



About the Emergent Series

This episode is part of the Learning Uncut Emergent series where we talk about rapidly changing business models, and how Learning and Development can support organisations to adapt. Exploring how learning professionals can emerge from disruption as relevant and effective. The series is co-hosted by Michelle Ockers, Laura Overton and Shannon Tipton.

Michelle Ockers:

Welcome everybody to another Emergent episode. It's been a number of months. Last November was the end of season one of Emergent, and this is kind of a bridging episode where we're going to fill you. In I've got Shannon and Laura here with me, and we'll introduce ourselves again in a moment for those who are coming fresh to an Emergent episode. We're going to fill you in a bit on what we've continued to do with Emergent, something we've called *Emerging Stronger*, where we're headed into the future, and why it matters for you as a learning and development professional.

So I'm Michelle Ockers, of course. I'm the host of Learning Uncut, and I work with leaders who want learning to make a bigger impact in their organisation, predominantly through learning strategy and capability uplift for L&D teams. The first of my Emergent co-hosts is Laura Overton. Welcome, Laura.

Laura Overton:

Hi. Yes, my name is Laura, and I'm really just very passionate about how learning and development can really create business value. Have been for the last 30 years of my career. I think most people know me for the research work that I've done in establishing benchmarks for high performing learning organisations and also further facilitation and writing work that I do. But really, at heart, I'm an analyst, but I've got a passion for the industry, so it's been brilliant to be involved with this series. Thank you, Michelle.

Michelle Ockers:

It's been great to have you involved. And the final vital part of our little trio here is Shannon Tipton. Welcome, Shannon.

Shannon Tipton:

Hi, Michelle. And yes, I'm Shannon Tipton, the owner of Learning Rebels. What was really great here about being a part of this is that it just aligns with everything that we all believe in, but mostly what Learning Rebels also believes in, which is tackling training or learning and development in a completely different way, and using those different lenses to see how we can really make an impact to our businesses, and most importantly, for me, to the people within those businesses. So this was just a wonderful journey to be a part of, so thank you for having me with it.

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Michelle Ockers:

Well, one of the things I really loved is that it enabled us to see what was common in our collective vision for the industry, and it really brought us together. At a point in time when we felt there was something going on in the industry, it was imperative to look at how do we seize this moment. Between the three of us, working together over the past year because it has been a little over a year since we started working on Emergent, it's allowed us to really see and refine that kind of collective vision we have that brings together the best of our individual vision. So Shannon, how would you describe that collective vision between the three of us?

Shannon Tipton:

Oh, the collective vision between the three of us; it was just such a wonderful process to be able to work together and to make such great links with all of our strengths. It's between your organisational mind and Laura's data mind and my, hey, let's try this kind of mind. It was really interesting to see all of this come together because I think it just does go towards one of the lenses that we talked about, which was about community and being able to use the other people around you in order to really make the impact that we need to make right now. And it was really cool to have that all come together between the three of us and be able to apply our own individual strengths, as well as our collective strengths. And then also discover where we each have gaps and how we can help move within those gaps, and then emerge stronger through the three of us. So I really did enjoy this process. It was just such a process of discovery.

Michelle Ockers:

As well as those elements of the vision, one of the other hallmarks I think of the approach that the three of us have combined, is around being really pragmatic and helping people to take action and looking at moving beyond just talking, and applying and shifting in a way that's going to help us to become more business-critical. And Laura, I know you have been very grounded in research and evidence for a long period of time, so that has wound through our collective vision as well.

Laura Overton:

Absolutely. Evidence-informed and independent thinking. I think the great thing about each of us is that we would challenge each other to ensure that what we're reflecting is something that is of value and is across the whole of the industry and to bring that independent thinking. I think that the three of us are known for around the globe has been really important.

Michelle Ockers:

So let's recap on where we've come from. Season one of the podcast ran from the 23rd of June to the 10th of November 2020. So it's early July 2021 at the time we're recording this, so a little over a year ago. And at that point in time, it had been several months since our daily lives had shifted radically right around the globe, with the pandemic hitting the world and lockdowns. And at that point, we were kind of just at the tail end of that initial period of rapid response by organisations with L&D supporting people to adapt to this change. Of course, it's probably gone on for much longer than we had anticipated at that time.

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I think we were already thinking ahead to how do we emerge out of this, which has happened in a more staggered way across the world. It hasn't been an even experience. But we felt that there were enduring shifts underway because of the pandemic, and some of these were shifts that the pandemic accelerated but didn't necessarily start. So it was about this opportunity at this point in time, but we felt there was this opportunity to usher in L&D becoming even more useful and maybe taking action and moving on some of the things we'd known about for a while, as well as exploring what are the new opportunities right now.

So, we invited a total of 32 guests to a podcast series we called Emergent to help us explore what L&D could do for an emerging future. And that, at a point in time, Laura maybe you always knew this, but a certain point in time, it dawned on me that this was really a research project we were undertaking with these conversations where we were really trying to look for the threads and what is it that we're hearing from our guests many of whom have made a choice to change before it was thrust upon them. And we were teasing out some of these ideas. Still, I had to look back at our wrap-up episode, which was on the 10th of November 2020 that came out. We were still teasing out the key themes from these conversations.

And really, since that time over the past sort of eight months, we've continued to work on sense-making and clarifying our findings. We've published an e-book, the Thinking Habits e-book, Laura, which I know you'll talk about in a moment. And also a white paper about our research findings out of this kind of body of work, and we'll put links to those in the show notes. So let's start summarising. When we look at this as kind of a research project, what are some of the things that have fallen out of it and the key things that we discovered through these conversations and through working with that and combining it with other evidence? So Laura, mindset and thinking habits was one key thread we drew out of Emergent.

Laura Overton:

Yeah, out of the podcast series. A lot of the recommendations that came through from those 32 guests, Michelle, were really kind of familiar actually to the three of us and also to many of the listeners. And certainly, we're familiar in the concept of the research part work that we've done in the past. We knew that high performing teams were more likely to do some of the things that were recommended. But what really struck us by listening to those different guests, their different perspectives, wasn't what they did, but it was more the approach and the attitude that they had. And as we kind of listened more and explored that more, we really started to look at the concept of thinking habits. What is it that influences our behaviour when we know that we need to do something? Well, like, for example, get in touch with what the business problem is before we recommend a solution, something as basic as that. When we don't do that, often our behaviour is informed by the way that we think, and we identified really five different thinking habits.

One was how do we think about our value? Do we see ourselves as creating learning through--values for our learning solutions, or do we see ourselves creating value through our business solutions? And we certainly saw through the podcast that

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those are creating values from the business solutions were getting more traction in this crazy world when we're thinking about business first. The other one was about how do we think about our role? Do we think of ourselves as kind of a knowledgeable expert? I know how to do great courses, great facilitation, great content, great instructional design. Is my role is to bring my expertise, or is my role to be more of an empathetic explorer, starting to say, okay, well, what is it that's needed? I may not be able to solve all the solutions, but how can I apply my expertise with your expertise? Which also then brought us onto the thinking habit, which was all around how we think about others. Do we see ourselves as being independent, or do we see ourselves as being interdependent? And particularly, I think when we looked at the coming out of the pandemic, we were all hands on deck.

We were certainly - there was a sense of interdependency where everyone was working on really critical emergency issues together, and that interdependence came through. We also talked about time scale a lot, and we would think about our thinking habits around time scale. Do we think of ourselves as kind of having to do long-term projects, investing in the future, or whether or not we have an act now, I need to do something now, short-term that builds a long-term future but is more responsive? And the way we think about our responses means that will influence our behaviour and what we take up. And then the final one really is a thinking about habit around how we think about risk and innovation. Do we take the perspective, or let's hold on? What's worked for us in the past and hold on to that really tightly, or do we change our thinking habits to say, okay, how do we move on? Rather than - I know Shannon, you use this term about racing to the solution, and this is something that's worked for us. Rather than doing that, how do we perhaps let go of the things that work for us in the past and move on into something new and trying something new?

So those thinking habits around how we think about our value, our role, how we think about our relationship with others, our relationship to our responsiveness and our relationship to risk and innovation absolutely set our guests apart, and we felt they were critical to bring into the Emerging Stronger process that we went through. So for me, I was really I think that was a breakthrough moment because I've been looking at why is it that people don't - they know what to do, they don't do it. And this is an essential time that people were still struggling so much, and we really felt that the way we think is so important, and I think that's been backed up by a lot of the literature that's come out into the marketplace as well about the way that we approach our thinking really influences our behaviour. What a great time to kind of reset. So that's, I guess, what we wanted to do.

Michelle Ockers:

I think that link between thinking and actions has been known for a long time, and maybe helps explain some of why even though we've known in learning and development there's been a body of evidence around what works, sometimes we hold ourselves back from acting on it. And teasing out these thinking habits is helpful to look at how do we adjust how we think so that we take the actions we know we need to take, and I know we're going to come back to this. So Shannon, to supplement those thinking habits, we also derived a set of lenses. Would you like to

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talk to us a little bit about what a lens is? Why did we use this kind of frame of reference to think about lenses?

Shannon Tipton:

When we were going through all of the transcripts for all of the different podcasts--

Michelle Ockers:

There are a lot of words spoken across the episodes, right?

Shannon Tipton:

Yeah, there were a lot of words. There were a lot of words. And one of the things I did was to go through each one of those and see which themes bubbled up. And without fail, the four topics that people just kept talking about as being important to how we are going to emerge stronger where it was the concept of data, community, technology, and experiments. And then we sat back, and I remember the conversation we had. We sat back and thought, well, what if you just shifted the perspective just a little bit? Like if you put on a new pair of glasses, what happens to your perspective? What happens to the lenses, right? How do we see things differently? And that was an aha moment for us. It was like it's not a matter of completely jerking ourselves out of what we currently do, but it's a gentle shift of changing the lenses and changing the perspective and maybe looking at things from a completely different angle to see if the lens will allow us to look at our problems in a different way. And I thought that was--we had a lot of fun doing that.

Michelle Ockers:

We did. And something that the two of you don't know, I got new glasses this week for driving. So those of you who live in Brisbane, you're just a little bit safer on the roads right now. But they're multi-focal, and I'm not used to them yet, so it's taking me a little bit to figure out when to look through the top, when to look through the bottom, how to position my head so I can see things. But they are helping. Things are becoming clearer. But sometimes, things are just that little bit out of focus before it clicks into place, and there's this overlap kind of where I'm using a little bit of both. So I think there's some good analogies. I think the lens analogy is really useful, and it's not just in eyeglasses, but Laura, I know we played around with the idea of a lens in a microscope. And what does a lens do in a microscope? So maybe you just want to pick up on that cause I know you spent a lot of time, and you even got into the lenses of insects eyes at one point thinking about this analogy.

Shannon Tipton:

Oh yeah. That's right. We did.

Laura Overton:

Well, as soon as you hit on an analogy, you can look at it in so many different ways, and I love the idea that sometimes, a lens can be used to kind of allow us to go straight in and zoom straight in on something very small, and to look at it in more detail to see what does that mean. But equally, a lens can be used to make something bigger; look at it from afar. We can see multiple facets that then combine through the insect eye to combine to give us a different perception of depth and

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colour and navigation that we couldn't - what comes through each lens individually may not make sense. But when it's combined, it can really give us a new sense of direction. So we were saying what needs to be brought into focus? What needs to be pushed further away? What needs to be combined to give us a new view, a new direction, a new navigation? We could have gone on forever on that, but we had to stop at some point. But yeah, we love the concept of lenses.

Michelle Ockers:

And it's all about helping us to see differently or to see better and to see things we might not otherwise see. So let's walk through those four lenses a little further. The first was data, which is about exploring the information around you in order to understand problems better and to make smarter decisions. And data, of course, comes in both quantitative and qualitative forms, and we looked at how do you work with data and explored that, and community, which is about drawing on the diverse perspectives and skills of others. We all have blind spots. We all have biases, and sometimes our expertise or our specific experience to link in with that thinking habit of when to move on, when to hold on, when do you draw on past experience as the basis of future success, and when do you need to bring something really fresh in and let go of something.

So community can help us because it can draw diverse thinking into play and help us to tap into that to gain fresh insights, improve the quality of our thinking, as well as this idea of interdependency Laura, which you spoke about as one of the thinking habits. We heard many times in the podcast series about working with marketing or working with IT or working with - and I know we're going to talk a little bit more about behavioural science - perspectives from behavioural science or working actually with behavioural scientists if you're fortunate enough to have them available to you. So that can really power up our toolkit and how we can go about crafting solutions to the problems we've been exploring with data.

So very much, we kind of realised that data and community was there, useful right across the life cycle of working on business opportunities and challenges as L&D practitioner. They're particularly useful for that early period when you're understanding and gaining insight and clarifying and exploring problems and looking at them differently. There are two more lenses. Shannon, would you like to pick up on the other two lenses and unpack those a little bit for us?

Shannon Tipton:

Sure. The other lenses were technology and experiment. Too often, we jump to which technology tool is going to solve our problem for us, and so we lean on that technology tool and hope that it has a magic wand somewhere in its back pocket that's going to solve all of our issues. And what we really wanted to do with that technology lens was to drive understanding that technology can help us. It should help us. But it's used as an augment. It's not used as the end-all-be-all because the first part is and what we talked about in the workshop was using the data-informed evidence to help us then drive what technology we might need because that's going to help the business move forward.

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Then also it brought in that experiment lens. So that experiment lens, again, that why are we racing to solution when we should be taking different paths? So when you think about using experiments and experimenting to get to where we need to be, the analogy that I've often used here is using your GPS. So your GPS gives you a variety of options before you hit your final destination. And what if there's a roadblock before your final destination? What do you do? You have to shift your path, and you have to experiment and be unafraid to be able to fail fast, test fast, adapt fast, and use those experimenting tools that we gave in the workshop to be able to think around what barriers might be in front of us and be agile and be quick. So I really loved those two and the way we approached those two in the workshops because it opened up a whole new realm of conversation that I don't think any of us quite expected. So that was really interesting.

Michelle Ockers:

Which leads us into where we took these insights. As we sort of synthesised and teased out these themes, these lenses, we thought there's something really valuable in this. And to just sort of offer them as a contribution to the world is great, and to be able to say, well, here's the insights we gained. But how can we take that a step further and support people to actually do something with these lenses, these insights that we've gained and to actually act on - if taking action is part of what we're all about, how can we help people to actually take action by applying the insights that we gain through the Emergent podcast and the additional research that we've done? So we created Emerging Stronger. Would you like to talk about Emerging Stronger, Shannon?

Shannon Tipton:

Emerging Stronger was the workshops really master sessions that the three of us developed. How can we use these lenses to help move the industry forward and to help people - help L&D leaders, in particular, achieve the successes that they're looking for in their businesses and really be the business partners that they're hoping to be? But also to that, is the partnership here about how can this research then help the broader community? That's what we were hoping for. So the sessions that we provided not only were helpful to the people who attended them but also helped us to gain more data around how can we now move from Emerging Stronger, dare I say to Staying Stronger, right? So how do we make that shift? And I think that was the core foundation of our Emerging Stronger master class.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. So we ran the masterclasses, the core of the activity was over a three-week period. But in terms of flow, we started with a session around mindset and thinking habits which Laura has spoken about. And then, over a three-week period, we ran a series of six masterclasses. When we started, the first two were all about the lenses and starting to get our heads around with the participants around the lenses, and what are these lenses? What are some of the tools you can use to apply these lenses? How might you apply them? Then we moved on in the second week to another two masterclasses where we worked with a case study, and had people working in groups actually practising applying the lenses to a case study which was

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an interesting experience in itself because the case study we chose to use was based on real world.

And initially, everybody went oh, but no organisation would operate like that. And no organisation would move as fast as you saying this organisation needed to move in at the scale, but the reality was it was a real case study. So that was interesting because that brought up not only practice in applying the tools but a really interesting conversation about how do you engage with business? And when you push back and say what you're asking isn't doable, and at what point do you say, well, these are my customers, and this is the reality I need to ground myself in of how the organisation wants to work, and how do I respond to that. So I think Laura, we hadn't quite expected that to come up in the case studies. It was very valuable. And then, we supported people, and we'd sort of been setting them up for this all along. It was a 'bring your own business challenge' or business opportunity to work on, and we're here with you through the community that we established to support you to work on that business challenge using the lenses and to identify some experiments that you can actually go out and run. And then we brought everybody back for a kind of progress check-in after, I think, three weeks, and now, we continue to support them in the community.

So it's very much around here's some tools, here's some practice in a safe environment with a group of peers. Get out in the real world and do it, and there's a safety net here for you to continue to explore. And we got to see things as we went along, but it took quite a few different groups. We brought quite a few different types of people together into this community, Laura, to start applying and working on Emerging Stronger. Would you like to talk a little about who was involved in some of the lessons that we learned from involving these different groups and creating our community?

Laura Overton:

Yeah. I think the irony is not lost on us, was it, when we did this because we're creating a masterclass in Emerging Stronger, and no one's emerged from a pandemic before. So we were all working out using evidence and using our experiences to be able to say, okay, what is the right part. We had 34 participants in the actual program itself. But what was amazing about them was that they came from all over the globe. We were connecting from across the time zones, and they each had really different experiences. We had some who had been in the middle of looking for work during that time because the pandemic hit hard. We had others who are really established in their roles in their job massively busy right now, and a wide range of experiences and a diverse range of experiences. And I think that was a lesson for us with how powerful it is to bring people together with a common playground because no one had done this before.

So we can all learn from each other, and I think that gave us permission, and I think it's the lesson to share with anyone else doing a global program. That psychological safety of connecting with people was so important there. The other thing that we did is we brought our guests back in, and about ten different guests came and joined into those areas. Not that they were there to teach, but they were - again, we rolled

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our sleeves up. We're all working together with the guests, and again, working with experts. Again, not as experts as such but as people who are working together on a common problem with outside helped us to work on that interdependency and learn from each other with our sleeves rolled up.

We couldn't have done it without - I mean; it was global. It was during the pandemic. It was naturally virtual, but we couldn't have done it without the producers that we worked with who were behind the scenes working with us on the right activities, the right connection. The thing I really struggled with, those who know me, knows I'm used to doing kind of keynote presentations and loads of slides and loads of data. Slimming that right back to give space during that session to connect and engage and practice and talk, and our producers really helped us kind of think through the right kinds of interventions to really allow that conversation to go and challenged us rightly so to make sure that we gave people enough time to think and absorb with that.

And then I think the other final area that I was really excited about was that we worked with sponsors of this program, and I think we work with them in a completely unique way because, for us, we were hungry that people would be allowed to come on this program even if they couldn't afford to. So we had to cover the cost. So working with organisations who actually were in agreement with the direction and the purpose that we were going with made such a difference. It not only released the funds to allow a wide group of people to connect with us, but I go on with our platinum sponsor, we work with Models Thinkers. We worked with Best at Digital here in the UK. We worked work with Go1, we worked with Learn Online Live and Cheryle (Walker) from the virtual production perspective. But rather than just saying okay, we've got a sponsor and thank you very much, they were so actively involved with the process that we were constantly looking for ways; how do we use the content? How do we use the playlist to get to expand our thinking, so they were involved with that process, how did we use those mental models from model thinkers?

Michelle Ockers:

They all attended some of the classes as well, so there was a level of involvement.

Laura Overton:

They were committed. They were so committed. Charlotte came along, didn't she, from Best of Digital, and gave us that perspective of bringing in behavioural science, gave us new views and ideas genuinely work with us in the way that we ought to be working with our supplier partners. They were there. Their sleeves were rolled up, and we were all working on these challenges together, and that's I think what's made it so exciting on why all of us learned through that process. So I could talk for ages on this one but so many lessons.

Shannon Tipton:

Well, I think the point, Laura, the point here is we've we learned. And what was brilliant, what we did not really plan the serendipitous moment here was between our sponsors, between the people we sponsored and the attendees ourselves and our

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guests, we built a community there. So we were using the community lens to help drive this program, and it was brilliant to see all of those pieces come together and move it forward.

Laura Overton:

We could learn what it felt. Rather than talking about that, we could feel what this really meant and what a difference it meant. So it was amazing.

Michelle Ockers:

I really loved that some of our guests who had been podcast guests who came back and attended one, two or three sessions took an active part in the breakthrough rooms that we'd set up the activities and walked away saying to us, "I learned something too." So you just highlight no matter what your level of experience or expertise engaging in community, you come away learning something with a well facilitated active level of participation structured activities and so on. But at the end of the day, it's like this sense of common purpose and this vision that everybody aligned around and brought something different too, and that, of course, started with very strong anchoring in Emerging Stronger. And what does Emerging Stronger mean, and exploring that and looking at how do we put that into action? And one of the very first things we did was ask our participants what does Emerging Stronger mean for you? We did some activities and conversation around that, and there were a number of different sort of ideas that came out of that. One was very much about our mindset and what sort of mindset do we need to emerge stronger.

So there were words that you would expect, like empowered, hopeful, resilient, confident, and one that I really loved, anti-fragile, which is all about being able to move forward with a different perspective through hardship. Some of it was about skills, about being equipped and capable, some of it was about being able to take action, and particularly this idea of experimentation really captured people, and I know we're going to talk a little bit more about that as well what sort of impact do we have when we are emerging stronger.

We ran a poll, and we gave people eight options to pick from around what are your priority goals for Emerging Stronger with us. And what was really interesting to me looking back at that poll, the top three responses were really about two things that are intertwined. One is about strengthening voice in our organisations. And the other two really about our relationship with our business, and they're kind of all intertwined around relationship with the business, so connecting learning to business value and strategic initiatives and building stronger stakeholder connections and achieving buy-in faster. So they kind of aggregate around this theme of our relationship to our business which ties in with a couple of those thinking habits in particular. One is that business first thinking habit, and the interdependency that it takes in order to understand what our business priorities are, what business value might look like and actually to achieve that in conjunction with others. And we did see shifts in voice as well through the course of the program. Some of the voices of those perhaps who were less experienced as participants became much stronger within the program, and we saw people taking action and having conversations differently through working on their business challenge and sharing back with us what that was like,

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what they saw shifting. So Shannon, let's talk a little bit more about what our participants learned.

Shannon Tipton:

It was vast and varied. The different projects that came to the program and it was interesting to see the evolution between how they were thinking about their projects to the end conclusion. I remember one of the participants coming to me privately in the network and said - or rather in our community and said I don't think this is the program for me. I think that this is way over my head. And once we talked about it and we talked about her project, it wasn't that it was over her head; it's just that it was thinking about it so differently and trying to see the forest through the trees, so to speak. Can I see through the fog? And that just gave me an acute awareness as to the struggles that our people within the industry are having.

Now, some of the challenges that surfaced with the different projects ranged from businesses that need to pivot, how can we support that pivot as an L&D person in their organisation? Also, then that led to change management. There were several that were dealing with change management initiatives, and those are big initiatives to start with. We all know how complex trying to deal with organisational culture can be, now lay a pandemic on top of it. So that was certainly a challenge for a lot of our people. There were topics challenges that were brought forth that dealt with onboarding, reskilling, upskilling. All of this pandemic driven where the pandemic shone a very bright light on a very specific problem that the organisation was having. Mostly what I saw with the challenges that were brought forward, I think that they had a lot in common even though they came from different places, and the thing that they mostly had in common was that there was a shifting of culture in - the sands were shifting - how people were interacting at work, how they were treating their professional development opportunities, how L&D needed to now think of a different way to interact within the businesses and still remain connected to the different departments and work cross-departmentally with everybody.

So it was really very unique, very varied, but yet felt similar to what we had experienced before the pandemic. And like I said, I think just now, it just showed this very specific light. And some of the feedback that we got from the masterclass was very heartwarming actually, and I know I speak for myself, but I know I speak for both of you who received messages, personal messages, saying how much that this program opened up their eyes to really be a contributor to really make a difference. And we took that survey at the very beginning of the masterclass as far as where do you feel that your contributions were? Do you feel that you were very much contributing or not at all or making an impact or not at all? And so many of them had said - I mean, one of them came back to me and said, I felt very confident about my impact and contributions to the organisation. But then she came to me later and said, oh, maybe not so much.

Michelle Ockers:

There was this real shift, if you recall, in the early part of the program where we're encouraging people to adopt that business first thinking habit and to try to look at whatever the challenge or opportunity they brought to the masterclass to work on

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was through a business - from a business perspective and think about it business first rather than learning first. And we actually asked them to state the problem or opportunity without using the words training or learning. They really grappled with that, right? That was a big shift.

Shannon Tipton:

They did, yeah. And I think that was Laura coming through, saying, don't use the words training, don't use the words learning, and see what you're left with. And that was a really large light bulb moment for a lot of them, especially when we started putting together the idea of building a hypothesis around your business problem. That was something that they struggled with as well, and that's when they started coming back to me and said, oh, I thought I was ready for this. Oh, not so much. And so that was an interesting development. And I think the last part that I would land on here was just some of them coming in and not having work. They were out of work, and so we sponsored them. And we had one person in particular on LinkedIn, and we had another person also who said that we gave them confidence to go in and find a new job somewhere where they really felt like they were making a difference and could articulate to the businesses that they could help their business make a difference, and I thought that was very heartwarming.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. Laura, were there any other big lessons that stood out for you?

Laura Overton:

Yeah, I think for me--and it's kind of a lesson learned in hindsight--was the way that this program was structured. Maybe it was more in hindsight for me, not for you too, as more of the experts in this field, but what we were dealing with was a highly complex situation. There wasn't a if you do this, you'll end up here, an A to B. This is completely ambiguous, completely complex environment that we're working in. But we followed quite a number of the principles that have been outlined in Mirjam Neelen and Paul Kirschner's book around how to work with complex environments. And whilst we gave a little bit of guiding information, the role of the case study, the ambiguous case study, starting to build these new ideas, these new lenses, these new ways of thinking in an integrated way really made a difference to us and also to the participants.

Many of them were saying, I felt vulnerable, but it was okay because we were all in it together, and then they started feeling confident to challenge each other and work with each other, and I think that case study helped, and I think that was something that we learned and we learnt how to use models, mental models and existing models that are already out there to help us structure the complexity to help us link what is going on in a complex world and give it some form, some structure where we can start to make a difference. And again, that is something that's recommended in terms of evidence to inform learning design.

And to say, I'd love to say that we've read this book and we were following it religiously, but in hindsight, there were many of aspects--of highly recommended aspects of having these integrated environments creating a layered approach. Let's

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get confident in the case study, and then we'll start to work together on each other's business problems and stretch ourselves a little bit more. We use drop-in centres to kind of - and we create that guided principles for people, those helping areas as mental models to help people start to slowly make sense. And it was spaced learning. It still is space learning.

It wasn't all - it wasn't in a couple of weekdays. It was over a period of time, and each time, we went away, and we practised. This, to me, was probably one of the most powerful insights that I got from this program. And that, and using strong behavioral science activities - the role of the role of nudges and thinking habits; thinking about how our brains work and starting to work out different ways that we could use our interactions with each other. And I think what I loved about this was many people who'd written public feedback have said I was pushed. I had to be vulnerable. Other people were being vulnerable; that helped. I had to be curious. Other people were curious; that helped. I had to challenge. Other people were challenging me; that helped. And I think Harold Jarche said to us, didn't he, right at the beginning. A community of practice isn't a community practice unless we change our practice, and I think everyone bought into that. And ultimately, we were all helping each other through that journey, but we created a scaffold and a structure in an ambiguous world. And I think that was a really powerful lesson that we learned, and we had to change things on the fly.

Michelle Ockers:

We did. By the end of the second masterclass, all of the content had been introduced. So two-thirds of the masterclass sessions, not to mention everything that went on the community, the showcasing of progress and so on, was about application and about practice and getting used to things. But after every single masterclass of which those last four were really very highly interactive and activity focused, and application-focused, the three of us would get together and go, oh, what just happened? Where do we need to take people next? What do we need to support? What did we learn? What were people having difficulty applying? Where are the light bulbs going on?

And the experiment lens; we spent a lot of time on experiments and how do you construct a hypothesis and what's the difference between a pilot and an experiment. How do we talk to people about that and support them to get the difference and to approach it differently? And it would be remiss of us Shannon - I hate to do this because we are in the middle of a mouse plague here in parts of Australia, which has gone on for way too long - But we talked a lot about Trojan Mice and releasing Trojan Mice. So maybe if you'd like to briefly introduce a little bit of how we work with experiments and Trojan Mice. I think that might be useful for listeners to think about.

Shannon Tipton:

Sure, we had a lot of fun with that. And as I mentioned earlier, the idea of experimenting was a bit of an anomaly for the participants who really hadn't thought about it in that way. And especially when you think about the idea of Trojan Mice, not my idea, Harold's. And there are several - Harold Jarche, and then there's some other writings about Trojan Mice that are out there that you can find. But the concept

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is trying small ideas, using small ideas, and letting them fail in order for you to get closer to a solution. That's the point because when we do a pilot - and a lot of times, we find that we're confusing experiments with pilots.

When we do a pilot, a pilot is already a solution that's been decided on, and all we're doing is we're changing the variables within that pilot to make sure that our solution still works. What we wanted to encourage people to think beyond was don't think about a solution. Think about different ideas that we can apply to help us get to an end result, and try little ones over and over and over again. The whole concept of Trojan Mice is failure. We expect them to fail. They should fail because, with every failure, it brings us closer to the right answer. And so that was something that just completely blew people's minds where they were like, wait, you want us to do what? We want you to fail. We really do. We want you to try little ideas that allow you to fail. And that was a lot of fun, actually. And it was a lot of fun for me in particular, diving into that particular topic and really just getting so deep. I did not expect that. That was an awakening for me to really start digging into this experiment lens and seeing what will come up and having that concept of Trojan Mice come out was just so much fun.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. One of our participants recently talked about it on LinkedIn as palatable risk-taking, which I really like that phrase. We can move the word failure out of it; palatable risk-taking.

So as we've gone through this discovery process ourselves through the Emerging Stronger masterclasses, what started as a perspective on Emerging Stronger about being - about how can the profession emerge stronger, how can L&D teams in organisations emerge stronger has evolved a little into something that we think is a little more timeless. And because of the shifts, we saw in the people who participated in the program, and because of the shifts in our own perspective during that period, and the window of opportunity to move stronger goes well beyond the pandemic is what we've realised because it's very much an individual journey about making change, about seeing themselves differently; making a different impact, a bigger impact through their work. And we're also curious about over time, thinking more about what are the characteristics of teams that emerge stronger, L&D teams that make a bigger impact.

So, Laura, we're now looking at this as the opportunity for a continuing body of research around this idea of Emerging Stronger, which we really think was like to glue this common sort of sense of purpose around exploring this, and what does this look like and how do we do it through the masterclasses. So you've brought your research mind to our little trio here, and we said, here's how we could keep going with the research and contributing through the research. So, where are you leading us with this, Laura?

Laura Overton:

It's where is the circumstance leading us. I think that's the critical question. And I think what we've all become as part of this program are genuine explorers. We want

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to discover what will work, what will help us find our voice, create community, become more strategic, and create a platform for us to become high performing learning and development leaders, leading high performing learning teams. So it's not as though this piece of work is going to be something that is new, but it builds on what we already know. So the research work that's going on around the globe at the moment, personally, I've been involved with the CIPD's new research, looking at the Emerald Works Learning Performance Benchmark, work that's been going on that I was involved with for 15 years.

There are things that are already out there, but how can we leverage and seize this moment of time in that kind of community, in our society, and in our kind of global economy to actually say, oh, is it this moment to be able to take some of those things and put them into action? What are the circumstances? And we think we can do this for a number of ways obviously by looking - asking good questions, working with each others and keeping on sharing our stories. Brene Brown talks about stories being data with soul, and we're doing that with our Emerging Stronger community that we described before, but we want to extend that through the work that we're doing through the interviews, that we're doing through the questions that we're asking when we're individually working, but also when we come together under the Emerging Stronger banner.

So we just want to keep learning, keep growing, keep exploring; what does it mean? What do we need to do? If we do experiments, what have we learned? How have we grown through those opportunities of taking that palatable risk? So it's all very well; it's doing this in isolation. But how can we do this together? And I think that's what we mean by this becoming much more of a research and an exploration opportunity where we can share our findings with other people and get others on the journey with us.

Michelle Ockers:

And we've got a couple of specific things that we've planned in coming months, Shannon, to help with that sharing.

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Shannon Tipton:

Yes, we have. So funny you should mention that Michelle, what we have coming up-- what we have coming up season two of our podcast with a focus on what it takes to emerge stronger at an individual level. Six episodes to be published from mid-December to late January. We're planning on one per week. And then, just like drum roll please, dadadada, we will be having another Emerging Stronger masterclass kicking off in February of 2022. So we will be posting all of those details on the Emerging Stronger website as well as on LinkedIn, so you can find information about that coming soon.

Michelle Ockers:

I love the way we just keep evolving and saying, well, what did we learn and what's next because we had genuinely thought that the masterclasses were a one-off because--

Shannon Tipton:

We were like; this is it. This is it. But I think it's just when you see the benefit, you want to keep contributing.

Michelle Ockers:

And the other opportunity as well, Laura, is for us to continue to work with organisations who have a belief in the vision that we've set and in the value of community and being part of community to drive a progressive agenda in learning and development. So we are very open to continuing with the sponsorship with a different model.

Laura Overton:

Yeah, absolutely. For us, sponsorship is all about "how do we help each other." So if organisations are out there who actually really believe in this vision that we want to see a stronger learning and development function able to really make a difference to individuals, teams, and organisations, then - and they want to be part of that community. They want to contribute proactively to that community and also to open doors for other people to be able to connect with that, people who perhaps haven't got the resources who really need the power of a supportive community around. If those types of organisations are out there like our amazing current sponsors, please just get in contact with us, and we're really happy to share more either directly with me via LinkedIn or through our Emerging Stronger website. We'd love to kind of love to talk to you because this is an ongoing journey now, and it would just be great to kind of keep on working with a broader range of like-minded people.

Michelle Ockers:

And we've mentioned a stack of different resources as part of this body of work. We'll put links to all of those in the show notes. If you're interested just in listening to the Emergent podcast series because it is part of the bigger Learning Uncut podcast, of course, we've got a Spotify playlist. There's a way of actually filtering and just seeing those episodes on the Learning Uncut website, and we've curated all of the resources from the show notes and the episodes into a collection on a Padlet board, so all of those links will be in the show notes. And I would like to send also as we

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wrap up a big thank you to all of the guests and sponsors as well as our producers. Viv Hudson and Cheryle Walker did a great job at helping us to shape the space through the masterclass series in a way that really helped create a lot of change that we're talking about. So for all of the L&D professionals working in the virtual world, if you can find yourself a good producer to work with, they can do so much more than set up polls and breakout rooms for you. So leverage your producer. So are there any other final thank yous or notes to add from either of you, Laura and Shannon, before we wrap up this episode?

Laura Overton:

I think for me, it's just I want to say thank you to the amazing participants who were just so vulnerable. And also, thank you to all of those who registered interest to wanting to become part of this, but they just couldn't quite make it. We hope that you'll really stay part of this community. If you can join us next year, that's great. But just trying to join us on the journey now, so yes, we're thanking people for their interest and their passion and commitment to wanting to emerge stronger. This great faith in this industry, it's just fantastic to see what people are able to do.

Michelle Ockers:

And I think one of one of the avenues for sharing back that we haven't been as active with is the LinkedIn page for Emerging Stronger. We've got over 500 people sitting there interested and curious. So we have plans which hopefully, by the time the podcast is released, that will be revamping the website to start sharing more of the insight back into the community and the resources that we've been created as well as on the LinkedIn page. Shannon, you can have the last word.

Shannon Tipton:

Oh well, I would like to once again thank our guests for helping us manoeuvre through our masterclass. Without them, it would not have been the same. Some of them were so dedicated and generous with their time to come in and provide extra help. Not to mention that we did do a revenue share with our guests, and a lot of them donated their part to--

Michelle Ockers:

\$2,000 U.S dollars went to supporting frontline health workers in India when they were really suffering and still are suffering very much from the pandemic. So thank you to our guests for that.

Shannon Tipton:

Yep. So we hope to see you on our LinkedIn page or our website.

Michelle Ockers:

And there will be links to our LinkedIn profiles on the show notes as well. The show notes will be very rich, so do take a look at those for our listeners if you're curious to explore more.