

Michelle Ockers Today, I'm speaking with Keara Byrne, who is the Head of Leadership and Organizational Development at Ariba Group. I saw Keara speak at this year's AITD conference, 2023 conference, about how she uses, quite extensively, how she uses human-centered design across a range of organizations. And I was really impressed with both the breadth and depth of her use of HCD approaches and her passion about these practices and commitment to the value of them. So here we are, Keara, having a conversation about HCD. Welcome to Learning Uncut.

Keara Byrne Thank you so much, Michelle, for having me. It's a pleasure.

Michelle Ockers And I was really struck by something you said that I wrote down when I was listening to you talk at the conference. You said that you feel if you hadn't used HCD, you would have wasted thousands of dollars, hours of time, opportunity loss and credibility, which is a pretty big claim. Are you going to stand by that today?

Keara Byrne Absolutely. I live by that claim. I genuinely believe, Michelle, that if I had have not come across human-centered design and implemented it in my work, that not only would the solutions be of poorer quality, but I really would have lost credibility with my stakeholders because the solutions wouldn't have been as strong and robust as what they are when we co-design with our people. So absolutely stand by that.

Michelle Ockers And we are going to talk a lot more about what that looks like and some of the benefits of it. One of the things you shared with me in a previous conversation, which I found really fascinating, is that you used to find facilitation de-energizing, yet facilitating is one of the key activities you do in your work using HCD. And you mentioned something about a StrengthsFinder approach. I think it was StrengthsFinder, but you can correct me if that's wrong, that helped you to shift your perspective of facilitating and your relationship with facilitation. Do you want to talk a bit more about that?

Keara Byrne Absolutely. Look, I think I'm probably not alone in experiencing imposter syndrome in different parts of my career journey. But when I was early on in my career, I was, you know, a full-time facilitator. It was external-facing. So I did a lot of consultation and delivery of, you know, leadership and development programs across the state, actually, which was really cool. But almost every evening before the day, the next day when I would be delivering a program, I would feel absolutely anxious about going to deliver this program, even if I'd done it hundreds of times before and started to doubt, you know, do I know my stuff, constantly wanting to learn more, be the expert? And of course, that's not a productive state of mind. And, you know, it only took me 5 minutes into the program delivery and facilitation where I, you know, my nerves would relax. I'd build that rapport. and off we'd go. But that cycle kept repeating. And when I did my Strengths Profile, actually, is the tool that I'm also accredited in, Spotlight was the learned behavior that I discovered that was,

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I was good at, because I'd learned to be good at being in the spotlight and facilitating and you know, we all put our hats on and become, you know, a little bit more sparkly, a little bit more engaging than we might be otherwise. But it was something that was de-energizing for me. And so the way that I resolved that, from a strengths perspective, was to look at what were my energizing strengths around mission. And the purpose of me being in the room wasn't to be the expert in all things. Who would have known?

Michelle Ockers That puts us under a lot of pressure, right? When we feel that we have to be the expert.

Keara Byrne Absolutely. But, you know, I think it's a really human thing for people in L&D to feel that we need to have all this knowledge. We acquire all of this knowledge and expertise. But, you know, the shift that I, that I took, you know, probably midway through my career was understanding the true meaning and philosophy of facilitation, which is to bring out the knowledge and expertise of adults, again, going back to adult learning theory, and to really celebrate and give them the space to work through their real-world challenges. and come up with their own solutions, using some great tools and resources along the way. And human-centered design only served as another bookmark under that to realize that, you know, you're facilitating a process, but you don't need to be the expert in everything, which is incredibly freeing and leads to much better outcomes, in my view.

Michelle Ockers Yeah, absolutely. This was something I explored in a body of work I did with Laura Overton and Shannon Tipton, which listeners of the podcast may be familiar with. We called it Emerging Stronger, and we initiated it during the pandemic. And we were kind of exploring how could L&D emerge stronger and more relevant from the pandemic than when we went into it. And one of the bodies of research we did around this was a series of podcast conversations, which we then sat back and analyzed and said, what are the themes? And one of these was around mindset. And one of the key mindset shifts that we noticed with L&D professionals who had adapted and help their organizations respond more quickly to the pandemic was moving away from having to be the expert to being what we call the empathic explorer, which I think fits really nicely with HCD.

Keara Byrne Absolutely.

Michelle Ockers So I'm going to share, we created a resource around that and an e-book talking about these five mindset shifts. So I'm going to put that in the show notes if anyone wants to take a look at that. But let's move back to human-centered design. Keara, in your own words, what is human-centered design or HCD?

Keara Byrne Well, look, for me, Michelle, and I've obviously studied and implemented this in my work. It's a process, but it's also a mindset. So you start with the challenge and the problem that you're trying to solve. And it's always a business problem, usually, if you're working in and with organizations. And then you're really co-designing the solutions with the people in the system. So, you know, people across different levels of the organization in the system coming up with the solutions

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to meet their needs. And then the solution that you produce at the end, actually is much better for it because you've involved the people along the way. That's my best attempt at summarizing that briefly.

Michelle Ockers Okay. And why do you think it's important for learning and development professionals to embrace this approach? What do they get out of it or what does the organization get out of it? How is it a better approach than some of the other approaches we might use where we design more independently and maybe throw things over the fence or just use subject matter experts? Why is this a better approach?

Keara Byrne Oh, look, it's a great question. I think we should start with, you know, how does it benefit the people that are actually meant to implement this new knowledge or this new way of working or new behaviors? And a lot of what our work requires us to do is influence change of behavior, influence, you know, new skills and capability. So for us to be effective in our role, we really need to involve the people that do the work, essentially. you know, our first priority should be to add value and to have high impact. So it's less about us. And I think that's an important point. It's really about getting that systems perspective that I touched on, and also unlocking the fantastic ideas and solutions that already exist in the business. And I think that's the danger of having the expert mindset that really gives us that tunnel vision of what the solution would look like and what the problem is, and delivering an off-the-shelf solution. And it really encourages us to think about, you know, how can we democratize the conversation? How can we include our people in the process of this new way of working, of this new behavior that the organization requires, a new mindset, a new skillset? The other real benefit that I found is that it can shift the culture. So not only is human-centered design great at, you know, creating these innovative solutions, because you encourage diversity of thinking, and it's a real DNI tool, actually, as well as a change tool. But it's also incredibly anti-hierarchical, which I'm really passionate about. And I think that's a trend we're seeing, thankfully, across the board, you know, Commander-in-Control is dead. Where the businesses are moving to is more this networked leadership. Agile ways of working is big champion of that. You know, that's what I was doing at CBA, actually, before I joined the Ariba Group. And so, you know, democratizing conversations around How do we want to work? How do we want this customer experience to be? How do we want this people experience to be? And involving our people in these conversations and solutions just benefits everyone. So for me, it's something I'm incredibly passionate about, because I've worked with people at various levels who feel really proud about having to be able to contribute to a solution that they see day in, day out. And they, you know, they see the solutions that L&D teams might be pushing out onto them that they then have to adopt without having a say in how that looks and feels.

Michelle Ockers I love how you talked about this right up front as a way of working and the idea that we learn as we work and through our work. So it's almost, you know, the integration, it's a way of thinking about integrating learning and work and putting it into the hands of the people doing the work who were there to support. So I really liked that framing, Keara. Thank you. How long have you been working with

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HCD and can you talk about in that time some examples of the types of projects that you've applied HCD to?

Keara Byrne Sure. So, I wish I discovered this earlier, but I've been using Human Centred Design for the last, I'm going to say, five or six years roughly. It was introduced to me by someone I was working with in local government, actually, and we're working on the Reward and Recognition program for the entire organization. So we're reshaping what that would look like. And her name was Patricia Hatzianas. She, you know, told me all about Human-Centered Design. She was sharing little bits and pieces of it. And at first, I found it, you know, as you may have, Michelle, a little bit theoretical, you know, what are all these new terms? It's a, it's a big process with, you know, diagrams, different phases. But as we work through practically applying Human-Centered Design to this reward and recognition program, We designed a program that we put all of our people through. So it was around 660 people at that organization. They all attended this workshop over 3 days. And they all gave us their ideas around, you know, what reward and recognition they would like. And we started with personas based on different cohorts of the business. And we created stories around what motivations people had, goals, you know, what they really wanted from work, what they didn't want from work. And they were really then asked to empathize with someone different to them around what could they want as a reward and recognition, as well as applying it to themselves and ideating on all their great ideas for what they could receive as part of this program. And that, to me, showed, I guess, practically, the benefits of the process, the benefits of including people in this co-design, and then to see that the buy-in and engagement of the program was almost immediate because they had built it for us and with us.

Michelle Ockers That makes a huge difference, doesn't it? You're not trying to sell something or conveying it. There's a sense of ownership.

Keara Byrne That's a really good word, Michelle. It is all about ownership. And, you know, coming back to the change piece that I mentioned, often we will, you know, in LOD, historically, traditionally, and hopefully people are moving away from this, but the problem's identified. There's a solution that you already have in mind off the shelf, ready to go. You've done it before. And then you launch this thing and you roll it out to people who then are supposed to absorb this, adopt it and change. And I think that ownership, because they're part of creating the process and the new way of working or the new service or the new whatever it might be, is really critical to the success, but also the best outcome for, for our people as well.

Michelle Ockers Yeah, yeah. Thinking about that reward and recognition program, can you recall anything that came out of that in terms of things that people were interested in and felt they wanted to see in a reward and recognition program that maybe were a little bit unexpected or surprised you?

Keara Byrne Oh, look, this was quite some time ago.

Michelle Ockers I know, I know it's digging back, but I just thought maybe there's something that kind of sparked your attention that you might have retained.

Keara Byrne Oh, one thing that probably stands out apart from, you know, some of the things I wanted were really practical things like vouchers, gift vouchers, and they weren't really expensive things either. So that surprised us. They, you know, some of them wanted \$20 vouchers and that was great recognition for, you know, whatever work they'd produced or support they'd provided to customers or team members. But the one that probably surprised me at the time was that they wanted a day off to volunteer. So that was something we wouldn't have come up as an organization in the HR team. They wanted to be able to take time out to, you know, go and volunteer at a homeless shelter or their, their charity of choice. And I know that's very common now. But at the time, that came from the voice of our people, which was surprising, but also very rewarding to see that come through.

Michelle Ockers Yeah, that's a nice example. So what are examples of some other types of projects you've applied HCD to? I'm really curious about the breadth. And I remember seeing a list at the AITD conference that you had on a slide. And I thought, well, there's probably something in that that most people could relate to as something that they might like from a learning and development or OD perspective that they might get involved with at some time. So give us a little bit of a cook's tour through some of your other body of work with HCD.

Keara Byrne Oh, I like that, Cook's Tour.

Michelle Ockers I don't know if people in Australia will understand what the Cook's Tour is. Cook's is a bus company, right?

Keara Byrne Well, I'll run with it. I'll go with that. OK. So I think something that I've found really beneficial is not just the learning, I guess, program that you might typically think of, although I can speak to some examples around those that have been successful. But persona creation. So starting with, and I think this is more common now, which is great, I'm seeing more of this, creating personas of our people in the businesses, thinking about what their drivers are, what their goals are, their motivations, what they care about, what they love and what they hate, you know, emotions are part of that. And it's really cool to apply that real human-centered lens to the persona creation. Having a backstory as to why someone might be the way that they are, so building that empathy. And I found using that persona creation really powerful with leaders in particular. So, you know, rather than just creating a program with leaders, which is also something you can do, I think starting with, well, who are our people? And what do they care about? And who are your people? What are the different types of personas that you see? What are the reasons behind why someone might be deemed a low performer. And actually creating that with leaders is fascinating. We did that for the Elevate program, actually, and had a one-day workshop where they created these most amazing personas around their different types of people. And that then informed our Change and Comms plans. Then they created the key messages that we would need to tailor to the different types of people that we had in the organization, what's in it for them, what, how this would help them. But it was also equally really fascinating to see leaders responding to the personas in different and new ways, because they were having to be empathetic to

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why someone might be behaving in this way. So it serves all kinds of purposes. So I really value that persona creation in and of itself, not just for learning programs, but just as a leadership development tool. I've really enjoyed that.

Michelle Ockers I just want to check in with you on that. It's really interesting. You know, my sense is that what you saw was maybe some rethinking or reframing of how these leaders were seeing different types of people through developing empathy just by creating personas, right?

Keara Byrne That's exactly right. And you know, the program that we developed that for Elevate, which I know you've just interviewed Simon around, was requiring a massive culture change. It was a transformational program around customer experience. So you know, one of the things that we really understood was we needed to work with the hearts and minds of our leaders to be able to you know, role model the changes, but also understand where their people were at as well and support them in new and different ways. So that was a really powerful one. Journey mapping is a really great tool. So, you know, I did that recently at the Ariba Group, where we were looking at creating our new grad experience, and looking at the Think, Feel, Do at certain touchpoints across the ideal journey and experience that a grad would have. And again, we did that with our business. And that was really successful, because it wasn't just what we want them to know and to learn. And it was broader, it was more about how we want them to be feeling, what sort of emotions we want people to be having, how we can then support them to have those emotions, and to have that experience. And the more that I've used human-centered design around people experience, the more I'm convinced that you know, fundamentally at the heart of it, a lot of this is about emotions and these tools.

Michelle Ockers At the end of the day, we're trying to change behaviors, right? And emotions are such a critical part of motivation and shifting behavior.

Keara Byrne Yep, absolutely agree, Michelle. So, yeah, I mean, that that's a real business case for human-centered design in itself, that point that you just raised around you know, it really does require us to dig deeper through using these tools and these practices, because it does require us to think about the think, feel, do and behavior change as you work through these different activities or the process end to end.

Michelle Ockers Yeah, I think I just, I just want to hover on the think, feel, do just for one more moment, even, you know, Whenever I am preparing to design and facilitate a workshop, even for conference presentations that I give, I do a think-feel-do right up the front. I think it's just a nice, easy little grounding thing that we can do in our roles when we're facilitating things when we're presenting things, even if you think about I'm going into a meeting and I'm trying to pitch something to someone to influence them. I think the think, feel, do is a really useful, quick tool you can use in your work in so many ways.

Keara Byrne Absolutely. And it's a really nice thing that you can introduce through human centred design activities with leaders as well so that it feels really practical

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and really targeted to what you're trying to solve for as well. I might just give a couple more examples, Michelle, and then if you'd like me to move on, I'm more than happy to. The other things that I've used them for, is Strategy Sessions, actually. So, you know, thinking about what are the problems we're trying to solve is a perfect place to start for a Strategy Session, because it really unearths the why. And then that, that flows through in terms of, you know, who we then delivering services for, then we are going to empathize with people and our end users and our customers. And then what are some of the ideas we have to, you know, make some great solutions to the problems that we're seeing at the moment. So that is a really nice framework for strategy sessions as well. Teambuilding, I've also used it as a Learning Needs Analysis tool. So when I was at Sydney Trains, we were required to deliver a risk-based Learning Needs Analysis every, I think it was 3 years. And that was a compliance piece, but we actually integrated into the the design principles that it would be, you know, based around human-centered design. So we had an external come in, and we had our people effectively champion what good looked like throughout that process and identified what were the key capabilities and the tasks and the activities and the skills that were required and what the key risks were. They were the, they were the ones that were really driving that. And that was a, you know, facilitated within a framework. That was a really, really strong example of where that can go well, as well as actually evaluating program success. Comms and change, I've talked about that. And I'm currently doing the Engagement Survey Action Planning at the Ariba Group with one of our business units. And I was telling you this offline, So it's a massive program of work, and there are 5 key streams. And a lot of them are to do with tools and resources and, you know, development and upskilling. And so what we've done is we've actually allocated a Senior Leadership Team member to one of those 5 streams. And I've been coaching and working with them offline. to give them these human-centered design tools. And they're using them with their working groups, again, with a great mix of people across the business, to define the problems, to look at the solutions, and to, you know, ideate, prototype, create personas, create customer journey maps. And it's, I haven't used the word human-centered design once, because they don't need to necessarily know that. I mean, maybe they'll be interested at some point in time, and we can go more into that. But the outcome is the same. Whether you tell someone that we're using this framework or not, I'm building their skills, and they're the ones that are leading this. They're the face of it. And it's really successful because there is that total buy-in and that total collaboration and democratization. And there's a real buzz in the business around coming up with some innovative new things and new ways of working, which is really great to see.

Michelle Ockers Yeah, it's great rolling it out as a work tool rather than just using it ourselves. And I did an episode, I just reminded of an episode I did back in August, 2019 with Shauna Murray for anyone who wants to take a listen to that as well. It was episode 32. which was called Supporting Work with Human-Centered Design. And she talked about how they were rolling out human-centered design practices as a way of working at coal services. So, and she provided some tools that she was using or rolling out in the organization. So it's a similar sort of idea, it's work tools. Back to what we said before about ways of working, it's not just for us as designers of solutions. It's putting these ways of working into the hands of our people. And I

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guess particularly our leaders, when they're working with their teams and engaging them in problem solving and solutions and improvements, right?

Keara Byrne Absolutely, especially you mentioned leaders. I mean, they're classically expected to be the knower of all things, being the expert, having all the solutions. And of course, we know that that's not the case. And through my leadership development, we really work on that mindset. But, you know, like I was talking about before, team building, ideation, having ideation sessions around, Guys, this is a problem we're trying to solve. Let's ideate on what some of the solutions might be. And getting the team to come up with that and not just yourself or the more senior leaders in the organization, it's very powerful to actually do that. It sounds so simple, but it really creates that ripple effect of inclusion and innovation, which is awesome.

Michelle Ockers Absolutely. Better solutions, greater buy-in. So let's dive into one example. And we picked an example to use almost like a mini case study to bring the process to life and to end on a project. And it's the Managing Challenging Behaviors program you're going to walk us through, Keara.

Keara Byrne Yeah, sure, Michelle. So I know we've spoken about this, but just to highlight this for your listeners, and this would be a challenge I'm sure many people in industry would experience. So I was approached by some senior leaders about a challenge in the business. So, you know, a Q problem, co-defined problem. And it involved, you know, people maybe not responding to customers in a way that was helpful, that was customer-focused, and that helped to de-escalate what was leading to escalated situations with customers. And there was some pretty, you know, challenging behaviors on both sides. And I will say that was customers as well as team members in the business. And so it was a great challenge to have. And I think we've spoken about the need to do that analysis upfront and really co-design, or co-define rather, the problem statement using data. And so that's where we began. We looked at the data around some of these levers. And then we spoke to some of our people. And we ended up, you know, running a workshop. And I just want to shout out to the project lead on this, Anna Zuza, in my team, who did a brilliant job leading this program of work in my team. So, you know, we, we had this co-design, co-define problem session with our people. And we really asked them to identify, you know, what they saw the challenges around challenging customer behaviors. And we wanted to really be deliberate about the language around, these are behaviors, this is not about the person, because we all act in ways that are challenging on our worst days.

Michelle Ockers So can you give us a little insight into how you ran that workshop?

Keara Byrne Yeah, I mean, the first workshop we ran was pretty unstructured. We said, you know, this is what we're hearing. This is some of the data that we're seeing. So we presented some information to them based on some analysis. And then we asked them for their perspective. You know, what are you seeing out in your areas in the workforce? What sort of customer behaviors are you encountering? What are some of your key challenges? What could help?" And it was a very open

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forum. It wasn't forcing anyone into a solution. At that point, we really just wanted to understand the diverse perspectives around what they were seeing, hearing and thinking at the time. And then we engaged from that. We distilled those insights. We played them back to the senior leader sponsors. And then we engaged an external learning organization.

Michelle Ockers Can I just ask a question throughout that? When you play something back to senior leaders that you've gathered from the people involved in whatever the problem is that you're working on in the organization, do you find an openness from most senior leadership groups to listen to that? Or do you find resistance? And if you do face resistance, how do you deal with that?

Keara Byrne Look, my immediate reaction and response to that, Michelle, is, No, not really. And I'll explain why. I'm very data-driven. So, you know, I haven't mentioned other things that I've done as part of this. I mentioned the Customer Experience Transformation, I guess, program of work that I was involved in over the period of 3 years I was at Sydney Trains. That included Elevate, that included managing challenging behaviors and a number of other things at the time. And at the start of a process engaging with this senior leader, or 2 senior leaders I was working with, they had initially asked me just to roll out training. And I went about doing 3 different deep-dive analyses around customer experience feedback, which you can't argue with, because that's a really, that's a data point that everyone uses to measure success. So I looked at customer experience, actually went as far as creating new categories for the verbatim 1900 comments that customers had made.

Michelle Ockers So coding those comments in effect.

Keara Byrne Coding those comments, yeah.

Michelle Ockers Qualitative analysis. So you could then do some quantitative analysis around that.

Keara Byrne Correct. So theming them into, you know, a pie chart around what customers most complained about, what they complimented us around. I looked at another internal data, data set, and included that in the overall theming. And then we actually did some observations out in the field around customer service. My team did that, and we had some behavioral indicators, and we looked at that alongside the customer feedback. So when I presented back, the people and what they were saying and what they were telling us in the Human-Centered Design Workshop, when I presented back the customer experience data and the themes around that, considering all of these 3 other sets of data, it was hard to argue that this was not a really strong point of view, and that it was evidence-based. So I like to use data to really drive the storytelling and not have an agenda, but to start with, What is the data telling us? What are the people saying? And when you string that all together, there are very common themes that's very hard to pull apart. So that's my technique that I find works really well.

Michelle Ockers Yeah, I think that's really useful advice for people. Multiple sources of data can boost the credibility of what you're, or they reduce the deniability perhaps of what you're presenting, which is really great as a tip.

Keara Byrne Yep.

Michelle Ockers So you've done the playback, you've gotten by in, you know, around here's the problem and some of the underlying causes of the problem. Where to from there with the managing challenging behaviors?

Keara Byrne Yeah, so total buy-in in terms of alignment of what the key challenges were for people, and complete endorsement and sponsorship of the way forward, which was to create a blended program. So because we are talking, we were talking about behavior change, that includes mindset, shifts, that emotional shift that we're talking about, empathizing with our customers, and then doing something differently as a result of that. We worked with Be Learning to create an upfront digitized module, which was a Choose Your Own Adventure. And that's where the human-centered design element really came to life, because then we decided to have multiple workshops with diverse people across the business And they actually created the backstories for our customer personas, which then built and fixed. That was in the pre-learn as well, the digital version. They created these scenarios of what was happening on the day for the customer. And then we helped introduce some really simple frameworks around, you know, choose your own adventure. There's two pathways you need to create here. One is what happens when the staff member reacts and, you know, crisis ensues and things escalate. play that out over a number of scenes. And what happens when you respond? What does good look like? And so we had 4 different customers. We had this brilliant Choose Your Own Adventure that was animated, that was really engaging. But most importantly, our people had built it. It resonated and it landed in the business because they saw these types of behaviors day in and day out. they could recognize their colleagues or themselves in when they may have behaved in a way that later on they thought, you know what, I really respond, I really reacted in that situation, as opposed to responded. And so we were really trying to appeal to people's choices, ultimately, in how to behave and respond. And then we had a half-day workshop, where we, you know, built further skills, and it was really practical and working around some more scenarios and introducing practical tools to respond to these types of challenging scenarios. And then we followed that up with actual one-to-one coaching that my team delivered. And the other thing that we did was we introduced an infographic of how to be a coach as a leader, and how to debrief if someone had been in some kind of incident or you know, think something that hadn't gone well, basically, in the field. And so leaders were then developed and equipped to have a great meaningful conversation off the back of something that hadn't gone well, and had the tools and the skills to have that meaningful conversation and coach that person to you know, hopefully choose something different in the future. So that, that was a really successful program. And we were talking about, you know, roughly 1900 people that went through that. So it was a massive scale in terms of rollout. But as I mentioned at the start, you know, if we hadn't have gone down the path of human-centered

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design and co-design in that, we would have come up with something much different that would not have hit the mark in my view.

Michelle Ockers Yep. So you mentioned scale there, 1,900 people, because there's obviously a fair bit of work to co-design, to use some of these human-centered design approaches. Is scale one of the things that helps you to figure out when to use HCD and when not to? And what else? would you take into account when you're trying to figure out where HCD might be a good fit or what tools maybe you might pull out of the toolkit rather than roll out the whole thing?

Keara Byrne Oh, that's a great question, Michelle. I think scale, absolutely, because you you can't do this process for everything. So despite my, you know, lots of dot points that I'll share in my pack off the back of this call of where I've used HCD in different organizations, you just can't use it and it's not appropriate to use it all the time. So you really have to be selective and scale is a good criteria to do that. So for Elevate, for example, we also had a, you know, rolling out to the same audience. and it was that CX transformation. And so we definitely wanted to use it for that, because it's not just about scale, it's about longevity. If you're trying to impact massive culture change and behavior change, you want to invest upfront in human-centered design and get it right, because it's going to be something that has a legacy and that gets embedded in the culture and then is a rolling program. If something is a one-off, you know, intervention where there's a problem in the business, And it's something that could be resolved quite quickly. It might not even require, dare I say, training. It might be something completely different. Obviously, you're not going to necessarily use human-centered design. I think if you don't have the time to do it well, you know, that's another criteria that I use. How much time do we have to do something here? And if your sponsors are not going to give you the right access to people, So if you can't get the right people in the room to help you, you know, co-define the problem from different various perspectives and come up with some kind of meaningful solution, it's probably not worth trying to go down that track in the first place. So they're kind of the loose criteria that I would apply. But I would, I would keep an open mind and try and experiment where you can to see you know, is this something you could do in little parts as well? Because you don't have to do the whole thing. You might decide to just do human-centered design for one little micro skill, as opposed to the end-to-end process.

Michelle Ockers Yep. Yep. That makes sense. Have you come across Arun Pradhan?

Keara Byrne No, I can't say that I have.

Michelle Ockers Okay. So he's been on the podcast several times. And, you know, he was an early champion of human-centered design for learning and development. And one of the, he used it a lot. He was at Deakin Co, I think back in about 2017, doing a lot of work with human-centered design for designing learning and performance solutions. And he's continued to use it. He's now the GM of learning at ANZ Bank. But I recall a conversation with him either earlier this year, late last year, where it wasn't a private conversation. It was maybe a panel discussion or

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something like that. I remember him saying, I think it's getting to the point where we're overusing HCD and there's times when our business leaders just want us to give them a solution and get on with it. your point about the appetite for it as well and being really careful about where is it going to add most value. But I also like that approach that you framed up around this is about ways of working as well, and maybe just pulling something out that helps us to be that empathic explorer rather than racing straight to solution or thinking we've got to know the answer. You can apply it very lightly, right? It doesn't have to be masses of big workshops, for instance,

Keara Byrne No, no, and I think that's where, you know, I'd say it's a cautionary tale for L&D practitioners to not have this as a prescribed methodology. you roll out for all your programs, and this is the one way of working. As I've mentioned and tried to illustrate in some of those examples, you might just use it for one part of the overall program. And it might not be about the learning itself, it might be about the change, or it might be about, you know, getting leaders involved early on, it could be something very different. So it's not meant to be, in my view anyway, my humble opinion, it's not meant to be a silver bullet for everything. And I think if you enter into this with a mindset that first we need to co-define the problem, then we need to empathize and we need to, you know, ideate, then we need to do X, Y, Z. It's probably not going to be authentic. And people will feel that, you know, I think the almost, the way that I see this is there's some level of spontaneity about the approach. Because if you do your upfront analysis and problem-defining really well, and you know, that usually involves speaking to people in the business. It then enables you to kind of go, what could be a really helpful next step from here? It's not necessarily going through the end-to-end process. It might just be, let's hold an ideation session and get ideas out quickly and just do some exploring around what we think we could do here. Or it might be something completely different that doesn't require HCD at all.

Michelle Ockers Yep, yep. Do you have a favorite tool or technique that you pull out of your kit bag pretty often, Keara?

Keara Byrne Oh, look, there are two that I'm big fans of. I think ideation is a really simple, quick one. And I mentioned this a few times in the conference as well. You know, getting online even or being in a physical workshop, either way, you've got digital sticky notes or you've got physical ones. There's nothing easier than to ask a question, give people some time to think individually, to get all their ideas out. That stops groupthink. It also enables everyone, you know, including introverts, a bit of space to kind of go, Well, what am I thinking right now? But it also encourages, you know, innovation, if you frame it up really well around, this is not about having the perfect ideas or having an ego about your ideas. This is about quantity over quality, almost. We just want to get everything out and do some exploring. And it's a really freeing activity if you do it well. It really engages everyone. So you know, normally in workshops, there will be one or two people who might sit back and, you know, take it all in, might be less likely to speak up. What I love about these Ideation Sessions is everyone's voice is welcome. And in fact, the process just unlocks that democracy

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we were talking about earlier. in, you know, what are your ideas and explain them without having to justify them. And then taking the best ideas forward. So that's a really good one. The second one is personas. And I know that in LinkedIn, threads I've seen, you know, people are reluctant to almost do the, the Empathy Maps and the Personas because they're not sure exactly how to bring those to life. I think if you allow people to actually build out the Personas other, rather than you building the Personas, that works much better. So you might have a title in mind, you might have you know, operationally excellent, but you know, might struggle to connect with customers. Obviously, that's a long title, you'd want to synthesize that a little bit. But you might give some guidance around what sort of persona you're looking for. But then they actually build it out. And that, that activity, whether it's around people, or whether it's around customer, really gets people thinking, like we were discussing earlier about who are the different types of customers or people What do they care about? What are their motivations, their goals? And then you can build scenarios off the back of that and bring that to life in pretty interesting ways. So I find pairing personas with scenarios a really nice tool if you want to work through that as well.

Michelle Ockers Yeah, yeah, good advice. So you've given us really nice examples and good detail on what it looks like to use some of these different approaches in action. If we do have people who are thinking, I'd like to either get started with HCD or I'd like to enhance my practice and they're looking for some resources or ways of skilling up. I know you're a fan of IDOU, and off the back of your recommendation at the AITD conference, I did something I've been thinking about for ages, and I actually did an IDOU course. I did the human-centered service design program, which was really valuable. Apart from IDOU, which I know you're a fan of, and maybe you can talk about where would you recommend people start if they want to go to IDOU? And are there any other go-to resources or ways of developing your skills with HCD that you'd recommend?

Keara Byrne Oh, absolutely. I think there's a lot of great stuff out there and the benefit of this becoming more popular and mainstream is there's a lot on offer. So, you know, do your research if you, if you want to go and explore. I would even recommend some of the platforms that unlock human-centered design collaboration through digital platforms are Miro and Mural, and also Microsoft Teams. So, you know, we're talking about ideation, those sticky note ideas or practices. There's some really quick and easy ways that you can do that, you know, in a team environment that can be digitally enabled. And that's really important now that we're all, or most of us, in hybrid ways of working. But if you're looking for courses, and I would recommend you start there, as opposed to learning through doing, which I am a big fan of. But there is a lot to learn in this space. There's a lot to unpack. And so I did the, actually, it was the Foundations in Design Thinking, Michelle, that I did IDOU Certificate in. I do highly recommend that. They obviously talk about human-centered design throughout that, although it is called Design Thinking. And I would recommend you do it in a team because, you know, the best way to learn is with others, we know that. But it's also then a really rich experience when I did this I partnered with a peer, and we actually learned together, did the activities, and then we brought it back into our team. And we embedded it in our team, the knowledge and the skills and the behaviors of how to use human-centered design. But we did it in ways that actually solved real business problems or real team challenges. So that

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was a really, really awesome way that we got to do it then. And I guess that's a luxury if you can do that. If you're after something short and sharp, there is a Design and Innovative Thinking course at Sydney Uni. It's a 1-day workshop. So that's another offering there. And there is something else as well I recommended my team at Commonwealth Bank did. And they did it together. It was free. And I'll have to put it as a link, Michelle, because the name is escaping me. But it was a free online program. And they both said it was fantastic. So they did it together, and they embedded it in the business as well, which was great.

Michelle Ockers Yeah, fantastic. I like that idea of doing it with someone. My co-founder in Learning Uncut, Ravina Bhatia, and I did it together. Oh, brilliant. Yeah. And you know, the thing I loved about that program was it was very applied. So you had to kind of take something. They actually gave you little case studies and they cautioned us against using our own work, but I couldn't help myself. I'm like, no, I want to do it. And they're like, well, it'll be hard. Consulting is hard to apply this to. And I said, all the more reason to do it while I've got your support, right? So I just took a very small piece of the customer experience through a particular service in our learning strategy development service. And it was really fabulous, like the insights I got and the parts of that experience, that initial onboarding experience to this particular service that I thought they would want to change the most. And the bits I thought were working really well, you know, it was completely the opposite. So the value of listening to people and asking the questions, right. And I loved how practical it was. It was really super.

Keara Byrne Really, really practical. And I mean, when you do, I mean, it's great that you can apply your work challenges through the learning, but when you are forced to do some activities that are really different. So, for example, we had one challenge to redesign a nursing home and the problem statement was around how might we you know, create a lifestyle at a nursing home where people live optimally. So it was really broad. And it really allowed us to think in very different ways and stretched our brains in new ways. And I think that's the real benefit of true Ideation is you really are coming up with different ideas and ways of thinking and harnessing that diversity. So sometimes I do recommend starting with something that is quite removed. from your business day-to-day, because people are very solution-focused. They jump straight to, No, I will just do this. That, that's what we need to do. So almost forcing them to think about something different can then help them to develop the habit of, you know, really generating lots of possibilities and then deciding on the best ones to move forward.

Michelle Ockers Yeah. Yep. Keara, is there anything else you want to add by way of advice or practical tips? You've given everybody so much. People should be able to go away and do something different, definitely, as a result of the conversation. But are there any other thoughts you'd like to leave listeners with?

Keara Byrne I suppose just one final thought as I've been thinking about this episode and preparing for it. I think it comes back to mindset. So we can all apply different tools and techniques in our work. But if it's not coming from a place that really honors the idea that actually other people have great ideas. that other people

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will make something better than we would on our own. I think that is a philosophy that I live and stand by. And hopefully everyone in my teams and businesses I've worked with would actually recognize that. And secondly, really trusting that bringing diversity of thinking is going to lead to a better outcome. So other people having great ideas, but also a belief that there will be a better outcome through bringing that diversity in. Those things are really, really important, not just the technical activities or processes, and really bringing that human at the center, or humans at the center of what you're trying to do. And keeping them front of mind and involved throughout is really, really critical. So that's my 2 cents, Michelle.

Michelle Ockers You've given us a lot more than two cents worth of value, Keara. Thank you so much. So I'm going to pop a link to your LinkedIn profile in the show notes if anyone would like to get in touch with you and find out more about the topics discussed. We've actually got quite a few Learning Uncut episodes where people were talking about the use of HCD in learning and OD. So I'm going to add those to the show notes too. And you mentioned your conference pack, which you kindly agreed to provide so we can pop that in the show notes. And that's well worth people's time to dig into. So thank you so much, Keara, for sharing your expertise and insights on human-centered design. Really appreciate your time and look forward to hearing about future projects.

Keara Byrne Thank you for having me.

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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.

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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*



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