

Learning Uncut Episode 131
Cultivating Safety for Rail Track Contractors – James Kennedy and Andrew Smith
Hosted by Michelle Ockers



Michelle Ockers:

Today I am joined by James Kennedy from the Australian Rail-track Corporation to discuss a contractor safety management program. And Andrew Smith is joining the conversation to represent Area9 Lyceum, who partnered with the ARTC on elements of this program. Welcome to both of you.

James Kennedy:

Thank you for having us.

Andrew Smith:

Yeah. Hi, Michelle. Morning James.

James Kennedy:

Good morning, Andrew.

Michelle Ockers:

So James, you are an unusual guest on the Learning Uncut Podcast. Not without precedent, but we don't often get a story where the main guest is not a learning and development professional. You're actually a civil engineer who's moved into the fields of safety and environment and you're also a trained change practitioner. I want to come to that in a moment, but whilst we were just chatting before we started, you told me about your LEGO collection and how you knew from a young age you always wanted to be an engineer. What did that look like? Tell me a bit more about the LEGO obsession as a kid.

James Kennedy:

Okay. Well, I was one of those kids that annoyed my mother and father by incessantly asking why, but why, and I remember their exasperated expressions when they would try and answer something and I'd say, but why? But why? That sort of turned into a fascination with how things worked and how they were put together. And I don't know why, but it just did. But about the age of six, I got my first technical LEGO set and at a great expense because we weren't a very wealthy family, and there was a little tractor and I pulled it apart and put it back together again. So much almost wore the little blocks off, little knobs off the blocks. I've still got that set. It's sitting in the cupboard behind me. It's a little red Massey Ferguson tractor. From the '70s since those days, I just have continued to seek understanding of how things worked and why things worked, and that sort of turned into an interest into why people do the things they do and how things work in the workplace. I studied civil engineering and went through leadership training, and that opened an awareness around the human aspect to engineering and why decisions are made and why failures occur. And I've just allowed that to flow throughout my career, and I've constantly reinvented myself and I need to keep stimulated and keep learning. And here I am closer to retirement than I am starting continuing to reinvent myself and learn and try and reinvest into the industry and the people around me.

Michelle Ockers:

It's interesting you talk then about this interest in how things work, also extending to why people do the things that they do, which of course leads into the fact that you are also a trained change practitioner. Do you recall the moment when you decided to train as a change practitioner?

Learning Uncut Episode 131

Cultivating Safety for Rail Track Contractors – James Kennedy and Andrew Smith

James Kennedy:

It was a phased transition. I was working with a senior leader in our learning and capability team who was helping me out with some of the guidance around the learning aspects of the Contractor Safety Management program, which is a whole program that I lead there for about a year and a half. She was a qualified change practitioner, and she, through her awareness, quickly identified that the program required a more structured approach to leading and influencing change with a particular focus on human aspects. Because when you're talking about safety, you need to understand what are the reasons why people would resist change, change fatigue, culture, all of those sorts of softer aspects that are hard to understand and quite easy to overlook. And ARTC is also a very complex organization. So we serve a huge geographic area with different business units that have different drivers. And the group executives have different, if you like customers to satisfy different business driver needs. And during these conversations with our capability lead, that the concept of people-centered change came about. And she suggested that I go through formal training as a change leader and as a change practitioner. Because they're two different levels to upskill in those concepts. And the rest is history. I really latched onto those concepts and have applied those on this program.

Michelle Ockers:

So we're going to talk about this contractor safety management program. That's the key story here today. Is that the first time you'd applied what you learned about being a people centered change manager? Or had you gotten some runs on the board before you started work on the contractor program?

James Kennedy:

I think informally or intuitively, I'd done some of the work before. So I had been through formal leadership training programs. I had a fundamental understanding of personality types and working with difficult people or working with people from... With different make-ups in what their motivations are leading large project teams and the like. But I had never heard or considered that change management was a formal profession until starting to work with those who were formally trained in that area. And I must say I... It's probably in the last two to three years that my awareness around change management as a formal profession was really awakened. It's like, how long has this been going on for? And it's really amazing.

Michelle Ockers:

It's one of those disciplines that it's very good for learning and development people to adopt because at the end of the day, what we're trying to do is not just have people know how to do things, but to actually make the behavior change. And I think this is a great program, the way you've approached it holistically. And I can say, Andrew, you are nodding there, right? You see this as well. Yeah.

Andrew Smith:

Yeah, absolutely. I think you touched it perfectly there, Michelle, around the behavioral change. And that's one of the highlights, certainly from our perspective that we've seen in this partnership with ARTC is the impact that this can make at an individual level. And of course then across scale and across multiple projects, as James has described.

Michelle Ockers:

So, James, let's talk just a little more about the Australian Rail-track Corporation and in particular, contractor safety. What sort of work are contractors doing for the corporation that has safety implications? Let's do some scene setting.

Learning Uncut Episode 131

Cultivating Safety for Rail Track Contractors – James Kennedy and Andrew Smith

James Kennedy:

Yeah, sure. So, ARTC uses contractors in many different facets of its operation, right from the most basic we need contractors in to service our facilities. So how do we maintain air conditioning units and change the lights when they don't work right through to mega projects, and we've got multi-hundred million dollar projects. We use contractors when it comes to safety and such considerations. We're starting to talk about some of the heavy maintenance that we do, where we are introducing concepts around high risk construction activity. So working around people and plant working at heights. We do a lot of work around live services in the rail environment. Trains pose a significant hazard to people. And if you look at the mix of contractors, we have circa 400 contractors in our vendor list, but it's really, the tail of that is a very long, thin tail. We only have about 30 contractors that form that pointy end where we're dealing with the bigger end of works and those that involve high risk construction work.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. So our story starts with some concerns you had about contractor safety. And when I say you, it could be the royal you the bigger organization James, but there were some concerns about contractor safety and a false premise about what was driving safety incidents. Tell us about that premise and how you figured out that there was a flaw in the thinking.

James Kennedy:

Okay. Well, as humans we're prone to all sorts of fallacies and biases and logical shortcuts to get through the flood of information that we are presented with on a daily basis. And one fallacy or one bias actually is confirmation bias, where we tend to identify and seek out information that confirms our beliefs and ignore contradictory information. Our early working of the contractor safety program was based on some views that contractors were the problem. Every time we saw a contractor incident or is confirmed the informal or emotional view that we had a problem with contractors and the contractors hurt people too often and that we needed to design a program that addresses the problems that contractors bring to ARTC. Conversely, we didn't have good systems to measure the leading indicators about the good work that's done and all the times that incidents didn't occur.

Now, by using a more data-driven approach, we're able to verify the metrics that formed the view and found that by looking at the actual hours worked, the actual incident data whether ARTC or contractors were in charge of those workplaces, were able to identify that it probably came more back to the structure, the framework, setting contractors up for success, equipping our people that were the more fundamental issues rather than contractors were the problem. And that completely changed our thinking around how to design a program around tackling the challenge of contractor safety.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. So you went beyond the superficial. There's a term we use, and I don't know if you've come across this term around performance consulting. So if someone comes and requests a course or a piece of content rather than just serving up the order really ask some questions, take them through a process of discovery to find out why people aren't doing what they need to do, and what are the many levers that you can pull. It's not just knowledge and skills, right? As you just mentioned there, it's things in the environment, it's processes, it's systems, it's motivation, it's mindset, it's incentives. Like there's a whole stack of stuff that you need to address. So in summary then, what were the key levers you needed to pull to change behavior and improve safety?

Learning Uncut Episode 131

Cultivating Safety for Rail Track Contractors – James Kennedy and Andrew Smith

James Kennedy:

Well, the analogy to what you've just said there is what's the brief? And from an engineering perspective, we always go back to make sure we test the brief and understand the original intent. Now what are the levers? Well, we really needed to set our people up for success. So to do that, I employed an acronym that an old mentor once introduced me to, or DCOM, where Definition Competence Organization and Motivation for different areas that you have a look into and to troubleshoot it. We looked at the definition. We needed to develop a systemic approach underpinned by guidelines, procedures, tools to drive consistency across the organization competence. We needed to train our people in how to use these tools. Understanding what our expectations were, what the culture was that we were striving for. Organisationally, we needed to mobilise everyone from senior leaders to frontline workers around the challenge. And that was meant through the change management practices that we talked about before. And finally motivation. We needed to create that sense of chronic unease, the imperative for change, and a personal connection to safety.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. So a very comprehensive approach, and I do want to come back particularly because of your interest in change management and the approach you use to some of those aspects. But I also want to position the role of the competence piece and how that was tackled. So Andrew, I know that Area9 Lyceum played a large role with tackling skill development, tackling competence and some of the hearts and mind stuff as well. So the mindset piece. At what point did you meet James and how did your engagement on the project come about?

Andrew Smith:

Yeah, thanks Michelle. So we as you know we have a strong footprint into a range of industries here in Australia and globally, and particularly into the construction. So there was a nice synergy with the connection with ARTC and some of our partners operating as contractors on ARTC sites. So I met the head of organization and leadership at ARTC, and through her connection I was introduced to James at the sort of the, from what I saw, the early stages of the development around what he's just described.

So that's how we became introduced. And the difference that we see from this project to others that are evolving is quite often we have a clear runway of what the objective is, and where the destination is, if you like from a deduction course, or a leadership or a even a compliance safety course. But the interesting aspect of this that we really enjoyed, and probably goes back to the Area9's approach of an agile manifesto of understanding and seeking to learn and develop, was that this program with James and then with his colleague Paul, continued to evolve and develop as we both learned things about our capabilities and capacities. And of course, as the goals that James became more transparent to us and understanding. So the evolution of the program was really a very interesting and valuable journey for us that we've been able to transfer into other partners, and support them on this journey.

Michelle Ockers:

So, Andrew, instead of being given a design brief, and we talked a little bit about order placement already, and of course it's good practice when we are working with external partners as well, not to place the order on them, just as internal L&A professionals don't like people just coming and self diagnosing and saying, here's the order. It sounds like rather than being given a set design group, there was a level of working it out together. Would that be right? You talked about evolution of the program. What did that look like?

Learning Uncut Episode 131

Cultivating Safety for Rail Track Contractors – James Kennedy and Andrew Smith

Andrew Smith:

I think so, yeah. And that's exactly right. I think that there was not some false starts, but there were moments where we felt we were getting close, but then as a group, we reflected on where we were at, and we redesigned certain things. And I think James, the day come is a really nice framework of exam. Clearly the e-learning for us, and the adaptive learning lands beautifully into the compliance and competence perspective, or the competence area, but I think the thing that resonated the most was how we as an online platform helped enhance that motivation aspect as well. And that was an area that we've explored in healthcare, particularly around scenarios and decision making, but into this safety and particularly around behavioral change was a really evolving process for us here.

Michelle Ockers:

So James, what shifted for you as you started working with Area9 and started thinking about, where does, if we can use training, where does a program, a course, a competence uplift, play in your bigger scheme of shifts, to uplift contract to safety? What changed as you started exploring with Area9?

James Kennedy:

Okay. So Area9 introduced a far more powerful learning tool than I'd ever seen before. We went from essentially a PowerPoint presentation. There was a slide show with multiple choice, or multiple guess, if you want to call it questions, that didn't give you any feedback. You didn't know your answers were correct or otherwise until you popped out at the end and you said you've got 75%, well done and a little certificate. We found that the AI learning engine actually was a learning tool rather than a competency assessment or a knowledge confirmation tool. And there was a journey that we went on with Andrew and the team to better ask the questions, introduce the technical content, and then structure the question set to craft the knowledge that we needed to go into the face-to-face workshops. And we went through quite a few iterations. We spent a lot of time, and we found that the platform had the potential to be far better connected with our people, and the personal imperative for safety if we designed it to do that. And that was something I'd never seen before, but we found it, we switched it on and we used it. And the feedback was that people really connected much better with the online learning platform as a result.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, that's interesting and the platform, of course, Andrew is Rhapsody, and we have had one episode on learning uncut before for listener, episode 57 with Henrik Carter from a Danish Roadwork Education Center and your CLO Nick Howe, where we talked a bit about the platform's use of AI, before AI was trendy, you guys were doing it, Andrew, which is really interesting. It's a really leading example of AI used well in learning tech. I think. In simple terms, how does the use of an AI engine in Rhapsody help the learner?

Andrew Smith:

Yeah, so we've been going for 13 years and we've just tipped into 40 million learners across multiple sectors, including rail and construction into finance and healthcare, of course where the foundation of the organization is. But fundamentally, Michelle, the algorithm collects data, 20 data points per minute on each learner. So that historical data points, helps when we build courses into Rhapsody. Which is now over eight billion data points. It has that recognition of fundamentally what the individual, three things. It recognises what you know, what you don't know, and really important is where you think you know it but you are wrong. And that's the really that unconscious incompetence is the really important aspect. And one of the areas that we saw some significant impact with James and his team and through this project, is teaching the awareness for people to recognize that. And it behaves fundamentally like a personal teacher helping each individual person adjusting in real time,

Learning Uncut Episode 131

Cultivating Safety for Rail Track Contractors – James Kennedy and Andrew Smith

moving around the content testing, probing teaching, to reach full competency. So a very different design to, and a very different pathway as James alluded to for the learner. And we see that across millions of learners is the high level of engagement, but importantly, those outcomes, particularly in high risk environments that James has described across those major projects for ARTC.

Michelle Ockers:

We all have blind spots, so it's revealing those blind spots and building a level of awareness around what we thought we knew. The Learner Experience James, can you describe what people go through, maybe just sort of end to end on the program, as well as touching on how it looks and feels different for the learner to do learning developed and supported with this AI engine versus your traditional E-learning, which you've described a little earlier around Power Points with multiple choice or multiple guess questions. So the Learner Experience, what does it look and feel like for someone in your organization or one of your contractors to go through the program?

James Kennedy:

Yeah. Sure. I think we started by socializing the contractor safety program early and by engaging with our leaders through a number of forums, such as Leadership forums, contractor forums where we got our contractors in the room through leader led engagement. Where we would talk to the leaders and have them cascade communication down through their teams so that people were aware of the imperative for change and what's coming. So there's a contractor Safety Program coming. We also started to develop the tools, the procedures, the guidelines early, and had some small teams doing some pilot work so that there was a cross pollination. Just the murmurs were starting to get out across the organization that change was coming and people were involved in that change. And we started to develop tools that were based on best practice from across the organization. So we were starting from a platform that people were familiar with but wasn't wide spread across the organization.

What we then did, we started to ramp it up and we sent out invitations to each learner and we started, we structured it all up so we knew, we identified who the learners were through their leaders and we sent out invitations to people to attend the E-learning through Rhapsody. And we got cohorts through Rhapsody, that was about two or three weeks ahead of the face to face training. And then we then got them into the classroom with a very experienced and very engaging trainer, Paul Blake, who took them through a two day journey where we built on the modules that we built in Rhapsody. We then did the practical aspects of those modules in the classroom and we didn't cover the technical aspects of the content in the classroom. We did the engagement aspects, the Hearts and Minds work. We lent on Rhapsody to do the technical learning and then we lent on the classroom to do the Engagement work and the Hearts and Minds work. They were then given the opportunity to complete a feedback survey and we closed the loop by giving them feedback on their feedback and how it's been incorporated into continuously improving the program following the learning. And this is the end to end part. We then did a whole pole of sustaining action work where we socialized it. We gave people feedback on the implementation of the tools that they were taught and how to use.

And we dashboard-ed the whole thing so that they could actually see the impacts of their learnings and the effort that they put in actually translating into results after the fact to really embed that this is making a difference and tackling the original imperative for change around making sure people go home safely.

Learning Uncut Episode 131

Cultivating Safety for Rail Track Contractors – James Kennedy and Andrew Smith

Michelle Ockers:

Hearts and Minds. Let's lean into that a bit. So what do you mean by Hearts and Minds in this context? Why is it important and how did you work on that? In the face to face workshops.

James Kennedy:

We introduced a concept, it's not a new concept, but the personal imperative. We introduced that concept around what is our personal imperative for safety rather than taking a more clinical approach to safety is important because of a compliance reason. We've got legislation, we've got these other things that we must satisfy. We ask people very early on about an experience that they've had where someone close to them has been impacted through safety. And this is one of the first exercises we did in the classroom. The shares that came out of that were incredibly raw. There were often tears. There were stories of extremely serious harm and long lasting emotional impact from that. And that sharing around that created an emotional response. We then linked that emotional response to behavior to say, well, what are you going to do about it? And that was that emotional response to safety. It's a personal thing. And what is your personal imperative? To get to a deeper understanding of why safety is important to us. They then wrote a little personal commitment story around that. There were photos. Find a photo on your phone of what's important to you and most of the photos would have something around family, a hobby, something that wasn't work related.

How are you going to sustain that? And that really close, tight connection unlocked the hardest soul in the classroom. And the way that Paul was able to grab the, and captivate people who were pretty cynical and at the end of that two days they'd walk out. Thanking Paul for the experience was really compelling. But that's how we linked the Hearts and Minds to safety, was through a connection, a personal connection to safety. Unlocking a really deep emotional connection.

Michelle Ockers:

It takes a certain environment for people to feel comfortable doing that. What did it take to create that space? It can potentially unlock a whole lot of trauma's maybe too strong a word, but potentially trauma. If people have had very raw experiences, how do you create that space and look after participants in that kind of environment? If you want to go there.

James Kennedy:

Absolutely. And it is a challenging environment to work in. But it took the right approach. No one was forced into sharing anything that they didn't want to. That was an absolute key thing. People broke into small groups that they were comfortable with to first talk to each other about their personal stories. And it was only those who felt that they had the courage or felt that they had the desire to share more broadly were asked to do so. Out of a team of 10 to 30 people, it might have been two or three that shared more broadly. But you could see and what the other thing that we did was Paul, who is ex military, has got some pretty compelling stories himself, ex military and also ex, I guess, he's got some pretty well connected stories, emotion to behavior that he shared as well. And we really nurtured that and it was held in confidence. We didn't share that outside of the room and only asked those who wanted to share. We also made sure that people who did share or did feel that they had a real emotional awakening or unlocking had the support and we had the EAP available if needed, but we didn't ever need to exercise that. So it was a safe environment that we did that and we did that very carefully and very compassionately.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. Andrew, did you sit in on any of those workshops?



Andrew Smith:

No I didn't, but we were involved obviously in the design and then into the scenarios that we saw with James and Paul's support, creating situational scenarios that allowed them as a learner in the E-learning capacity to go through a decision making. And we saw that that blend and the transition from E-learning to the workshops was powerful, but also the line of sight that we gave Paul was the facilitator. There's a wealth of actionable data, if you like, from Rhapsody, but particularly around those scenarios where he could see certain things that the learner had gone through a decision making. So we briefed and prepared Paul for the rolling workshops that gave him the insight and the opportunity to continue to build on that. So that was our involvement at the workshop level.

Michelle Ockers:

Right, so talk to me a bit more about scenarios. I believe they were used quite heavily in the E-learning and then they were linked into what happened in the workshops. Just talk me through how scenarios were incorporated into the E-learning and then that transition of the scenarios into the workshop. And I don't mind which of you takes that question.

Andrew Smith:

I can give... James, if you're happy for me to give the background from probably a technology build. So we've used the scenarios in a number of applications before, particularly in clinical decision making in healthcare, and it comes from Fidel's Work, who's on the advisory board out of Harvard on Area9's advisory board. So what we do is and this is where the powerful impact from what ARTC used it was creating specific incidents and issues that are relevant to the learner. And then the learner goes through. In what's probably best described, Michelle is they're presented with a scenario. They then move through a sequence where they're asked to reflect, they're asked to make their decisions. And then in that sequence, they're then presented with what ARTC saw as the model response. And I think the important aspect there.

It wasn't prescriptive of that you should do this, you should do that. It was more stimulating, that response. And I think that was a really important and Powerful learning for the learner. And then they then went through a second reflectory process before submitting their decision making. And at that point, that was where Paul had line of sight of that information across a cohort of 10 to 25 in the workshops. And that information.

I think, proved valuable for Paul to further enhance and from our perspective bridging the gap between standard sort of E-learning approach and workshop facilitation. We felt that and with Paul's insight, that those learners came in not only with the competence, as James described, but also that motivation around certain those things. So we played a role in that aspect.

Michelle Ockers:

So what's an example of the type of data? Let's just pick one scenario. And what's the type of data about that scenario that would be fed into Paul to use in the workshop?

Andrew Smith:

Yeah. James feel free to elaborate. Of course, there was four or five scenarios and spread throughout the module. But the ones that resonated probably for us was there was a specific safety incident in one of the sites in New South Wales and the learner reflected, went through the details of that safety incident and then they were asked of what they would have done differently, how would they approach the management of the contract and what they would have done. And that scenario can be presented as information in a PDF. It could be a

Learning Uncut Episode 131

Cultivating Safety for Rail Track Contractors – James Kennedy and Andrew Smith

video, it can be anything, any media that allows you to provide that information. And then the learner would then go through that decision making of, okay, this is what I would do. I should have considered this, I would have considered that. And then being presented with what ARTC? Again, not prescriptive, but the framework around the model response. So that was an example, but there was a number of those, but certainly the derailment one was a really important one in that learning. And then from that, Michelle, Paul, the information we prepared for the workshops gave him really nice insight to some of the learners responses that he could then tease out and enhance and bring to life at the workshops.

Michelle Ockers:

So how was that played through to the workshop scene James?

James Kennedy:

Yeah, so there are two scenarios that Andrew's just referred to there. One was where a worker was struck by a vehicle that was reversing at one of our work sites out in western New South Wales. It was a real scenario. We didn't fabricate that scenario. We had the benefit of a digital recreation and played through, so it was quite raw. That worker was very severely injured as a result of that. Now, the scenario that was introduced in the E-learning introduced well, it was introduced in the E-learning. What Paul then did was grabbed that awareness and the initial thinking and people had a couple of weeks to process it. He then broke people into teams and said, how can we better set this site up so we manage the hazard. And it was quite interesting. You'd get groups of four, five, 10 people and they would come up in the matter of 15 minutes by working as a group. And these aren't professionals in the area of setting up a site. They were just some principles that were introduced and they were able to come up in pretty much very case, a better layout just by working together. And what that did was underpinned the team working, introducing some concepts around what does a good site look like and what are some of the principles around setting up a safe site.

By doing that work, they were able to come up with a much better site layout plan and that then gave them the awareness that they took away to their teams to say, you know what, with a cup of coffee and a sheet of blank paper and as a team we can come up with a better idea. And that was one of the takeaways.

Michelle Ockers:

That's so interesting, isn't it? We had an episode with David Broadhurst from CodeSafe and I want to say Ray Gretch, they were at a company that was laying insulation bats and they were looking for ways of improving access to rooves for the staff working in the rooves. And what they actually discovered was if they went out to site to video people trying to follow their safe working procedures, the procedures didn't work and the guys on the ground were playing workarounds, basically. But what they were able to do was then the bigger aha moment was oh, we have to actually go out and tap into the knowledge of our people who are doing the job to figure out how to do it more safely. And that's a similar principle to what you've just described there. And that realization that your staff take away that hey, this is in our hands and we can just sit down and figure it out together and find a better way. That's very powerful.

James Kennedy:

I think the word there is empowerment. We actually help people feel empowered to make a difference, the other word is ownership. So we really leaned into the concept of ownership, that we all have ownership, we can all make a change, we just need to do something. And that's where linking that emotional imperative to behaviors with ownership being an absolute key underpinning behavior that we were driving for someone else's problem, it's mine.

Learning Uncut Episode 131

Cultivating Safety for Rail Track Contractors – James Kennedy and Andrew Smith

Andrew Smith:

Just to reinforce that. Again, we played a small role in this, but one of the nice things about Rhapsody in the design of it is it allows the learners to provide feedback on each component, each question as they're completing the course. And then we took that back to James and Paul and said this gentleman or this person here has challenged this question. So we would adjust and be agile in that approach with the subject matter oversight to keep the content or make the content very relevant to the learner as it was deployed. And I think that plays a small role in what you've both just described about the operationalizing it. And sometimes every workplace can be quite different. So that's a really important facet.

James Kennedy:

Well, to lean into that, it gave us a window in to the cohort that was coming through the classroom so that Paul was able to pitch the material at a level that wasn't patronizing for those who are more experienced, but also wasn't too advanced for those who were not as mature on the E-learning journey. Then we also had some cohorts that had a real spread of people at the other end of spectrum. And what Paul did there was said, well, here's a couple of mentors within the team or coaches and actually buddied them up with people that needed more coaching, so actually created little cohorts within the cohort. So it actually allowed him to unpack and structure the workshop sessions to the best effect based on the people that were in the room.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, fantastic. It's a really great example of the use of data to improve the quality of the learning experience and get it right for people, brilliant. Andrew, one of the things you mentioned before was this idea of helping people to see what they think they know, which isn't true. So the conscious competence model is what we're talking about here. You heard something from one participant that really struck you as to the testament to the power of this program to support and enable that. Would you like to share that story with us and discuss why you found it so powerful?

Andrew Smith:

Yeah of course. James. Hopefully I've got this right. I continued to. Maybe I'm not embellishing it too much as time goes on, James. But James was the one that told me about this gentleman. And I think for all of the outcomes that James can elaborate, of course, around the objectives of this one, this story really resonates with me, and particularly from that sense of humility and the awareness. And James, forgive me if I am embellishing some of the details, but this gentleman was your normal sort of verbose and quite forthright at workshops. I think we've all been exposed to those type of people. And, he was quite quiet. And during one of the breaks, James went up to him and said, are you okay? And he said, I thought I knew more than I did, and I've learned more than I have in the last four weeks than I have over a long period. And I think for me, that what really resonated there was around James's sort of the motivation and the understanding, but also that sense of humility that, okay, I thought I was better than I was, and now I'm willing to learn, which he'd been missing. And I think that's probably for me, outside of some of the key empirical evidence that James can touch on, was one of the most found outcomes for this. And I reflect on that a lot and discuss that a lot both internally and externally with partners as well because I think it's just really powerful message.

James Kennedy:

Yeah. That's, we've got a lot of similar stories and that's one about, perhaps someone who is unconsciously, I would hesitate to use the word incompetent, but they don't...

Learning Uncut Episode 131

Cultivating Safety for Rail Track Contractors – James Kennedy and Andrew Smith

Michelle Ockers:

It's ugly language in a lot of ways isn't it?

James Kennedy:

It is. It's ugly language, but it's probably a sense of awareness around their self-awareness around what they know and how they come across. And that humility is raising the awareness around, oh, do I really come across like a bit of a know-it-all? Or is, you can't teach me anything. And by introducing the material and by having a facilitator who was quite disarming had a great sense of humor, very engaging, we're able to unlock some pretty tough nuts and get people engaged around the challenge. It's quite interesting.

Andrew Smith:

Yeah. Well, just to add something to that, Michelle. I know, I agree completely. I think the unconscious incompetence is something that the managers can see from the data from the learner. It's described as the meta-cognition there, the recognition of what you know and what you don't know. So the terminology is very, is important in front of the learner. I think that you are right. That's quite a harsh word for the learner to engage in anyway.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. Even the word meta-cognition, right? Is very jargon y. It's like, oh, I thought I knew stuff, but now I'm rethinking, I think the idea of rethinking.

Andrew Smith:

Yeah. The recognition.

Michelle Ockers:

I'm rethinking what I thought I knew. Yeah.

Andrew Smith:

Yeah, that's right. The recognition of what you know and what you don't know. Yeah. Absolutely.

James Kennedy:

I think we need to be particularly mindful that some professions, and you're looking at engineers and their ilk. Take the word competence as a personal. Very personally. So if you say you're consciously incompetent, that strikes at the very heart of their profession. So we need to use language that's appropriate and the level of compassion there.

Andrew Smith:

Yeah absolutely.

James Kennedy:

Otherwise, we'll switch them off.

Andrew Smith:

Yeah.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, absolutely. So, James you'd originally planned for 200 people to complete the program. This has risen to actually 600 who completed the E-learning, of who 500 have joined a workshop so you've obviously had, quite a reach across the organization. When you look at what's different now, compared to two or three years ago before you started the

Learning Uncut Episode 131

Cultivating Safety for Rail Track Contractors – James Kennedy and Andrew Smith

whole safety change program, what do you see, if you were to walk around the organization, go to some of your sites watch people working, what's different?

James Kennedy:

It's a really interesting question, in that what feels different, what looks different? Just look at what looks different. I walk around our offices where we're planning for a major position at the moment in the Hunter Valley there's a major position up the road where we've got 400 to 500 people working around the clock, doing open-heart surgery on the Railway. Now the leading to those major campaign activities requires a lot of planning, and this is where the contractor safety work is really taking place. I've walked around these offices, and I catch people doing the right thing. I see the tools up on screens, I'll see people in the corner having a huddle, I see people looking at safe work method statements and reviewing them.

I see contractors in there engaged in the planning activities, and that level of doing, is unprecedented. I've also spent quite a lot of time out on our site, in our projects where we're working with contractors and the dynamics between ARTC people and their contractors have changed. There is more trust, there's more mutual understanding, and we're seeing contractors start to relax a bit and go finally, we're able to do our work and you're not overstepping the mark, you're not smothering us with your love but at the same time you're providing better clarity around what your expectations are of us so that we can better serve you. And that resetting the balance around what is ARTCs role as a top tier PCBU if you want to get into that language, or what is our role as a client and what is the role of the contractor has been reset so that there is a new equilibrium and it just lets people do their work, those best equipped to do it.

Okay, So that's the leading behavior, but then we need to look in the rear view mirror to see whether we're leaving a trail of destruction or if things are better off. And that's where lag indicators such as total reportable or recordable injuries are measured. And TRFA is one of those measures. And we're actually seeing on the graph, a reduction in harm. So there were fewer people going home hurt, and significantly hurt. And that graph has been trending down for the last two years. So that we are absolutely leaving a legacy of less harm out on our work sites, which shows that it is having an impact.

Michelle Ockers:

It's wonderful in terms of an outcome, it also strikes me that the kind of communication, the kind of way of working together that you've just described, there's got to have other knock-on benefits for the business. Do you have any sense, even if you don't have data, any sense of what as a result of the shifts here you're seeing what's changing in relationships and how ARTC is working with your contractors?

James Kennedy:

Yes. It's such a complex world at the moment and to try and filter out what are the impacts of the post-pandemic world, because this has all been done during that really complicated. We've had floods, we've had fires, and we go into the pandemic and now we've been working on contract safety work, so to try and filter that out. But what I am seeing, is that people, the welfare and the mental health aspects, people are more calm. They're more composed. They're getting through a pretty tough phase in their time, quite well. And that harmony is an offset to a lot of the disruption and chaos that we're seeing around us. So I'm seeing people enjoying their work despite it being challenging.

Learning Uncut Episode 131

Cultivating Safety for Rail Track Contractors – James Kennedy and Andrew Smith

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah thank you. Let's move to what you both personally learned through your work on this program. So Andrew, if you think about this body of work and what some of your key personal learnings or takeaways are, what would your response to that be?

Andrew Smith:

Well I continue to learn, I've just what James has articulated there is so valuable to understand that we played some role in that and I think particularly the personal behavior where he is walked in and seen those things. And of course the lag indicators, are really important. I think what I've learned personally and what we've evolved in Australia with Area9 Support is the impact and the blend, from E-learning into workshops and how we can help enhance those and particularly around what we've described around the actionable analytics, that line of sight to tease those out and understand that. And I think... So that's what we've learned and we apply that to a number of organizations.

ARTC have been very generous with this module to allow other organizations not just access but if they want to use it and tailor it to their environment. So we've seen... And contractor safety, that's the other aspect that I've learned is the challenges of contractor management and contractor safety and there's an awful lot of work in Australia in a range of industries and you need to manage these organizations carefully. And this is something that I've learned and that translates to a number of our evolving partnerships, whether it's in utilities or rail or even into finance and healthcare. There's a transitional workforce that comes in and I think those contractors need to be managed carefully. So we continue to learn and apply and adjust through this but the words that James described really resonate and continue to impress me about what ARTC have done with this program.

Michelle Ockers:

It's a very well-crafted thoughtful body of work as a whole. So James, what have you personally learned through your work on this program?

James Kennedy:

Thanks for the kind words, Andrew, that resonates with me. It's very kind of you to say that. I think change done properly takes time.

Michelle Ockers:

Yep.

James Kennedy:

You can't rush through it. And despite being a results orientated individual who likes to work at Pace, the pace isn't set by me and how hard I work, it's set by, well, the team around me, but also by the capacity for change within the people that we're influencing. And we, our learners, they're all really busy. They've got to keep a network running 24/7 disasters happen when they happen. Incidents happen when they happen and they need to deal with those things. There are all sorts of pressures on them, but to bring people along on that journey, you need to pace it. But you also need to design a program that considers their world and is relevant to them at their time. And that's where we're able to use all the tools at their disposal. And Rhapsody side was an absolute key one where we introduced scenarios that were relevant to people, optics and photos and messaging that was relevant to people so they could connect with it.

We were able to, through the learning, pace it to the individual. And some people might have taken 40 minutes to do a module. Some people might have taken five, but they all walked away with that same level of learning. And that was a real takeaway for me. I think there are

Learning Uncut Episode 131

Cultivating Safety for Rail Track Contractors – James Kennedy and Andrew Smith

some other things that strike me here. The people centered implementation approach is, it's so important to get your leaders and sponsors on board early around that imperative for change to clear the runway for you because if you try and lead change in a large complex organization with all of the other things that are on the plate of the executive and others, you're setting yourself up for a fail if you don't have the executive sponsors on board to clear the runway and communicate the imperative for change down through their lines of management. And we did all that work really early on, and we engaged with the executive and the senior managers around that work so that when people got into the classroom, they were getting the message both from the trainers, but also from the aligned management who supported and endorsed and gave it momentum. And that was absolutely essential.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. And, James, where did you do your people-centered implementation training? Your people-centered change management training? Through what organization?

James Kennedy:

That was, again, during the pandemic. So it was all done on Zoom. Normally it's done in the classroom, but we were able to do that online. And it was through Change Synergy that we did that learning.

Michelle Ockers:

Great. Thanks. I'll put a link to them in the show notes if anyone wants to take a look at them.

James Kennedy:

Yeah. And I were able to structure, an online program that was very effective with breakout rooms and what not and exercises that actually worked online. And I certainly got a lot out of that, as did my peers who went through that training.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. Okay. So by way of summary then, James, I think there's a lot that people can take away and think about applying in their work in what you've already shared. If you were to kind of try to wrap it up in a nutshell, just a couple of top tips for others who want to get started to do more with, supporting behavioral change in the workplace, like truly, deeply supporting change. What would your top tips be?

James Kennedy:

Go back to the brief and really understand what the problem is that you're trying to solve. Don't just launch into it. Use data to underpin that. And then through that drive a compelling case for change. Build your elevator pitch, if you want to call it that, but get the leaders on board. Work with subject matter experts and professionals, to come up with a high quality product. And that's where Andrew and others in my organization have come in. I think also understanding the pace of change and the people that you're dealing with and how complex their world is absolutely essential as well. Sustaining the work needs to be thought about very early on. It's all good coming up with a great bit of training, but how do you make it stick? And what is the work after the training is rolled out and after you've done all the hard work and everyone's got this certificate hanging on the wall, what is it that makes it stick? And you've got to think about that very early on. And that's the feedback loop and becoming business as usual or sustaining actions if you like. And that's another aspect that really needs to be thought about early on.

Learning Uncut Episode 131

Cultivating Safety for Rail Track Contractors – James Kennedy and Andrew Smith

Michelle Ockers:

Great. Thank you so much, James. So for both of you, I will include links to your LinkedIn profiles with the show notes if anyone would like to get in touch to find out more about any of the topics discussed in today's episode. Thank you so much James and Andrew for sharing, this fabulous body of, change management work. James for taking us through that sort of broader change approach, Andrew, for talking more specifically around, where the program through Rhapsody fitted in and supported the work. There's lots for us to all learn from that. Thank you.

James Kennedy:

Thank you, Michelle. Thank you, Andrew.

Andrew Smith:

Thank you. Thanks James.

Michelle Ockers:

So for listeners, if you're finding Learning Uncut valuable, please refer it to a friend. Share it with a mate, tell a colleague to come and listen. Share this episode. Indeed there's lots worth sharing. And if you can leave a rating on whatever platform you listen to, it helps us get the work of great guests like James and Andrew into the ears of as many learning professionals as possible so we all get better together. Thanks everybody, and see you in the next episode

Learning Uncut Episode 131 Cultivating Safety for Rail Track Contractors – James Kennedy and Andrew Smith



Learning Uncut are learning and development consultants that help Learning and Development leaders and their teams become a strategic enabler so that their businesses can thrive. We work in evidence-informed ways to drive tangible outcomes and business impact and are strong believers in the power of collaboration and community. We specialise in helping to build or refresh organisational learning strategy, update their L&D Operating Model, enable skills development, and conduct learning evaluation. We also offer workshops to shift learning mindset and practices for both L&D teams and the broader workforce – as well as speaking at public and internal events.

Learn more about us [at our website](#).

About your host, Michelle Ockers



Michelle is the co-founder and Chief Learning Strategy at 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*



Find Michelle on [LinkedIn](#)

