

Learning Uncut Episode 102
Taking Action on Reconciliation (D&I) – Ian Crowhurst and
Brigitte BinAwel
Hosted by Michelle Ockers



Michelle Ockers:

In the spirit of reconciliation Learning Uncut acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their elders past and present.

While I routinely open events with an Acknowledgement of Country this is the first time I have done so in a podcast. It seems fitting to do so in an episode that is about reconciliation and which is being published in National Reconciliation Week which is 27 May to 3 June 2022.

The theme of Reconciliation Week is Be Brave. Make Change. Reconciliation is an important issue and piece of unfinished business in Australia. It is about strengthening relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous peoples, for the benefit of all.

In this episode we will hear about how Origin has been taking action on reconciliation since 2015. I'm joined by Brigitte BinAwel who is a specialist consultant in Diversity and Inclusion at Origin, and Ian Crowhurst, the Head of Learning and Development and Talent for Origin. They introduce us to their Reconciliation Action Plan and the contribution of learning and development to building cultural awareness in support of their reconciliation efforts.

Michelle Ockers:

Good morning, Ian. It's lovely to have you here.

Ian Crowhurst:

Good morning, Michelle.

Michelle Ockers:

And Brigitte, welcome.

Brigitte BinAwel:

Good morning, Michelle. Thanks for having us.

Michelle Ockers:

It's an absolute pleasure. And Ian, of course, you and I have been talking about having this conversation on learning uncut for many months. I think we've bounced into each other at different industry events and talked about the work that has been going on at Origin Energy around Reconciliation. And it's been a story I think it's very timely to share with the world. So thank you for being here today to share that story.

Let's start with an introduction to Origin Energy; what the organization does, who you do it for, and a little bit about your workforce.

Ian Crowhurst:

Sure. So I'm Ian Crowhurst. I'm head of learning and development and talent for Origin, so I look after all of the learning across the business. We operate in all different states from Queensland, Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide, and where actually Origin is the leading energy provider within Australia. And we have extensive operations in Australia from New Guinea to the South Pacific delivering generation upstream in terms of gas to our customers across Australia.

Learning Uncut Episode 102

Taking Action on Reconciliation (D&I) – Ian Crowhurst and Brigitte BinAwel

We're key players in energy sales, renewable energy, power generation, and gas exploration, and we've set a vision to lead Australia's energy transition towards net zero with a rapid shift towards cleaner energy and a focus on that. And so, we have approximately sort of 6,000 employees across Origin Energy, and we have a very clear purpose which is about getting energy right for our customers, communities, and planet.

Michelle Ockers:

Thank you. It's such an interesting time for the energy sector, of course, with sustainability and climate change being part of the national conversation, the global conversation. And, of course, diversity and inclusion a very important part of the conversation these days as well. So Brigitte would you like to introduce your role to our listeners?

Brigitte BinAwel:

Yeah. So I work in our employee development and inclusion space. My title is specialist consultant. And within the team, I lead our Reconciliation efforts. I also actually am the co-chair of the indigenous employee network we have at Origin as well. So in that capacity, I work really closely with our indigenous employees to ensure that we're bringing to life the aspirations of the network.

Michelle Ockers:

Thank you. Some of our listeners may be familiar with Reconciliation Australia who are the lead body for Reconciliation here in Australia. And on the website, they describe Reconciliation as being about strengthening relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-indigenous peoples for the benefit of all Australians. So in that context, why is Reconciliation important to Origin?

Brigitte BinAwel:

Well, I think Ian touched on our purpose just earlier. And with Origin's footprint, we've always had relationships with indigenous communities. This spans back over 20 years. So it's really important for us that we have meaningful relationships though with indigenous communities and peoples. We really have a focus of the last 10 years with our Origin foundation. That commitment is really around equal education opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; whether that's in remote or rural communities or even in the urban setting.

When we started our Reconciliation journey formally that was back in 2015, and that was when we launched our Innovate RAP. So that was the foundation for Origin. We already had relationships like I said stemming from our integrated gas business. And so, we really wanted to build on that and ensure we had an understanding of Reconciliation, and we're committed to building Reconciliation across Australia within the whole Origin portfolio.

Michelle Ockers:

And, of course, formalizing that through a RAP, and we're going to talk in a moment what a RAP is because people may not be familiar with that. That was just a continuation and I guess a focal point for continuing the work you've been doing with indigenous peoples and communities for some time. So what is a RAP, a Reconciliation Action Plan?

Brigitte BinAwel:

So we partner with Reconciliation Australia, with the governing body, who provides a solid framework and actions that relate to each of the different levels of a RAP. So for those that aren't familiar, there are four levels of a Reconciliation Action Plan. So you start with a Reflect, which is really around scoping the capacity for Reconciliation in your business. Then you move to an Innovate which is in relation to implementing Reconciliation. Then a Stretch RAP which is embedding reconciliation and the final level is an elevate RAP which is really leading in the space of Reconciliation.

Learning Uncut Episode 102

Taking Action on Reconciliation (D&I) – Ian Crowhurst and Brigitte BinAwel

And within those four layers, there are a minimum set of actions that relate to, I guess, contributing to Reconciliation more broadly in Australia. And as you progress up those levels, those commitments get really targeted and broader and determine really how you're embedding those actions in your business.

Michelle Ockers:

So it was 2015 when you had your first Rap. I believe you went straight to an innovation RAP rather than a reflect.

Brigitte BinAwel:

That's correct because we already had relationships with indigenous communities through our integrated gas business. We already understood there was scope here to do this work, and it aligns so closely to our purpose as a business. It was a natural progression for us.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. And you're coming towards the end of your Stretch RAP then. So you've been through innovate almost towards the end of stretch. Can you give us, Brigitte, a high-level overview of how your RAP has evolved over those seven years?

Brigitte BinAwel:

Yes, when I reflect on our Innovate RAP, it was really for us around implementing the baseline systems and processes so that our organization had an understanding of what Reconciliation was. There are some key policies that came out of that, some initial learning opportunities. And then when we moved to a Stretch RAP, it was really in relation to embedding and increasing those actions and aspirations that we originally had.

The key difference I think between the two is that we have hard targets in a stretch RAP. So they relate to our indigenous employment numbers, our indigenous procurement spend, and our learning aspirations. And so what we've really seen as a baseline level understanding across the business continue to grow. We've seen that reflected in an increase in our engagement survey questions that relate to Reconciliation, and we've really focused on bringing to life Reconciliation within our individual business units so that there's ownership from the front line of Origin employees as well.

Michelle Ockers:

And in your Stretch RAP, there are three pillars: relationship, respect, and opportunity. Can you talk to us briefly about where these three pillars come from and what they mean?

Brigitte BinAwel:

Yeah, perfect. Well, so we worked closely with Reconciliation Australia around those pillars. And really, they guide us in how we determine our minimum actions and then our additional actions as an organization. So for us relationship really — the relationship pillar really focuses on supporting healthy engagement. Those actions relate to developing respectful and mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

When we move to our respect pillar, that's really in relation to respecting the rights and interests of all community members and our stakeholders in those communities, and it's in relation to creating a culturally safe and inclusive workplace. With the opportunities pillar, really focuses on those three target areas that I mentioned before. So that's creating further opportunities in relation to education, employment, and procurement. And that's a really big key for us because it really drives I guess the strategy when we're considering additional actions, where does that fall within those pillars, and how do we ensure that they're aligned to what we're chasing.

Michelle Ockers:

Learning Uncut Episode 102

Taking Action on Reconciliation (D&I) – Ian Crowhurst and Brigitte BinAwel

Okay. And what part — let's move on to the learning and development lens on this having kind of at a high level at the space you're working in and some of the targets you have. How does learning and development contribute to these pillars?

Ian Crowhurst:

Sure. So under those key actions, we've got some significant L&D callouts there; one which is for example about growing people's knowledge. So we did that through the learning that I'm going to talk to you a bit more about. And so that would be talking particularly about sort of people's cultures, histories, backgrounds, and sharing that with our employees and how they can support that.

And we've also got an action under there in terms of sharing stories as well. And so we've done that through the learning and that we've provided about our employees sharing stories with others to learn more about culture, histories, backgrounds, and some of the other elements, and then also building our talent pipeline. So we've got other areas of our P&C team that support Reconciliation targets and numbers and things, and we've got that through, for example, our career trackers program which we're supporting with.

So we've got sort of many aspects in that RAP which you can find online on our Origin Energy website which sort of details all the actions that we've got, and L&D is a big supporter of that, I mean, how we deliver that.

Michelle Ockers:

We will put a link in the show notes to your Reconciliation Action Plan online so people can take a closer look, and I would encourage everyone to do that. It's well worth. I mean, it's hard in the time we've got to convey the breadth of what you have been doing as an organization in this space, right, and the extent of change underway in the culture as a result of it, so I hope we can do it justice with this conversation because there's been so much energy and it's a very genuine effort from a deep place of wanting this to make a difference. So I encourage everybody to go and take a look at the RAP online.

Maybe if we stick with the work in learning and development for the moment. You've got something called your cultural awareness opportunities framework, and I think that's an important thing to get our heads around to understand the work you've been doing to support Reconciliation. So can you talk to us a little about what that framework is and how it was created?

Ian Crowhurst:

Yeah. So internally when we were sort of creating this framework which we called as a bit of a working title, framework, because we were then thinking about how we apply that to our employees, and we actually then called it opportunities, so recognizing that would probably resonate with people better. What we originally thought about is having something visual for our people to understand all of the learning opportunities that would be available to them.

So we created a bit of a picture diagram that articulated for all employees, and we actually decided to split that from employees and people leaders in terms of what learning they had to do. And that was in a mix of what compulsory learning they needed to do that we were endorsing across Origin, and then also what optional learning opportunities there were.

So, for example, when we pulled that together in terms of sort of the mandatory piece of that, we decided that when we created our online learning, everybody would need to complete the cultural awareness three modules of online learning as part of induction, but also, we decided that everybody would refresh their learning at that point in time as well. And then we also had a whole mix of optional learning which would include things like podcasts, articles, a few TED talks that we could source, some

Learning Uncut Episode 102

Taking Action on Reconciliation (D&I) – Ian Crowhurst and Brigitte BinAwel

immersion opportunities that teams and individuals could take part in, and then a bit of a calendar and mentoring program.

So we sort of poured that together in one big diagram that people could then visualize, see, and sort of understand their journey as how they could go through that. And that's really how we supported our communication in terms of articulating what we were doing from a plan and perspective through to actually then people working through it. So I think it was a really good visual for people to see, and it was fully branded in our Origin colours to make that really feel connected, and we decided to host that on our SharePoint site which we dedicated a section of that to Reconciliation.

Michelle Ockers:

So maybe if we stick with the essential component, the mandatory component. What we're trying to achieve and let's just start with outcomes. What were you trying to achieve through that part of your learning opportunities?

Brigitte BinAwel:

For us, it was in relation to really being able to create a culturally safe workplace for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. And how we wanted to achieve that was to really educate our employees, all 5,500 of them on Origins Reconciliation journey. We really wanted to highlight the differences between the two cultures. I think sometimes, people experience and when working in this space, they may think Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are similar. They're actually quite different. And it's really important that as you go through a Reconciliation journey that your employees really understand the differences between those two cultures. And finally, we really wanted to break down the stereotypes that exist in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their communities.

Michelle Ockers:

It's interesting you talk about making it culturally safe for your Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. I've been doing a fair bit of work with Waka Kotahi, New Zealand Transport Agency over the past two years, and the Māori culture, of course, is important to their organisation and they weave that into their work in learning and development. I've got an episode coming up with someone from Waka Kotahi to talk about that as well. And, of course, it's a very different culture to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. But the reason I bring it up in the context of things being culturally safe is as a non-indigenous person, it can be a little overwhelming even with the best of intent for knowing how to approach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in a very respectful and informed way. So I'm curious about what you've done is helping people — I guess non-indigenous people who are part of Origin to get comfortable and confident with that as well.

Brigitte BinAwel:

So I think through the learning, that was a big element for us. We actually had our own indigenous employees feature on those learning modules, and that allowed them to highlight some of the stereotypes that exist in the space. We also through our indigenous employee network create a culture around please be curious, come and connect with your indigenous employees, and respectfully have conversations and be really open that we're on a learning journey together. And internally, Origins indigenous employee network has been, I guess, really brave in the space. We're wanting to educate our non-indigenous employees to really ensure that we have strong allies in the business, and that's been instrumental in creating this culturally safe workplace that we have at the moment.

Michelle Ockers:

So safe for everyone, right?

Learning Uncut Episode 102

Taking Action on Reconciliation (D&I) – Ian Crowhurst and Brigitte BinAwel

Brigitte BinAwel:

Safe for everyone, exactly.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, very important. So in terms of design then of the three modules, what were the key aspects of design, and what were sort of I guess some of the design constraints or objectives or rationale that you were applying to come up with that design?

Ian Crowhurst:

I focus mostly on the online learning, for example. So we aligned that to our L&D strategy in terms of making the learning fun, engaging, exciting in an online learning format. And that was easy for us to deploy through our learning management system as well, so we decided to host it on that with some clear links in other sort of areas of our business-like SharePoint I mentioned. So we used existing systems and that was quite clear at the outset that's what we were going to do.

We worked with external partners, so we used an indigenous provider to help us advise us in terms of some of the content. We use the IEN group that Brigitte mentioned to support us with some of that content and feedback, and we also use them for the video content because actually, in our online learning, we've got those videos that Brigitte mentioned whereby people are talking about their experiences. So we did a few things on eye contact, for example. We did a little piece on cultural leave. We also did the difference between an acknowledgement of country and a welcome to country.

So some really important things that people could really sort of just take that piece and understand and be able to apply it back in there in their everyday work ultimately. Those were really well received which I'll talk a bit a bit later in terms of some of the feedback that we got from that, but that sort of brought it back to Origin in terms of some of the content. So we actually split that program design into those three pillars which was linked to our RAP. So we actually had those three modules based in those three sections. So you could do that in sort of 10, 15 minutes, each module, and you could separate that over a period of time, or you could literally do all three together. So it was very much and flexible in terms of how the learner wanted to do those.

We did have some clear milestones in terms of completion of the modules. So within 90 days, we were expecting people to complete all three modules, whether they did those all together or separately. And we also in those modules had some exciting sort of quizzes; the videos that I mentioned. We use Articulate Rise, so if you feel familiar with that, you can sort of see some of the design that you can do and activities in there. So it wasn't just about reading and listening, but we also had some content directed out to other sources as well across sort of the websites and things like that.

So overall, as I said, we got some really great feedback the design was really creative. We used an external partner to help us actually design that, an expert in terms of designing that as well as the advisory piece as well, and we also used a small filming company to help us film those videos that I mentioned. So we've sort of taken the best of what we've got internally and taken the best of expertise outside of Origin to create that all together.

Michelle Ockers:

I imagine there would be a lot you could do visually with this particular learning. Can you talk to us a little bit about kind of the look and feel and what you were going for there with the visual presentation and the imagery and so on?

Ian Crowhurst:

Learning Uncut Episode 102

Taking Action on Reconciliation (D&I) – Ian Crowhurst and Brigitte BinAwel

Yes. So we used our Origin colours as a base, and so we've got a really clear brand colour palette and we worked with our brand team to organise that. But equally there's some amazing images that we have from some of our partners that we work with. So indigenous pictures images, photos, that we integrated into our online learning, and you'll be familiar. Those are really vibrant colours generally, and then we use some of our own imagery with our employees.

So it was a mix of all of those three things together that actually makes it really attractive and fun as I said, but also engages you throughout. So you might have a bit of reading in there, for example. Then, you'd have a really great photo, then you'd have a video to do, and then, you have an activity. So it was very much interactive in that sense.

Michelle Ockers:

So storytelling is obviously a key part of your cultural awareness program, and Ian's mentioned the videos that were part of the modules. I think you talked about gathering stories earlier, Brigitte. Why did you choose to use stories so heavily in the program, and how did you go about gathering and sharing the stories?

Brigitte BinAwel:

So Michelle, you're probably familiar with this, but storytelling is an instrumental part of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. And so for us it was really in relation to bringing to life the lived experiences of our own indigenous employees. This was really impactful because as our employees, we're going through the learning. It was connected to them. It was about Origin. It was about our people. It wasn't necessarily a stranger as such.

And so we really wanted to highlight that this cultural learning happens every day; in our communities, in our workplaces, and we wanted it to feel connected. How we went about I guess engaging with our indigenous employer network is it was always through an expression of interest. A very key thing for Origin in our learning journey is in relation to it's not that the role of our indigenous employees to educate our non-indigenous employees unless they are open and willing and wanting to. And so through that expression of interest, we had indigenous employees who were very excited to be a part of this excited to educate our workforce. And through our interviews with them, we really unpacked some of the key stereotypes that they had an experience with and that they could authentically speak to.

Ian Crowhurst:

In addition to that, we also have storytelling as one of our people leadership habits. So our people leadership code, we have five habits, and as I mentioned one of those is storytelling. So we actually support our people leaders by providing them some training up skilling to be able to tell the story across their employees. So it also has a really good connection in terms of our program of what we support our people leaders to perform every day as well.

Michelle Ockers:

Thank you. It's great to be able to connect it to something which is a part of the way you communicate in the business, and also deeply part of the culture that you're building awareness of. Did you go looking for particular types of stories? Like in terms of crafting the stories, I'm really curious about this. I think it's a really important and perhaps underdone part of learning is really leaning into that lived experience. How did you bring the stories to life? Did you have someone who was an expert in storytelling working with you? Did you coach people? Was it literally a matter of inviting people to share a story and hitting record? What did that look and feel like that process of actually capturing the stories and helping people to bring their stories to life?

Ian Crowhurst:

Learning Uncut Episode 102

Taking Action on Reconciliation (D&I) – Ian Crowhurst and Brigitte BinAwel

From the sort of filming perspective, we were clear on what elements we wanted people to talk about. So one of those was a brief around a policy, so our cultural leave policy. And the individual that we selected to do that, we just asked them questions for them to sort of share what their experience was in using that policy. And so they were able to bring their lives externally and their experiences of using that policy to life, and ultimately we just sort of guided them within that filming process, asked lots of questions, naturally did some editing around that to support them because it's sometimes the first time that people had been filmed. And it really sort of just resonated in terms of how people use experience and appreciate what we're delivering across Origin, and it also really connects why we have policies to this case to support our people and our communities around us.

Michelle Ockers:

And outside of the videos and the e-learning, how else are you using storytelling as part of your Reconciliation work?

Brigitte BinAwel:

So we do have local Reconciliation working groups at a state-based level who bring to life a lot of our events that occur each year, so we have a calendar that highlights the key dates throughout the year that relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. And through those dates, national Reconciliation week being one of them and NAIDOC at Origin, we actually celebrate NAIDOC throughout the month of July. We have a lot of guest speakers coming in, a lot of guest speakers who deliver activities, cultural learning activities as well. So we're on a continuous journey, and we often have I guess real lived experiences through storytelling from an external lens coming in to share it as well.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. And I think the fact that the approach you've taken is this continuous approach is really important because too often what we see in some initiatives is people just go through a once-off piece of learning, and that's the end of it. But you've really gone to a lot of effort to keep this alive and continuous and to give people more opportunities to deepen their appreciation and awareness of the culture. And I guess to that point, you talked before about having resources available on SharePoint. So what are the resources? What types of topics, what types of resources have you made available?

Ian Crowhurst:

So on SharePoint, we have got as I said the framework, so the whole sort of start to finish of the journey. And those resources are mixed in terms of some are aimed at teams. So team usage, and others are aimed at individual usage, but they're all totally optional. So in terms of when people access them, if they want to access them is totally optional. And to give you a flavour, we've actually had just a thousand people go on there and access these resources; maybe one, two, five of those. But they're a whole mix of different things so we found some podcasts that are available for people just to listen into, and we've got some specific TED talks around Reconciliation that people can just tap into as well. And then we've actually created a few things of our own in addition to that.

So we've created an events calendar that connects to some external events like NAIDOC Week etc, but also events that we might be organizing internally within Origin, so you can sort of see a tap, what's happening at what particular dates. We've also got a little booklet on becoming an ally so people can have a little read about what it means to be an ally and what sort of behaviours they need to drive, and we've done some suggested learning around that. And then we've got a couple of other sort of immersion opportunities that we have for people to access. So we've sent people in previously to GARMA for example. That we talk a bit about on there in terms of a process if people are interested in going to that, and also some education programs as well.

Learning Uncut Episode 102

Taking Action on Reconciliation (D&I) – Ian Crowhurst and Brigitte BinAwel

So there's a whole sort of range; whether you've got a small amount of time to have a look through that or you actually want to go and do an event that people can access as and when they want. And that's pretty much the principle of our learning strategy is that we'll provide some really directed guidance and that would be our e-learning modules. And then also, if you want to learn more, this is how you can do it.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. So I would love to be able to share in the show notes some of the podcasts and TED talks that you've curated, Ian, for a listeners who might be interested in deepening their own understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. So I will get some recommendations from you to share.

You talk you talked about becoming an ally. Talk to me more about this role of ally. What is that about?

Ian Crowhurst:

So we have a couple of ally programs set up, one which is based around PRIDE within Origin, and the second one which we decided to do was around indigenous. And we've created a booklet which describes what it means to be an ally within the Reconciliation space. So the first sort of thing we sort of focus on is what it means to be an ally. We then sort of go into how to educate yourself to become an ally, and we've got some recommended reading around that which is ongoing resources.

We sort of call out some of the behaviours that we would expect of people, and then also we've got some recommendations around sort of giving time to support specific programs or volunteering in some way, which has a really good connection with our Origin foundation program as well. So it's really sort of a pamphlet booklet that sort of describes what it's about and how you can get involved.

Michelle Ockers:

Do people formally get recognized as allies or is this more something like that people take on the behaviours themselves so you may or may not know how many allies you have?

Ian Crowhurst:

Yeah, exactly that. It's pretty informal. Our PRIDE program is a bit more structured. So actually, we give out badges for example around when you're a pride ally, but we decided to go down the more informal route here where people could just take it upon themselves to experience that and be a part of it.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, it's fantastic that level of guidance is available for people, so they not only understand the culture but know what they can do to make a difference. So I want to go on and talk about how your people have responded and engaged. But Ian, is there anything else that you'd like to share about the approach to the cultural awareness program itself or any of the learning opportunities available that we haven't covered yet?

Ian Crowhurst:

The one thing I would just call out is that we were quite keen to make sure that we made use of existing platforms. So I mentioned our learning management system which we host our online learning on. I mentioned the SharePoint which SharePoint has some really great benefits, but also, it has some limitations, and the limitation of that is that you don't get a lot of data from usage by individual, for example. So but we decided that actually for us in this particular program, that we would utilize that and compromise on some of the data we might get.

Learning Uncut Episode 102

Taking Action on Reconciliation (D&I) – Ian Crowhurst and Brigitte BinAwel

And then we also use Tableau which reports for us around our compliance learning, but we use that for Reconciliation to just tell us who completed this specific online learning modules. So what I would say is that if you're thinking of doing something like this, try and use platforms you have to make it as easy as possible for implementation.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. And I love the fact you've called out SharePoint. And sometimes, we have a tendency to want to lock everything inside the LMS and it's harder for people to access and it doesn't get used as well. But whatever your intranet platform is making things really accessible where you don't need to necessarily know every time someone has accessed it, who was accessed it. It's better that things are used and that they're trackable in some cases. So thanks for sharing that.

So let's talk about how your people have responded and engaged, and this is a long-term piece of work, of course. So what have you seen, I guess, over the years since 2015 in terms of the engagement and response of your people?

Ian Crowhurst:

So we do an annual engagement survey at Origin, and as part of the annual engagement survey we ask specific questions around Reconciliation. And for the year where we started the cultural awareness online learning, and all of the framework and opportunities, we saw an increase of plus 15% year-on-year which we were really proud of and because that's a significant change for us from the previous year.

I think what drove that was the focus on Reconciliation, the fact that we provided some really great learning opportunities out there. Everybody could touch those in some way, either through some of the compulsory elements, but also those who are a bit more experienced and more touching into some of the other resources that we have out there. So I think for us, that is a really great driver and we're really proud of that.

We also that you were accredited is a great place to work, so we believe that had some level of contribution to supporting that. And then also we sit within the top companies to work for LinkedIn which also has a really good contribution to Reconciliation as well. So there's some three really great measures there. We also did have some general feedback from our employees as well, which I can share with you.

Michelle Ockers:

Please do.

Ian Crowhurst:

So the feedback we had for our employees was particularly on the LMS. So we have a star rating actually for all of our products on there; similar to what you'd see on the likes of amazon and those sorts of things when you when you buy a jumper or a product, and we got a rating of 4.7 out of 5 for the first module and 4.5 out of 5 for the second and third modules. We don't actually ask for people for commentary on that, but it just gives us a bit of an indication as to how that's stacking up against other products and whether it's on track in comparison to what we've previously done and so on. So we were proud of that.

In addition to that, we saw 97.7% of people complete the online learning modules within sort of the first 90 days. And the only difference there for us was just about sort of new starters coming on board at the time. So we weren't expecting 100% but 97.7% is a really great result, and then we as I said we saw sort of a thousand people clicking on the SharePoint activities and information. So some really great numbers there that we're proud of.

Learning Uncut Episode 102

Taking Action on Reconciliation (D&I) – Ian Crowhurst and Brigitte BinAwel

It doesn't stop there. People come on board with us. We induct them, and they also go through that those modules and also access the SharePoint online. So it's very much integrated into the business and for new starters and joiners as well.

Michelle Ockers:

So if I was working at Origin, obviously I had the opportunity to build my awareness and with that my confidence around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. There's other opportunities for me to get involved. Obviously, you've got the ally program. In terms of other opportunities through your Reconciliation Action Plan as an employee at Origin to participate in relevant activities, could you talk to what's available in that respect?

Brigitte BinAwel:

Yeah, perfect. So I would say that from a grassroots level within the organization, we really leverage our workplace channel. So we have a Reconciliation at Origin channel and that is an opt-in. We have about 1,200 employees who are active on that channel, and they really share their own articles they've come across or products they've purchased. And it really allows this organic conversation about Reconciliation to occur, and that's a really exciting part of I think the employee contribution to our journey because it's organic and it really allows for a deeper level of conversation about a range of topics in the Reconciliation space.

From a formal getting involved in our RAP activity, we have been really strategic to break down our actions at a business unit level. So business units have an active list of what they're contributing to our overall Reconciliation journey. And within that, there's some really tangible actions that employees can contribute to whether that's developing and your community engagement guidelines, process, or whether that be building local events and community relationships. That does look different across our business units depending on our footprint and the communities where we're operating, but that really allows employees to get really directly involved locally, and I would say to enhance that, we have the Origin foundation that is just really strong with volunteering in this space, and really enables our employees to be on the ground with indigenous communities and really volunteering their time, whether that's in the education space or partnering with around energy poverty and how we reduce that in Australia.

Michelle Ockers:

And it's great to have those opportunities for people to actually take action. So obviously, there's the behavioural shift day-to-day in your work, and you've got some really great targets around employment and procurement as well. So there's some sort of clear measures and indicators that you're making progress on those, but then for people to actually have an outlet for, hey, I want to do more with this, and to have that opportunity provided, I think people are more and more keenly aware of social responsibility and wanting to make some sort of contribution. So it's fantastic that you've got that opportunity available for people.

Brigitte BinAwel:

It's so important, Michelle. And what I would say that has been a really key change for Origin in this space is when we launched our Stretch RAP, we changed our governance structure that monitored our progress. So it is now consisted of our executive leadership team with our CEO who chairs that Reconciliation steering committee. And it's instrumental in the space that our senior leaders are visible and they are also hands-on, and I'm really proud of the fact that our executive leadership team have really showed up in this space and authentically want to be a part of it.

Michelle Ockers:

So what's next for this solution? When I say solution, what's next for your RAP? You're coming towards the end of a Stretch RAP. Are you moving then to an

Learning Uncut Episode 102

Taking Action on Reconciliation (D&I) – Ian Crowhurst and Brigitte BinAwel

Elevate RAP or is there another Stretch RAP? How does it work and what are the aspirations? How are things shifting for you?

Brigitte BinAwel:

So we do right, yeah. We're concluding at the end of next month which has been an exciting three-year journey. We are currently in the process of working with Reconciliation Australia around our next steps which will likely be another Stretch RAP. And we've been really I guess considered in what our future strategy looks like here. We've spent the last two strategies really focused on bringing to life awareness and embedding. And, for us, we really want to ensure that where it makes sense as an energy provider, we are partnering with indigenous communities and helping indigenous peoples.

As you know, Reconciliation has very wide breadth there are a lot of social issues that impact aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. And for Origin now, we really want to focus on our footprint. What we do is an integrated energy business, and how we can really support our communities going forward. So what you'll expect to see is a really targeted action plan going forward which we hope to launch in the next year.

Michelle Ockers:

And Ian, from the perspective of the work of learning and development, is there more coming up, is there something different coming up? Do you have aspirations that you're working on?

Ian Crowhurst:

We've got two things in particular we want to add to the opportunities. One which is focused around procurement, so we would like to create some learning. We haven't defined necessarily what format that might take place yet, but we want to provide our contract owners some training in terms of how to select indigenous providers when procuring. So we'll do something along those sorts of lines. And the second thing is around the space of recruitment. And so when recruiting indigenous people, I mean, how can you support indigenous people in that sort of interview process, make them feel comfortable, think about some of the behaviours they may demonstrate and take that into account? So those are the two areas that we feel that would add some value to our learning space, and so we're going to start commencing that shortly.

Michelle Ockers:

So what are sort of the key success factors? What do you put it down to as to why this has been such a successful body of work for Origin and a successful shift?

Ian Crowhurst:

A couple of things for me. One which is we've used internal and external experts, so we've used people internally who can share their stories, that can share the expertise and help us build that content really confidently. And then we've used the best of people externally, so a provider who was able to build the product in Articulate Rise, another provider who did the filming for us that made it really authentic.

I'm just going to read out to you a piece of feedback from one of our employees because I think it sort of summarizes some of that. So the feedback was, "Fantastic modules. There was still so much I don't know. I really enjoyed the authentic stories and loved what we'd heard from some of our team members in the business. Meaningful content. Impactful for me. Goes beyond the box exercise for cultural awareness training. Loved it."

The reason I'm reading that out is because I think it says so much. It talks about the stories and the authenticity. It talks about it's not just a tick box exercise and thinking about what people need to learn and how they can learn things, and it just also

Learning Uncut Episode 102

Taking Action on Reconciliation (D&I) – Ian Crowhurst and Brigitte BinAwel

means that people can build on what they already know. And so that's something that I take into account because people learn in very different ways and at different speeds. So that was something I just wanted to sort of end on as such so we could then reflect on employee feedback which is really important to us.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, it is. Thank you. Brigitte, if you think not just about the learning component of this body of work, if you think more broadly around Reconciliation action at Origin, why do you think it's been so successful? What's been critical to that success?

Brigitte BinAwel:

So I believe it's the visibility of our senior leaders at the beginning. That has been really instrumental in setting the scene as an organization that this matters to us. This is important. The connection to our purposes and organization is instrumental. It really allows our employees to understand the alignment, what they do each day, and how that contributes to Reconciliation across Australia.

It's our grassroots activity where we galvanize the frontline employees to have their say and to share their own experiences and learnings through our channels that we have available, and we've embedded it into the employee life cycles. So as a new employee, you immediately provided this learning. It's highlighted to you that we care about Reconciliation. We have an action plan and your role as an employee is to be across that and contribute to it. I think those are really important markers.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, thank you. And so of course learning uncut does have a global listening audience. So for those in Australia, the concept of Reconciliation and the opportunities and the need to embrace Reconciliation in our country will be familiar. For those in other parts of the world, there may be other diversity issues which are more significant to their local agenda. But what suggestions or tips do you have for others, and I guess Ian particularly in learning and development, but Brigitte more broadly for others who would like to get started or do more with Reconciliation or similar diversity initiatives in their work?

Brigitte BinAwel:

So from the I guess the higher umbrella question, for me, it's really been around understanding the space whether that's pride, whether that's senior females or whether that's Reconciliation with an indigenous community, really trying to understand their story, their experiences. You can increase your own education whether that's through books or documentaries. Just getting really involved is a really key thing for me. And I do think it's around building your personal relationships and networks. Everyone has a story to tell. And if we can show up and be empathetic to that, we can really move the dial.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. And Ian, your suggestions.

Ian Crowhurst:

For me, it's about understanding what you want to achieve and what the current gap is versus what you want to get to and think about how you can feel that in the most effective engaging way, and that would generally be more than one type of solution; thinking about how people connect and the way we work. And also, how we have a very different diverse workforce; some people working out on site versus other people working in central offices. So thinking about how you can use technology to be able to connect with them in those sorts of ways.

Michelle Ockers:

Learning Uncut Episode 102

Taking Action on Reconciliation (D&I) – Ian Crowhurst and Brigitte BinAwel

A lot of your suggestions there interestingly and could be applied to just about any particular body of knowledge or skills, right? So in other words bring your professional experience and your toolkit to this area of knowledge and skill building in your organization just as you would anything else.

Ian Crowhurst:

Exactly, yeah.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. Thank you both so much for taking the time to talk to us about your work with Reconciliation at Origin. We will include a link to your LinkedIn profiles in the show notes if anyone would like to get in touch with you to find out more about some of the things that we've talked about. Really appreciate your time today, and I would encourage guests to take a look at the resources in the show notes. We will be curating some things that you might find particularly useful to dig deeper into this topic. Thank you, Ian and Brigitte.

Ian Crowhurst:

Great, thank you.

Brigitte BinAwel:

Thanks, Michelle.



Learning Uncut are learning and development consultants that work with learning teams and/or business leaders to accelerate learning transformation. We specialise in supporting organisations to create or update their learning strategy, enhance their learning team's capabilities, align learning to business value, and implement modern learning approaches.

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Learning Uncut Episode 102 Taking Action on Reconciliation (D&I) – Ian Crowhurst and Brigitte BinAwel

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About your host, Michelle Ockers



Michelle is the founder of Learning Uncut. She is an experienced, pragmatic organisational learning strategist, L&D capability builder and modern workplace learning practitioner. She also delivers keynotes, workshops and webinars for learning and broader professional or workforce groups at both public and in-house events.

Michelle received the following prestigious industry awards in 2019:

- Australian Institute of Training and Development Dr Alastair Rylatt Award for L&D *Professional of the Year – for outstanding contribution to the practice of learning and development*
- Internet Time Alliance Jay Cross Memorial Award – *for outstanding contribution to the field of informal learning*



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