

Learning Uncut Elevate Episode 50: What's next for L&D?

Donald Taylor



Michelle Parry-Slater

Welcome to Learning Uncut. We've got another Elevate episode today and I am absolutely delighted to be joined by Donald Taylor from the UK, which is why I'm in the dark. I've got all the lights on now that we are also on our YouTube channel. So, if you didn't know that already, if you listen in rather than watch, do search for Learning Uncut podcast on YouTube, and you can also watch us as well.

Before we begin, of course, we always acknowledge country. Given our recent episode about Gari Yala, this may well be something that feels even more important to us here at Learning Uncut. We would like to, in the spirit of reconciliation, acknowledge the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community, particularly the Kombumerri People whose land I'm joining you from today. I often mention Jellurgal which is near where I live and the beautiful Burleigh Heads national park which I can see out of my window.

As Don is joining me, his morning in the UK and my evening in Australia, whilst I can't physically see it, I still want to pay respect to it and to all of the elders past and present on the Kombumerri Peoples land, and we extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples present or listening today.

Don Taylor takes no introduction, he is a friend of the show, he's been on this podcast several times before, but for those that have been living under a rock, Don Taylor is the chair of Learning Technologies conference, he has been working in learning and development for a number of years, I'm going to say, and I'm honoured to have him back on the podcast today to talk about his global Global Sentiment Survey.

Now, Don, you have been on this podcast many times before because we support you in your Global Sentiment Survey here at Learning Uncut. You've been running that survey for over a decade. And recently, you've gone back across sort of five years of challenge data. You've looked at it all together for the first time. And that's really what we're going to be talking about today, as well as, of course, all of your other research with Egle into AI. Now, what made you go back and have a look at the Global Sentiment Survey?

Donald Taylor

Good question. And thank you very much for the support that Learning Uncut has given over the years to the survey, getting the view from Australia and also from New Zealand, very important, so thanks for that.

Just to clarify, when you say the challenges question, every year for the past five years I've asked the question, "what's your biggest challenge in workplace learning and

development in the next year?” So that's what we're talking about here. And why have I gone back to look at it?

It's because the data has got richer and because we've been through a fascinating period of change. And I think that in my production process of the report in the past, I've recognised people's challenges year on year, but I haven't done what I do with the numbers, which is to make comparisons year on year. And I think that is an important thing to do because we've been through this period of change. When I started doing the challenges question, which was in the 2021 survey, we were coming out of COVID. Now we are in, let's say, the third or fourth year of reaction to AI. Those are two very big things. And it's possible over that period to see people changing their views of L&D in a way that goes beyond just what they choose on my main question, which is what's going to be hot next year. And I want to honour the fact that people are making the time to respond to the questions and sharing their thoughts. There's a very rich trove of data there which I think deserves more than just a one-by-one-year snapshot view of it. And I think that's characterised not least by the fact that right at the beginning, when I started asking this question, 40% of respondents answered with a total of something like 14,000 words. Now it is about, well, it's in the 90% bracket and it's about over 40,000 words that people are giving in response. There's a lot that people are saying and I think they deserve to have it taken seriously.

Michelle Parry-Slater

That is a lot of words for you to get through. No doubt you've been using AI to sort out some clustering of those challenge responses. You can't just sit and read through all of those. But do you, do you read every single word?

Donald Taylor

Well, you can, and you absolutely should. I mean, the worst thing I could do is just say, oh, I've got these words, I'll stick them in a black box and see what comes out the other end. That'd be very dangerous.

So yeah, I do read everything. But the problem is, and of course you're right, you read a book, an average novel might be, I don't know, a short novel might be 60, 70,000 words. 40,000 words is about the length of Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad. So it's a book, right?

But because a book's got a narrative and you follow the themes through it, there is no narrative through 40,000 words. And the difficulty is that it is very easy to allow yourself, a certain way into reading these things, to think, right, okay, well, I know what's happening here. We're talking about these five or six things. And then your confirmation bias kicks in and you start spotting those things and not spotting other things. So, it's very important to read through everything and then to use AI tools to help check and go through and spot what you've missed.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Yeah, so what patterns have come through in those, let's use the phrase, semantic clusters?

Donald Taylor

Well, it is actually what you'd expect. There are a series of challenges that come through, probably five in total, and these have been pretty much the same year on year.

But there are two which are different to what we've had in the past. In the recent past, being the past three years, we've had a concern about AI foremost, how do I use it, and how do I help the organisation use it?

And the other very common challenge people are seeing is a sort of sense of uncertainty and an existential threat. And this is very important because that didn't happen in the first two years of the survey. This is something which is undoubtedly correlated with the release of ChatGPT. And the sense that now there is something which threatens me. And I think that comes through very clearly when you read all the words and you can boil it all down to that sense of uncertainty about the future for L&D. That, for me, is the key theme that comes through.

Michelle Parry-Slater

I heard you talking on one of my favourite podcasts, the Mind Tools podcast, about exactly this sense of uncertainty. Individuals are answering your Global Sentiment Survey, so this is an individual fear that people have, although they're talking about our profession. And I see it myself, I hear it when I'm talking to people. It is uncertainty. As human beings, we like being certain. All of the research that David Rock has done with the SCARF model, for example, we like certainty, but we're not living in certain times at all. There's just significant change, and you've seen those changes over the years that you've been doing this survey. AI is probably the most significant, isn't it?

So, what are you doing about having that on the survey? If it's appearing more and more, what's the plan?

Donald Taylor

AI has been on the survey since 2017 and it followed exactly the trajectory we'd expect. I spot something, I think that's interesting, people will vote for that. It goes up for a couple of years, then it comes down. So like mobile delivery or curation, these are things which start off being popular and then fade away over time. Then of course, as it was fading away, it had got to the stage where it was almost taken off the survey because it was so uninteresting for people, when ChatGPT came out. And bang, it went off through the roof.

This year, in the 2026 survey, the responses to the question, what will be hot next year, AI, which had been number one for the third year running, dipped. Now, it only dipped by 0.1 of a percent. So that's not statistically significant. You could as well say, well, it

might have gone up, it might have gone down further. But that rocket trajectory of it going up had definitely flattened off.

What's the plan for the future? I've got to take it off the survey. I know it is absolutely what people are excited about and want to talk about. But if I ask people what's hot in L&D and I have AI on the survey, it drowns out everything else. And I decided that for 2027, it won't be on the survey, and I'll do a LinkedIn post about this and get people's reaction. I need to know what are we doing with AI. Because everything else on that list can absolutely be done using AI or not. And I want to know what people are actually doing.

Look, I've made this comparison before, it's not original, but it's a bit like going into the kitchen and saying, well, of all these things here, which is most important to you, your microwave, your fridge-freezer, your cooker, or electricity? And of course it's electricity because it powers everything else.

So, we have to get behind AI and see what people are doing with it. I think there may be some other big changes to the list coming up for next year as well, which will help me get back to the original purpose of the list, which is, what are people doing?

And that's where the second new free-text question comes in, which is, what have you done new this year in comparison with where you were 12 months ago? That's a kind of balance to the challenges question. And the idea is that in 2027 I'll be able to look at that and say, well, how do these new things that people are doing match up to the challenges that everyone was talking about last year? I'm hoping I'll be able to say, oh well, people recognised the challenge and they're facing it.

Actually, that's already kind of happening and that's very heartening to see. Anyway, so you asked the question, what's happening with AI? The answer is that's the whole subject of an extra branch of research with Egle, which is the AI in L&D report. And I think that's where that's going to live now, with the Global Sentiment Survey being separate from it.

Michelle Parry-Slater

So, you heard it here first, folks. Donald Taylor has killed off AI. That's the headline.

Donald Taylor

Well, now look, that's bad journalism, right? You're taking a small thing and blowing it up out of all proportion.

Michelle Parry-Slater

But what is happening is that people have so got this fear, this existential threat of AI. When I feel like we've been to this rodeo before. We've been to this rodeo when we first got e-learning, we've been to this rodeo when we first got email and the internet. Huge things happen and people are afraid of them. And I think that's perfectly valid. We as human beings are primed for change, but living through it is difficult.

Donald Taylor

You surely, Michelle, surely you're too young to remember us getting into e-learning?

Michelle Parry-Slater

It's very flattering of you to say, but I think it's just the lights I've got on my face.

Donald Taylor

Well, I certainly remember it. Do you seriously think this is comparable to e-learning?

Michelle Parry-Slater

I think e-learning was a thing, it was a tool and we could look at AI from that perspective. It's a tool. But certainly people's response to it feels very similar. Whenever we're in any sort of discomfort as human beings, fear is a natural response. And so I totally understand and respect why people feel the way they do. But then I often say to people, look, we're glad we live in homes with electricity. We're not out hunting our own food and living in caves, but that was the human condition at one point. I remember my grandparents having an outside loo and who would have thought it? We have them inside now.

So, change is definitely something that, when we're living through it, feels very difficult. But at the time, it is really important.

Donald Taylor

I just want to quickly look at something here, because I think it's important for whatever else we might talk about. I think there is something qualitatively different about AI versus e-learning.

E-learning, or rather the birth of the web in 1989, effectively, but it really came into prominence in the early 2000s, the birth of the web reduced the physical barrier to knowledge. Suddenly it was possible to access, in theory, all the world's knowledge through a device you held in your hand. But the mechanism of getting that information to people remained that somebody had to find, filter, interpret and share it, which is what L&D did.

The qualitative difference with AI is that AI can do all those things: find, filter and share it. The interpretation bit, it can do some of, and it doesn't do it terribly well, I don't think, but it doesn't do a bad job. And it does it incredibly fast and cheaply. And I think the fear is valid. It comes from the recognition that whereas in the year 2000, we could say, well, I can just produce a course but I'll do it in a different way, I remember doing presentations about blended learning in 1999, happy days, that idea that we could shift back to what we'd always done, creating and sharing content, people now recognise is no longer the case. That uncertainty, I think, fuels people's fear and discomfort about what's going on. And I think that's valid, because I think it is qualitatively different.

Michelle Parry-Slater

I agree with that, and I think it's also the context in which the change is taking place, because there's a real rupture in the world right now. There's economic uncertainty, there are socioeconomic challenges around that. And so, people aren't just living through one existential threat, they're living through multiple, and we have been for some time. To go with that analogy I used earlier, we're glad we don't live in caves, we're glad we live in houses. But of course, if anyone's ever lived through a renovation, the dust and the mess and all of that, that's kind of what we're in. We're in a big reno right now. And this rupture, your research demonstrates it, doesn't it? This sense of redundancy and job searches and leadership going to AI tools before they're coming to learning and development. Is this a surprise? Is this what you're seeing?

Donald Taylor

Quick aside, Michelle, that use of the word 'reno', is that something you've picked up in Australia?

Michelle Parry-Slater

Renovations! Sorry, I've forgotten my good English, haven't I?

Donald Taylor

Thank you. Just wanted to get that in there.

You ask, are we surprised that people might be bypassing L&D? No, not at all.

People, when they want to learn something, they want to learn it, they want to get on, they see a need and they want to solve that need. And it could be not learning so much as: I need to know how to do this one particular task. I go to YouTube, find out and fix it.

It could be they recognise that they need a bit more learning to take place. And so they said, well, I need to go to somebody who really knows about this. And they can find that person themselves. Or I can go through learning and development to find the person or to find something they've created, or whatever.

We've already seen that people are doing this themselves through everything from YouTube to expert searches and everything in between. It's only going to accelerate.

The issue that L&D needs to, I think, get a hold of is to reassert its authority in the field of instructional design. Now, I've made a lot of noise in the past couple of years about the fact that content is not a defensible moat for L&D. But I absolutely believe that L&D does know more about creating good learning content than anybody else, if we choose to use what we know and we should assert our authority in that area. And it shouldn't be difficult to point out that in some cases the stuff that people produce and share, or stuff they learn online, might look glossy, it might be fluent, it might sound convincing, but it is actually incorrect, or it's poorly structured, or whatever. Dr Philip Harbin has done some very good work on this, looking at how AI can be used very effectively in a pedagogically sound way by L&D people.

But people aren't going to be coming to L&D for their content for everything. Increasingly, if you give people the chance to talk into their phone and find an answer to something, that's what they're going to do.

That's the reality and we have to work with it. And there are lots of ways we can do that. I'm excited about the future, there are lots of things we can do, but we have to recognise that our province is no longer content, and that's not a defensible differentiator. It's not something that makes us look like the experts in a field that nobody else is in anymore, unfortunately.

Michelle Parry-Slater

It is then perhaps something that we need to think about in terms of crafting the overall experience. Because if it's not just content, then it's what the overall experience looks like. And I wonder if it will come down to almost the lowest common denominator for us, where we only end up dealing with compliance training, or only end up dealing with leadership programmes where people are throwing money at it and what happens to the everyman?

Progress alongside pressure, essentially. We've got to find our new way.

What is your suggestion? I know you've done a lot of research around this and you're looking into it through your transformation triangle. Can you tell us a little bit about that? Your AI in L&D report makes a really clear argument in that space.

Donald Taylor

I'd like to think we're not making an argument so much as reflecting reality. What we're trying to do with the transformation triangle is look at what people are actually doing, and rather than being prescriptive and saying, you should do this, you should do that, we'd rather be descriptive and say, this is what's happening. This is what people in the world are doing and we can see some patterns.

I hope at some point Michelle, we can come back to your point about what happens to L&D in the future, I firmly believe there will be some significant changes to L&D, so let's come back to that one. But as you have asked about the triangle let's look at it.

We brought out the AI in L&D report for 2025, which came out in September of 2025. What we've done is look at what people are doing well with L&D and the use of AI. We found that there was a pattern, that there were three what we call destinations that you can go to. I want to make it quite clear that when I describe these things, it's not a checklist of activities that people are going through.

It's not something where you're just choosing to do some of these things and it's working out. It's more complex than that. These are things which involve probably fundamental changes to the organisation.

So, the first of these three destinations is the skills authority.

Here, skills are pretty much treated like a business asset by the organisation as a whole. That's important, it's not L&D saying, we've done a skills audit. Skills are treated as important by the organisation as a whole. You know what you have, you know what you need to get, you know how to get from here to there. Everybody in the organisation treats skills and learning as being consequential. That word consequential, is really important. It links all three of these points.

The enablement partner is almost like, not the alternative, but a different view of looking at the capability of your organisation. A skills authority is quite centralised and is sharing information across the organisation, so consultancies will typically be skills authorities if they do this well. An enablement partner is an area where you've got a very diffuse organisation very often, people know what they need to do. And very often, no matter how good your L&D department is, employees on the front line know more about what they need to do than you do. But that expertise is unevenly distributed. The job of L&D is to enable people who are doing things well to capture, surface and share what they've got, so the rest of the organisation can use it.

Learning is still regarded as consequential. People want to learn this stuff so they do their job better. Managers regard people learning to do their job better as an important way in which people spend their time. You're in a hotel chain, somebody in Sydney finds two minutes shaved off check-in time by doing something great, get it up, share it, let the whole organisation from Buenos Aires through to Berlin learn the same thing. That's two minutes multiplied, really add up over the day. So that's two things, skills authority and enablement partner. In both of those, learning is consequential and it's a central role of the L&D department.

The third one is the adaptation engine. In the adaptation engine, L&D doesn't so much exist as a separate department anymore. Here, we recognise that the environment and the systems shape performance more than training does.

And we regard it therefore as something which requires a systemic solution. You've got something like a SWAT team that goes in and it will involve people from what used to be called L&D, but they're now just part of a team that goes in and looks at talent, learning, training, skills, marketing, employee value proposition, all of these things bundled together. They find out when there's a performance problem, whether it's a short-term one or a longer-term capability one, how do we unpick that, find the various components, and within that solve the problem?

If learning is part of it, of course that learning is consequential because the organisation sees that systemic approach as vital to organisational performance. So that's a lot of words to describe it, but that's the transformation triangle in a nutshell. We raised it in 2025, it got a lot of traction, and I think it did because it gave people a sense that AI isn't just a matter of doing what we do now but more of it, it's a matter of changing what we do and how we approach our work. Egle and I brought out another report for Learning Technologies, talked about it in 2026 in May, in April as the Learning Technologies

report was in May, and of course we'll be using that as a framework to explore what's happening in the next report, which comes out in September.

Michelle Parry-Slater

I'm curious to know from the feedback you're getting about this. I mean, you talk about it as reflecting reality, and I think we've been in some of this space for some time, especially when it comes to that adaptation engine. If we've not been looking holistically, if we've not been looking at the wider system, we're missing a trick. You don't just land L&D into a vacuum, you land it into a very complex organisation, even if it's the most simple of organisations because human beings are involved and we are naturally, inherently complex. So I'm just wondering, what are you getting reflected back? Are people agreeing? Are they resisting? Are they giving you another direction? Are they asking which one they should choose?

Donald Taylor

Yeah, all of those things. And I don't think people are resisting, that's interesting. Nobody has come back and said, well, this is complete tosh and you're talking through your hat. I think people are positive about it. I think some people are imagining they're closer to one of these points than they actually are. And I think it's very easy to say, well, we're doing skills, we've got a framework, we've got assessments, whatever. But that business having learning be consequential, and the people in the L&D department sharing the information about it across the business, not because the learning department is saying something but because it is a business asset, that's the cultural shift which most organisations haven't made on the skills side. Although many are getting there.

I think the most common thing is that people are not recognising the drags that exist on the journey towards one of these three destinations. They're imagining that if they just do enough work and the leadership is committed enough, they'll get there. But it's more complicated than that. They can be stymied on the journey for various reasons. And if they're held back on that journey, simply setting a vision and saying we have to change our mindset isn't enough. There are practical things that need to be done to overcome resistance or the drags on that journey.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Yeah, I would agree entirely. Because what tends to happen is if you're just hoping that your organisation will come along with you, or if you're just hoping that they'll engage in the change without actually setting up some strategy and being proactive about what you stand for now, we've already talked about how the default is that people will just go to AI. So, you become superfluous without actually fighting your corner.

Donald Taylor

And this comes back to the point you raised earlier about what happens to L&D. I think your right, and this is not necessarily the position of Egle, but this is my view having

been in this field for a long time, I think we're facing a point where there'll be two types of L&D in the future. One will be a strategic type of L&D where people are doing things for the organisation as a part of the organisation, and learning is seen as a consequential and important way of solving short-term performance and long-term capability issues.

At the same time, there'll be the necessary stuff - compliance training, onboarding, anything where everybody has to get from here to there and you have to know that everybody is there. And there'll be leadership training as well, though I think leadership training might be slightly outside that.

I think those two bits, the compliance side of training and the strategic learning and development bit, may end up being two completely separate parts of the organisation. The training bit being called learning and development, or something else. The strategic being called something completely different.

Michelle Parry-Slater

What's interesting in Australia is I actually see that split already. Oftentimes compliance will be owned by governance or risk, not even by L&D. Leadership will be owned by OD. There's this real correlation between organisational development and leadership here, which is quite fascinating to me, because I see organisational development as something entirely different, a totally different domain. And leadership kind of tends to sit under that here. And then you've got strategic L&D doing discretionary programmes, doing programmes that are in a separation from compliance. So it would be interesting to see, that's one culture, separate from what we've experienced in the UK.

We may have, you know, 105 countries took part in your Global Sentiment Survey, there may be 105 interpretations of that future of L&D. But to your point about strategic and pragmatic as two separate entities, I can really believe that to be true.

For me, what concerns me, especially as I see governance owning compliance, is that it's not about adult learning principles, it's not about the learning experience, it's actually about ticking a box. It's about the reason for learning in the first place. And I wonder if there's any reflection on that in what you've been finding through your report and research.

Why are we doing it in the first place?

If we can just go to YouTube or ask AI to create a course in five minutes, why bother having a strategic L&D approach? Why bother having instructional design that we know actually works?

Donald Taylor

There's a lot in that question, Michelle. I think let's go to the compliance bit for a second. I think we shouldn't underestimate the importance of compliance and we

shouldn't underestimate its value to L&D. It's valuable to L&D because it's a shop window. If everybody in the organisation has to do something, then they're going to judge you by what the compliance training looks like. And unfortunately, if you regard the compliance training as something you just have to get through as an instructional designer, and I'm not suggesting everyone's like this, but certainly a lot of compliance training is very dull, it's not seen as being learning by either the people who participate in it or the people who create the content. The result is that they then see everything the L&D department does as going to be like that. It's a very negative experience which spills over.

So I think we need to take it seriously. But the other point is, why would we bother with instructional designers? I think organisations that recognise the importance of compliance know that it's going to be done right. And the best way I can describe this is in the words of a Lieutenant Commander in the Royal Navy who said to me, "Donald, when we go into action, I don't want my boys having learned how to fire their guns from Wikipedia." There are some things which you just have to get right. For less exciting things like financial regulations, you've actually got to know that stuff. You've got to do it right. And if the compliance isn't done properly, two things can happen. One is somebody comes along, sees all the boxes aren't checked and takes away your licence to operate.

That's bad.

But worse is somebody does something rogue and does it in the wrong way because they didn't learn something properly. Of course, people can learn things and still do things in the wrong way, it's not a guarantee. But if they weren't given the opportunity to learn how to do it right and they go and bring down the bank, that's a lot worse than the previous option.

So compliance is something which too often gets a bad reputation, and I think it needs to be taken more seriously.

But unfortunately, that's one side of it, the strategic side, if you like and it will only be taken seriously by organisations which think that learning is a crucial part of dealing with the 21st century. I don't know, I'd be interested to know what you think, Michelle. I don't know that there is much that L&D can do to shift the culture of an organisation and its attitudes towards learning and performance simply by doing their job well. Maybe there are other things we can do, but it's very difficult to change a whole culture of an organisation. What do you think?

Michelle Parry-Slater

I think that's exactly the space we need to move towards and play in. And the reason I think that is when you talk about strategic L&D, you can't really be strategic unless you're looking at the bigger picture, unless you're realising how systems thinking will play into your learning and development.

You know my book, five chapters at the beginning of my book are really all about the wider system, who are your stakeholders, what's your strategy, what's the kind of approach that you're taking? Because I genuinely believe that we need to influence in the right way.

Now, I want to just take you back to compliance. The conversation around compliance is - endure something you have to do. Tick the box. My husband said this to me, he puts the videos on double speed, goes and makes a coffee, comes back, guesses the answers. Totally missing the point.

Donald Taylor

Hold on, is this going to go public? Is your husband in danger of getting fired?

Michelle Parry-Slater

No, it's all good, because then we have a good conversation. I say, no, this is not how it's meant to be. For me, it's about shifting the conversation. Shift the conversation to, do you want to go home safely today? Do you want your colleagues to go home safely? Do you want to make safe, legal, ethical, healthy decisions at work today? And if you have a different conversation, that's cultural. That's a cultural shift. So, this brings the two sides of your coin together, this is the strategic L&D and necessary L&D. And of course, who in their right mind is going to say, I don't want my staff to be safe, legal and healthy at work?

Now, of course, it depends who owns the narrative, who controls that narrative. What's interesting is the judiciary are starting to make the shift. So, in Australia in January this year, there was a case brought, it was a sexual harassment case and they were legally compliant. They ticked all the boxes. But the judge ruled that it wasn't sufficient to do e-learning whilst out on the casino floor. You can't actually be learning behaviour change if you're not concentrating on the learning. So, to my husband, putting the video on, skipping off and guessing the answers, that ticked the box, legally compliant. But actually that's no longer enough.

So, I think that L&D needs to really focus on, what is strategic L&D? What value are we bringing? AI can help us surface the case law, but actually how do we apply that case law in practice?

Donald Taylor

How persuasive can L&D be in this? How much contact do we have? Because we know the culture comes from the top of the organisation. I'm not saying we can't do it, but do you think it's possible? Have you seen organisations where they have done it?

Michelle Parry-Slater

I've seen organisations that are getting interested in it and to your point earlier, lose their licence to operate. There have been organisations in Australia who have lost their licence to operate and are now operating through a governmental board in order to

regain it. They need to look at these things differently. And there are a lot of licensed organisations here, we've got mining, we've got gambling, we've got all sorts of different organisations, and they're replicated across the world. But for me, it's not even about your licence. It's about the right thing to do. It's about human beings in the age of AI.

Donald Taylor

Of course, but it's tough enough getting in to see the CEO and saying, we need to get the licensing right to keep the business going. Talking about the higher picture will work in about 1% of cases. Sydney Savion, who was CLO at Air New Zealand for a while, did a really good job there, persuading the regulators to take a different approach to learning and making it much less about checking boxes and much more about actual behaviour change. She's now back in New York working for a nonprofit, I think. But it is possible to do it. I think it just takes a lot of energy, time and commitment. Do you think we've got that?

Michelle Parry-Slater

Well, it's interesting that you mentioned the regulators, because talking recently to an internal auditor, an external company that comes in and does internal audits, they said that they are really copping the flak. They're being told that we have to do it, and their audit reports are being used as "we have to do it." When actually no auditor in their right mind is saying you must do boring e-learning tick-the-box. What the auditor is looking for is examples of behaviour change. When they can't identify an example of behaviour change, they say that there needs to be more training. And so we're in this loop of people thinking that we can't do compliance well.

But we've gone down a track I didn't expect we would go down today, and it is one of my personal passions. You and I have had long conversations about how that shop window is so important. We've got 100% of our audience, which is why I think, in order to have this future of learning and development, we need to go where we're needed. And I think we are needed in that compliance space, especially if it's owned by governance and risk, because it needs to be of better quality.

We sort of need to start thinking about what's next. And there's one word in the research that I just really picked up on. That word is hope.

What hope can you give?

What picture does the data paint when it comes to hope in such a pressurised world?

Donald Taylor

I think hope is very important. Otherwise, why do you get out of bed in the morning and do anything, if you don't believe that you can be successful? And I do believe there are strong, good reasons to be hopeful. The fears that we have are based around uncertainty. I think the transformation triangle in particular and who knows, it may be in the future a square or a pentagon because we discover there are other destinations, but

the clear thing is that there are places we can go and we can do things. And it won't necessarily be easy.

We stress a lot in the May report about the transformation triangle, we stress a lot that leadership is crucial, it's necessary, but it's not sufficient within L&D. We need people who can drive things forward, but you can't do it all by yourself. And the question leaders need to be asking themselves is, what happens if and when I leave?

So, leadership needs to galvanise people in the department, get them to change, and galvanise the organisation, maybe not all of it, but a part of it and get it to change as well.

So I think a lot of the practical side of what it comes down to, of what we can do, comes down to hope – that we're trying to provide people here. There is a route to success in L&D, in fact to do with a lot more in L&D using AI and other tools like we've done in the past. I really and sincerely think that AI opens up a whole range of new things that we can do. The simulations, expert support, coaching, that can be driven by, supported by, augmented by AI.

Hope alone isn't enough. You leave a conference, you've heard some great speakers, you feel hopeful, you get back to the office. You've got a pile of stuff in your inbox, you've got to deal with it. So, hope has to be accompanied by action. And ultimately, when you are a certain way down the path, it's going to get tough, things are going to get difficult, you have to make hard choices, and that's when you need courage as well. So I think these three things together: you need the hope to start, you need to be committed to taking the action, and you need the courage to continue when things are tough. And I think that if you've got those things, we've definitely got a big future in learning and development, because so much now is possible. And crucially, in a world of technology where ultimately AI becomes a commodity, as technologies always do, nobody gets ahead at the moment because they've got an Excel spreadsheet. Nobody wins because they've got a steam engine. Those things became commodities within a certain period of time. ChatGPT and all AI tools will become commodities if they're not already. The question is, how do you use them? What skills, what knowledge, what critical thinking can people apply in using those tools? And that's where L&D comes in. If we're doing our job right, I think it's a long way away from teaching people how to do an introductory course in Excel, which is what I started doing back in the 1990s. But it's much more interesting and much more important. And I think we are the people to do it, if we have the hope, we take action and the courage to continue.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Where do you think people are getting that courage from? Is it upgrading skills? Does that by definition give courage?

Donald Taylor

I hope that it comes from community. I think that we need to be supporting each other, pointing out who's doing great work and saying, I'm going to be like them. And always when you stumble, because everyone's going to stumble on this journey, have friends around you who can say, look, that happened to me. Or maybe it didn't happen to me, but anyway, keep going. The journey's worth it. So, I think community is the essential component in this.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Yeah, I 100% agree. I think community is what's got us through all of these big shifts. When we think about when we first started using e-learning and you're sitting next to somebody who's working with Articulate, "I don't know how to use it". That's what we do, we just ask the person sitting next to us. But it's not even as simple as that, is it? It's the complexity.

Donald Taylor

No, it's not. You're right that we need to ask people, but it's a much bigger scale. Some people will be inspirational, blimey, look at what so-and-so's done, isn't that fantastic? But really, I think it's the community of people saying here's a small thing you can do today that's different. Here's a way you can get back half an hour in your day by approaching things in a different way. It's not a technical thing, it's how you deal with people. Here's how I changed that person from being a complete saboteur of what I'm doing to being at least neutral and sometimes they're positive about it. Those things we need to share. And that's why I'm a firm believer in conferences, yes, but also online communities and sharing generally. On LinkedIn, online events, your podcast, everything, it's really important to hear how other people are doing. It's a reality check and an inspiration. It gives you that bit of courage, it's tough to keep going.

Michelle Parry-Slater

I think the courage you get from doing that is that you have a perception that everyone's further ahead than you, but we're actually all swimming around trying to find the right direction with this stuff. I don't think anyone's really nailed it. So . . .

Donald Taylor

Michelle, I'm going to do a post on this.

On how the human mind works in terms of seeing distributions and what the actual distribution is. In our minds, we typically think about things as a normal distribution, classic bell curve, which is fair. Average height, average weight, everything, great. For technology adoption, it's not like that. For technology adoption, you've got a skewed distribution. It's like this, some people doing nothing, a lot of people doing a bit, and then there's this long tail of some people who are doing amazing stuff. This is what we hear about. And so we all imagine that's where everybody is. But the median is down here somewhere. And we should try to just think, how do I get a bit better today, rather than how can I possibly do the stuff that these amazing people are doing? It won't

happen. So, change your mental attitude, which is impossible to do, of course. But trying to just get better each day, rather than leap forward into something which somebody who started three years ago is doing.

Michelle Parry-Slater

I think that takes us really right back to you taking AI off the list. Because actually it's normalised, it's about trying a little bit every day and not feeling like you're being left behind.

I did an interview with Egle recently for People Management Magazine about exactly this, and it was really helpful. So I'll link to that in the show notes as well, because that feeling of being left behind is paralysing. But we can get courage by realising that actually we're all learning, we're all trying to move forward.

And I'll give a shout out to Ian Pettigrew, a good friend, who's written a book called Hope is a Strategy. And I think that just as a title of a book, it gives me hope.

But there is definitely a strategy in what you suggested there: hope, courage and action. Now, Don your next AI in L&D report you've mentioned is due out in September. So without spoiling it, can we have a little bit of a direction of travel? Or is it too soon?

Donald Taylor

It's not too soon, but it's very dangerous to say what's going to happen before it happens, because we haven't written the report yet. By the time it comes out, it could be that we've changed our minds about things. But I will say this one thing. We know, looking at what's happened over the past three years, that people have used AI all the time for creating content.

But how they have used it to create content has changed dramatically just between 2024 and 2025. Because people have shifted, they're still creating content, but they're doing it in a very different way. They've gone from asking ChatGPT a question and copying and pasting the answer, to using it as a sparring partner. That's one very simple example, there are lots of other ways in which it's been used differently. I can predict that that trend will continue. And not only will it continue, but the base of people who are doing that thing differently, which is a fundamentally different way of creating content to how we've done it in the past, that base will grow.

So again, coming back to our skewed distribution. Not everybody's going to be doing crazy, wild, exciting things, but a lot of people will be doing their job a bit better by using LLMs in a different way. And I think that's something we should congratulate ourselves on and be happy about.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Okay, well thank you, thank you for that little sneak peek.

Donald Taylor

That's as much as I can say. I don't want to persuade anybody who is answering the survey right now to answer in a different way. That's very important.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Is there anything else that you wanted to say today that you haven't yet had the opportunity to? Please do feel free to add.

Donald Taylor

I'll pretty much say this at the end of every podcast, please put down your phone and have a conversation with somebody today. The number of words that people hear has been diminishing. Now, it is true you're still communicating with people perhaps via text, but it's not the same as having a verbal conversation with somebody. Whether it's just in the shops over a cup of coffee, or you're going out to meet somebody you haven't seen for a while, talking to somebody is a different way of communicating.

You can see them, you can listen to them, you can shape your ideas on the basis of what you're perceiving their emotional reaction to be, in a way that you can't do with text. I'm concerned that too much of our interaction with people is happening online, and that's removing our ability to capture the nuance of interpersonal relationships.

You might say this has nothing to do with L&D. Well, maybe it doesn't. I think it does though, because I think we're all about people. And if we're trying to persuade people to behave differently, that's the core of what we're doing. And it probably starts with a conversation. So let's not lose that crucial human skill. Go out and practise it today, please.

Michelle Parry-Slater

It's definitely something I see in Australia. Despite the vast geography, people do love to get together in a room and have a yarn, have a chat. So yes, thanks for raising that.

Donald Taylor

Have a convo in the arvo while they're doing their reno, maybe.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Yes all of that. But I have to say, I did say to Michelle Ockers recently, how do you know if it's an O at the end or an IE? I'm still learning. I'm still learning.

So listeners, if you've got any tips for my Australianisms to annoy Don Taylor in future episodes, I'd love them.

Thank you so much, Don, for sharing with us just how the Global Sentiment Survey has moved on, and how this has been influenced by your AI in L&D work as well. And let's pick it up when you do the next sentiment survey coming up later in the year. But for now, that's all on Learning Uncut.

Thanks for listening. We'll see you next time. And if you enjoy our episodes, don't forget to subscribe and to share them with others so more people can find the wisdom of Don Taylor and all of our other guests. Thanks very much, Don.

Donald Taylor

Thanks so much.

Learning Uncut Elevate Episode 50: What's next for L&D? Donald Taylor



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