

Learning Uncut Episode 43

Arun Pradhan – What Happened Next

other contexts. And I think I wonder, well, there's no big surprises because what I found is that firstly, one of the first preconditions for it to work is the focus on a broader campaign. When I was investigating learning agility, I spoke to people like Brian Murphy, who was at Citibank at the time and others. And what I really discovered was that if you're talking just about, however you frame it, culture of continuous learning, learning agility, or whatever. If you frame it, just like that, without a connection to the WIIFM (i.e. What's In It For Me) or to the business focus and to people's individual focus, I think you've lost the battle to start with. Us learning geeks will embrace it. But for most people who are just dealing with their life and their work, it has to have that really clear kind of connection with the business basically, with their job and with the business outcome.

Michelle Ockers:

So how do you create that for people?

Arun Pradhan:

Yeah, so I think that what's really clear to me is that is, you know, in all these talks where people are talking about culture of continuous learning, we can provide models and I can provide things like my app, and so on. And there's still a piece that needs to be done locally, and often this is the piece I'm doing in a consulting level often, it's working with a group to say what are the key pain points that this organisation are finding and what are the values that have come down from on high - often they've come down from on high, and the best places is that they've been co designed - but usually the values and priorities, the business priorities and then how can this enable the business priorities.

So for example, one organisation I worked with was actually a consulting job, a government organisation in New Zealand. And I love this strategy on one level, like you would have loved it. It had continuous learning up front and centre. It was actually quite influenced by Towards Maturity, which I love the work from Towards Maturity. And on face level, it worked really well. But what I found that there was a disconnect, like it could have been in any organisation. Their initial strategy could have been in any organisation. And so what we had to go back to do was to unpack what that meant in their context. And in the end, we didn't actually talk about continuous learning at all. It was a whole bunch of other stuff supporting ... like, they've got quite highly technical people and it's trying to break down silos and it's trying to communicate with others both to innovate, but also to share their technical knowledge. There's all these other things that relate to continuous learning. And that's what we focused on.

Michelle Ockers:

So it's firstly about context and secondly about language and the way you talk about what you're trying to do.

Arun Pradhan:

Exactly, I think talking about continuous learning, it's like, I still use the framework of 70:20:10, but I haven't mentioned that to a client for years. I think there's the two languages that L&D need to speak, which is why I tried to speak in terms of learning agility, because I felt like that was something that was getting more broader impact in the market. I thought more people realised that they needed to be agile. So that's kind of why I made a conscious decision not just to talk in terms of continuous learning, but learning agility, and in my mind

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it's slightly different as well. But even learning agility, I think it still leaves a lot of people behind. So I think it's that local piece. Yeah, about context and language, and just the very clear WIIFM and the very clear focus that people have got to have in that context.

Michelle Ockers:

I understand, and I this is a, conversation I've had with different content providers, learning content providers, at different times about adoption. When you roll out a platform with content that's meant to "help people to learn" the best adoption rates are when you frame the conversation around "This is a set of resources to help you to work better," not "This is a set of resources that are here for you to learn."

Arun Pradhan:

Yes, absolutely. I mean, like, you know, it's so funny that L&D has such hard... I mean, you struggle with this too I know... like the fact that L&D traditionally, like the fact that we have to talk about performance is still a novelty at conferences and so on. And yet, that's all anyone else cares about is like, and even if they don't call it performance, they'll care about how can I actually keep my job or do my job faster. Basically, that's what they're talking about. So the fact that we're not connecting with that consistently is still kind of just gobsmacking on one level.

Michelle Ockers:

So you can't just throw in something like Learn2Learn and say "here, have at it" and expect people to actually use it and for it to make a difference with learning practices across the organisation.

Arun Pradhan:

Unfortunately, not. So no, it's not the magical bullet. There does need to be that connection, that localised connection with what this means here and what this means in your job role. And that has to really be part of a campaign because it's not just enough to tell people to, because we know people are so busy, that they're going to lose focus, well not lose focus, they're going to shift focus into the immediate. Most people are in a reactive mode at work. So a campaign has to keep the spark alive as well and to really help remind people I guess, and that's where, you know, I've also been working around nudges and this idea of how can you encourage that sort of behaviour as well. So yeah, it's trying to set people up for success, because even though they might agree with it on the spot, the fact is that future them will just be too busy to do too much dealing with whatever they're dealing with.

Michelle Ockers:

Right. And let's talk about campaigns a little bit more. So you have been working with some organisations around building, and I'll use the term learning agility, with the support of the Learn2Learn app but obviously, one of the things you've shifted is that initial consultation piece to set it up for success and figure out how to implement it. Have you had the opportunity to work with anyone around shaping a campaign as part of a roll out and, if so, what did that look like? What, you know, how did you shape that up?

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Arun Pradhan:

Yeah, so there was, this is an example that I think didn't go as well as it should have. So I won't name names, but it was a large financial institution. And they ran a campaign and I was trying to remember the name of the campaign, but it was around learning and they used a lot of the, or they leveraged a lot - so in Learn2Learn for the enterprise version I've got a bunch of resources like postcards and campaign material that can be adapted. And they did actually use some of that stuff. But what I found there was that, again, the campaign was about learning. It wasn't about people's roles. So I think it had some impact. Like, I don't want to put percentage on it, but like, I mean, it's still a small proportion of people who are just going to appeal to that. It's like an autodidact. They're lifelong people who want to be lifelong learners.

Michelle Ockers:

I call them Learnatics.

Arun Pradhan:

Yeah, that's a lovely name.

So you're going to get, but that's like 5 to 10% maybe in a lot of organisations. It's not a lot. And it's probably a bigger crowd of people who want to be them, but they just don't have the time. So I compare that with an organisation I'm working with in Sweden, and they rolled out Learn2Learn and not only that they talk about learning agility, but they run these local workshops in several European countries. And so they run these local workshops. And partly the workshop is designed to introduce some of the concepts. It's designed to introduce Learn2Learn. But partly it's also trying to frame up well, what does learning agility mean for you? Well, I think that's a really great co-design model, that there's this process of bringing people in saying, "Here are some things you can do and use, but really, what does this mean for you? And how would this make a difference?" I don't know if they asked this explicitly, but what I was encouraging them to do was ask, and what would be the cost of doing nothing at that individual level. So what's going to happen if you just go back into denial and going back into a reactive mode, so it's really trying to get people connected with what it means for them and so they really committing to it at a deeper level.

Michelle Ockers:

What's really interesting to me when you talk about this, and I'm fairly familiar with your body of work, is the integration of a number of different aspects. It's the learning agility, it's human centred design. I can hear elements of performance consulting in there and co design. So bringing all of this together and using them as supplementary approaches to really make the most of rolling out something like Learn2Learn.

Arun Pradhan:

Absolutely. The challenge I've had is that organisations that have bought Learn2Learn, I'm often in there for like a day or so. And that's it. And then I'm also get organisations which don't want to buy Learn2Learn, but they want to have an impact on learning agility. So I tend to do a bigger consulting piece there. And I'm waiting for a great case study where I get to do both the consulting piece and have Learn2Learn in one, because at the moment, I'm kind

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of farming it off, giving them some context, but it's really up to them. This group in Europe have done brilliantly with it I think.

The other big impact, the change, the thing that's made a difference too is the social proof element. So actually having a commitment, like you know, if you want to go jogging and it's just you, you're not going to do it mostly. But if you've got a friend who's going to come and meet you, you're going to do it. So I think it's the same thing with this. It's like even though they might be convinced, to have that small group and I've got in Learn2Learn, I've actually built in a ten week kind of model that groups of five or six, ideally in the same team, can take it through and it's very much about how can we contextualise this. Each thing is like drawing out one of the key concepts. There's kind of a campaign approach where they draw the key concept, work out what's the biggest impact for them, work out which ones they're going to do next, and so on. Like it's a bit of a process that they take. It takes about 40 minutes. And most organisations I've worked with say they're really excited to see it there, but only a couple of actually use that. And I've definitely noticed a difference in feedback and even usage from the ones that are doing that.

Michelle Ockers:

It sounds like that post implementation support is really important to getting the most out of it. And this isn't unique to an app like Learn2 toLearn, right? It's the whole idea of rolling out technology. It's about so much more than the learning tech itself. There's a really good quality report research report came out a couple of months ago from RedThread around learning ecosystems. I'm going to add that to the show notes. Because one of their key findings is you need to get really clear on your philosophy or strategy before picking your learning tech. And there's some good guidance in there that I think is relevant regardless of what kind of learning tech you're rolling out. And a lot of what you're saying is quite consistent with that.

Arun Pradhan:

Absolutely. And the other thing I've noticed too, is that is it just focused around one individual in the team who's got a vision, because in two of these instances, two of the biggest rollouts I've had, in both cases, the key people got either raises or moved jobs. This happened to the European one I mentioned. Fortunately, the person who replaced that woman was just as keen on it and was like really on board. But what I've noticed with the other one was that that was kind of her vision. Once she moved the next group of people, it's not like really part of what they're planning. And so even though they've got it there, they're not using it. And it's ironic because I've often talk to companies, not just about Learn2Learn but like, look at what you've got, and start with trying to get more out of that rather than buying more in. But it's interesting to just the team, is often it's very centralised, with one or two people who hold that vision.

Michelle Ockers:

And it's a building shared vision around these kind of shifts around modernising or transforming learning is really important so that things can be sustained if an individual moves on right,

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Arun Pradhan:

Literally, I mean, I'm talking about organisations with L&D, like decent sized L&D teams, and yet it was still very point sensitive. So yeah, that is an issue.

Michelle Ockers:

I agree. So when you reflect on what's happened with Learn2Learn, either the app for individuals or the organisational version of it, and the way people have been using it, or even when you reflect more broadly on, you know, your bigger body of work around learning agility, what impact do you think the work is having at this point?

Arun Pradhan:

Yeah, I think I think it is shifting the dialogue, shifts the conversation about how we can learn more effectively. I know some L&D leaders who aren't rolling out the enterprise version, but they carry the app version, and that one woman was making a point to me she still uses it as a reference when she's doing programme design. That's not what my intention was, but I'm happy that it's been used to help educate and help keep L&D teams on track.

But my idea was, it was pitched at a broader audience. I think if I was to be totally brutal about it, one of the things I've seen is there's a gap between people just knowing how to do it and people doing it. And so that's kind of led me to identify a pain point in the market to address that gap. So that's actually like leading me to look at another business idea I'm going to be implementing next year. So yeah, I think there's a gap between you can give this people understanding of how to learn more effectively. And even though might save time, the gap between most people who are busy and overwhelmed actually taking steps in that direction. It's still a big block.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, knowing and doing a very different.

Arun Pradhan:

Absolutely.

Michelle Ockers:

I've found in the past few months, I've been speaking with a lot of Learning and Development teams, running workshops, webinars, and some with internal Learning and Development teams around this idea of how do you support continuous learning in your organisation? And the number one thing I always leave them with is you have to start with yourself first. And if your team isn't doing this already, you're not ready to support other people to do it.

Arun Pradhan:

Yeah, absolutely. I often talk about the people, the travel consultants who basically are to telling you go places, they're selling it really like wildly, then you ask have they been there. And they go 'no.'

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Michelle Ockers:

It comes to credibility, but also shifting the way we learn, being more autonomous in our learning, which is, you know, some of what we're trying to build in the workforce. There's a level of, like emotional commitment, and there's kind of a whole stack of self-talk that goes on with some of the approaches. So I think having the experience yourself of trying to shift your practices and habits around your own learning is really valuable to supporting others, empathising with what they're going through, and then supporting them to make changes and adopt more effective practices themselves.

Arun Pradhan:

Absolutely. I mean, you know, when I do programmes with learning leaders, like L&D leaders, like that's kind of my starting point as to how they can use the techniques from Learn2Learn to transform themselves. To transform and then to help that to transform others.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes. So looking back on 2019 what are the work highlights? Would you like to share with us?

Arun Pradhan:

I've just been involved in a lot of consulting gigs, basically. And so they've been so varied, like often, the fun ones, which are the shortest ones are actually helping L&D teams with strategy. And my main kind of outputs there are actually helping them to connect with the actual business needs of an organisation. The one on the job I'm actually doing at the moment is working with a traditional company. It's actually not so strictly L&D I'm really enjoying. It's helping a traditional company, basically set up potentially like an innovation accelerator and other streams for innovation. So I've been reading all these mental models around innovation and trying to broaden out my toolkit. I felt like I was pretty good in the innovation space, particularly with my design thinking background, but I've had to take it to a whole new level. So that's been really fascinating for me as well. That's probably been the most enjoyable.

Michelle Ockers:

It sounds like you've continued working with mental models to support your own learning and work then.

Arun Pradhan:

Absolutely I constantly ... What I get slack on now is I'm, I used to as you know, I used to use the spaced recall app to test myself on it almost every day. Now I do that like once a week. So I definitely go through trends of doing that. But I still actively collect them. Like I that's my hobby, I collect mental models. And whenever I meet some geek I'm like, in their face about what are the key ways, what are the key tools, what are the key techniques you're using,

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Michelle Ockers:

If anyone's curious about mental models, please go back and listen to Episode 18 of Learning Uncut. I'll also add a link to the Farnham Street blog and some of the work they've done around mental models to the show notes because they've got stacks of examples which kind of demystify what a mental model is, and how you can use them.

Arun Pradhan:

They've actually just published a book around mental models, like a list, it's one of a series as well.

Michelle Ockers:

They have. So, looking ahead to 2020. Are there any goals or plans you'd like to share with us?

Arun Pradhan:

Yeah, so I've got this new business idea, which is kind of sprung out of my experience with running workshops around learning agility, actually, and seeing that gap between people getting how to do it, but not taking that next step. I think any business idea is about, like, you know, removing friction. For me, that was an area of friction that I wanted to address. And so I've come up with a way of doing that. At the moment, I'm doing rounds, talking to some entrepreneurial mentors that I've got. I've had about three meetings already. I've got two in the next week. And each of them every time I have one of those meetings, I come away with some new insight into what I'm trying to do in your opinion around it. So that's been great.

Michelle Ockers:

I'm looking forward to seeing that body of work unfold. It's always inspiring to have a talk with you, Arun. And I don't know if you're aware of this, but there's a question we ask our guests in our regular episodes right at the end around what resource do you find really valuable for your professional development? And several people have said "just follow Arun," so you are a walking resource for learning professionals.

So if anyone's not already following Arun, please connect with him on LinkedIn. I'll put an episode link to his LinkedIn profile in the show notes. And if you are curious about Learn2Learn or have any other questions as a result of the session that we've just had today, please get in touch with Arun. Thank you so much Arun and it's fabulous to speak with you.

Arun Pradhan:

Thanks again for all the work you've done. I don't know how you fit this into all the other contribution you make. But we're all glad you do. So thank you.

Michelle Ockers:

Thank you. All right. Bye.

About Michelle Ockers



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Michelle Ockers works with business and learning leaders to realise the untapped potential of learning in organisations. She is an organisational learning strategist and modern workplace learning practitioner. Michelle works with organisations to develop and implement transformative organisational learning strategy, and to build the capability of their learning team. She delivers keynotes, workshops and webinars for learning and broader professional or workforce groups at both public and in-house events. Michelle also mentors learning professionals at all career stages on career planning and professional development.

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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