intense change during COVID, what is it that they're doing that's different from others? And one of the observations we had and we were throwing around was, you know, the practices that high performing teams have been using for many years L&D teams and that those who seem to be working their way through COVID most effectively and helping their organisations most effectively through COVID, this is all public domain information. This is all stuff we have intellectually known about for a long time. So why is it that some L&D leaders and some L&D teams and some L&D professionals are able to apply these high-performing L&D team practices, which we distilled down into this much simpler, Laura's really done the heavy lifting around that with me as a sounding board, distilled them into this simpler set of principles, the TRI principles, which makes it even more accessible to others. What's different about those who are able to have more impact? And we really started playing with mindset. And there's a whole part in the book that talks about mindset and why mindset matters so much. And Laura, who is the fantastic pattern maker in the partnership, teased out a number of different aspects or thinking patterns, how we think about our work and our practice. which really encapsulated in bold, this idea that Laura just ran through of being smart bold, not brassy bold, not shooting from the hip in a really unthinking way, not being overconfident, but smart bold, thinking business first, being open-minded. leading and learning and being very deliberate and intentional in our choices and our practices. And we go into bold thinking quite a lot in the book. And we think it really makes a huge difference. And it's something that is available to all of us, no matter what point in our L&D careers we are at. It can feel challenging at times, even to the most seasoned L&D leaders, to operate in bold ways, to hold ourself in this space of open mindedness, to be continuously leading and learning. And that's where the safety net that I spoke about comes into play. So perhaps, Laura, not all underpinned by the benchmarking evidence, but certainly by the observations from many of our interviews. And we doubled down on interviewing through the podcast around these thinking habits, as well as, you know, Michelle mentioned O.D. practices. And I know there's a lot of you've been doing a Ph.D. and there's a lot of things we've picked up from that that shaped the way we think about this bold mindset. Laura, if you wanted to pick up on that.

Laura Overton:

Yeah, I think I think the bold compass is that inner compass is that anything in our minds, you know, and it just gives us some language. A bit like it was very difficult to be able to talk about emotions without different names for emotions, actually understanding our professional compass, the way that we align ourselves in the world as an individual. It just gives some language to that. And that was important because what we saw in those high performing teams, particularly jumping out at us during COVID, was their own agency. Whether they were lone professionals working, whether they were working or not working, it was their agency, how they saw themselves in that world of work that really made a difference to how others saw them. So, Michelle, yeah, you're absolutely right. We started to look at OD, the work

of Edgar Schein and Mee-Yan Chung-Judge, her amazing work on the use of self, how we turn up makes a difference. And suddenly, when you put that lens onto what we were seeing in L&D communities, you think, wow, that makes a real difference. Banduras as well, his work on self-efficacy. How we believe in ourselves influences how other people believe in us. And it's those aha moments. It's about bringing the outside in, all the aspects of how other people have been looking at how humans work and relate with each other made us go, aha. That's why that made sense in the learning and development community. That's why we can see bold inaction. So, yeah, that kind of superpower, we absolutely believe in it, not because we're writing a book on it, but because, you see, that's what's made the difference. It hasn't been the budget, the size of the team, the extent to which they're being disrupted, but how individuals choose to respond in a continually disruptive world that actually makes a difference as to whether or not they're going to be able to operate at the business value end in an organisation and redefine themselves. So for us, the L&D leader is about how we lead ourselves into the future of our own career, our own role, our own profession, rather than protect what we did in the past. So, yeah, absolutely. You can tell I'm getting all excited about this because I think it's how we turn up influences how others see us. And it's a cycle of success that we can really build on.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

It's one of the things in the book that I really enjoyed. And I keep feeling like I've said that I've said that so many times, but it's true. I did, which is in an age of AI, like where are we going to find ourselves? And everyone's worried about that yet. There's so much in here about things like mindset, the human skills, because that's not going away. That's going to be amplified through the value. So I've got no question about this, but my absolute favourite table in the book, who's ever thought that'd be a favourite table, but 5.3, everyone look it up. Using the improving principle to create opportunities. And it's all about that mindset shift and I love the way that you've gone from and to, because it really helps people whether they're the lone practitioner in a team, in a whole community think about how can we make that shift. And the challenge is, of course, to use your words, we're navigating new waters of change. And that change can be slow, it can be cumbersome, it can be lonely, like we've described, often described as a tanker turning in the ocean. I personally don't like that analogy. I talk about change as a flotilla of boats. You know, you want to vaguely get all those boats heading in the right direction, in the same direction through change. And on page 126, you phrase it as the familiar water of today. What does that mean? Is that the new water? Is that where we're heading to, the familiar water? Or is it helping remind us that not everything is changing? Actually, we do have some familiar things. And when we're thinking about, oh, the world's so different, the world's changing. When we think about what's not changing, that can be a comfort. Or maybe I've got it wrong. Maybe that's not what you mean. What do you mean by the familiar water of today? When it comes to change, where do we start with it all?

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, we talk in the book about the fundamental role of L&D being consisting of two parts. One is to help people to be equipped to perform today and to be ready for whatever is coming over the horizon. I think we already are in a position where we

have to change the language. We used to talk about being ready for tomorrow, but I actually was running a workshop with a team last year and they said, we don't talk about being ready for tomorrow because things just keep changing so much. It's about being able to adapt quickly as things move around you. But so it's equipped and ready. How do we help others to be equipped and to perform and ready to continuously adapt to change? So those core pieces of being equipped to perform, helping people to be equipped to perform, this is almost like our bread and butter, the familiar waters, the stuff that just about everybody in L&D will be doing regardless of what organisation they're in. It's the onboarding. It's the compliance. It's the role readiness stuff for people to be able to perform today. So starting in those familiar waters, it might that the waters might be familiar, but the ways in which we use our professional practice using the tribe principles might need to shift so we can build up more credibility. So we can free up capacity. We can test things out and experiment in what we kind of call low-stakes environments, the environments we're more familiar with, and create space then to be looking at the more strategic work potentially, the stuff that's more about helping individuals, teams, and our organisation to adapt in an environment of continuous change. And Laura talked earlier about you know, those skills around lifelong learning, continuous adaptation and how critical they are today. So being able to move beyond those familiar waters is really important. But if we are so overwhelmed with the workload because of the approaches that we're using and we're so stuck with just dealing with helping people to be equipped for today, we never get the opportunity to support our organisations to become more adaptable. How would you build on that, Laura?

Laura Overton:

So yeah, I think building on that, there are so many case studies that there are in the books, but it's not just about how they are doing onboarding in the way that we used to do them, or the way they're doing compliance in the way we used to do it, but how we're thinking creatively and differently, how we're using those opportunities to create building blocks, to create environments in which people can learn to be curious, can be practicing, be doing things differently rather than just learning knowledge. So let's use the familiar in order to create familiarity with new ways of thinking, new ways of learning. And as I say, you know, the case studies that we had, you are just going to have to buy the book, I'm afraid. But we have got so many in there. Or listen to extra episodes of the Learning Uncut podcast. But what you're doing is you're listening out for things now. That's the difference. What we want to do in the book is to help you listen out for things that you can then in a new way in your own familiar environment in order to create opportunities for others.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

So listeners you are never going to listen to Learning Uncut podcast the same ever again you're going to get your field notebook out, and you're going to be scribbling lots of notes, I'm sure you do now. I did have a question about the favourite case study but we can't ask favourite children question twice in an episode so we'll have to move on. We're going to wrap up now. It's been such an absolute pleasure to talk to you. And I just want to point out the subtitle of your book is Principles and Practice for Delivering Business Value. And I don't think anyone can say that you haven't delivered value today talking to us about your book. So thank you so, so much. As

we wrap up, is there anything that you haven't said that you wish you had had the opportunity to say before we close?

Michelle Ockers:

Just a key idea that while the book is called The L&D Leader, leadership is about being able to create a different future from the one that lies immediately before you. We all have the opportunity to navigate, to change direction, to change course, to be part of that flotilla and show others a different way or to influence what's happening around us through our own individual actions and presence. So really for people to understand that this book is for everyone working in L&D, not just for those informal positions of leadership.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Well said. Laura, how about for you? Is there anything that you wish you had the chance to say that I didn't ask?

Laura Overton:

No, it's just that we start the chapter one after introducing Polynesian Exploration Society with a Dolly Parton quote. So why don't we just finish this interview with a Dolly Parton quote and just to pack up what Michelle is saying. If your actions create a legacy that inspires others to dream more, to learn more, to do more and to become more, then you are an excellent leader.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Wonderful. So listeners, honestly, this book is an amazing book. And I'm not saying this because these two lovely humans are my friends, but actually, when I first read it, I was just surprised and surprised. And when you're surprised, it means that you're actually learning something, you really are. So I very much recommend it. You can find Laura and Michelle's book in all good booksellers on Amazon. And of course, if you want to get it directly from Kogan Page, the publisher, then do hit up Laura and Michelle on LinkedIn and they'll be able to send you a 25% discount code. So who doesn't love a good cheap book? We all love that. If you want to, of course, keep connected and build community, I definitely recommend that you connect on LinkedIn as well and look out for the L&D leader on Instagram as well. And you might be able to connect to Laura that way too. So howsoever you connect with each other until we connect with each other again on Learning Uncut. Thank you for listening. We'll see you next time.



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