

Learning Uncut Episode 53
Sharni Nowland – Building the Business Case for Better Onboarding
Hosted by Michelle Ockers



In a twist on the Learning Uncut ‘What Happened Next’ episodes previously published, where we followed up on what happened with a solution that a guest shared in an earlier episode today’s story is about ‘What Happened Before’ – a prequel if you like. In episode 47 I spoke with Julian Davis and Naomi Waldron about the Queensland Rail All Aboard program. All Aboard was recognised as the best induction and onboarding program in the Australian Institute of Training and Development’s 2019 Excellence Awards. After that episode was published, I saw Sharni Nowland, today’s guest, comment on it on LinkedIn. I reached out to her and discovered that she drove the development of the business case that led to the redesign of the All Aboard program.

When we spoke, I realised that Sharni had successfully addressed challenges that many other learning professionals face in their organisation. The first of these is the way that learning solutions which address compliance requirements can evolve over time and, despite the best intentions of the solution designers, end up cumbersome and unengaging. The need for sound organisational-wide governance of mandatory training is clear but is often lacking in organisations. It’s almost like a Shakespearian tragedy unfolding the way a series of well-intended decisions to tack on a little bit more mandatory training here and there leads to this unwieldy burden on an organisation.

The second challenge is delivering eLearning to regions with poor internet connection. And then finally, how to build the business case for change of a program, compliance related or not, and make it really compelling to get the go ahead.

In this episode we discuss with how she went about tackling some of these challenges along with her colleagues. Hear about the need for change, how the business case was developed using stakeholder input and data analysis, as well as the process of selecting a partner to develop the program and what made the partnering relationship with the supplier work well. Keep listening to the end for Sharni’s tips on building a case for change to an existing learning solution.

Michelle Ockers:

Welcome to the podcast, Sharni.

Sharni Nowland:

Thank you for having me. It’s very exciting to be here.

Michelle Ockers:

I’m really thrilled that you could be here and there’s a little bit of a backstory to this episode. I have been doing earlier in the year, a couple of what happened next episodes to pick up stories that we’d publish 12 to 18 months ago and find out what had happened with the solution or the body of work over time. But today we’re doing the backstory. This is like a prequel if we can think of kind of Star Wars and the way bits of the story got filled in afterwards.

Sharni Nowland:

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That's right, isn't it seriously? Absolutely. It's a very interesting story to tell and a very interesting journey if we take the All Aboard pun on. It was a very rewarding experience and a rewarding journey for me as an instructional designer to take.

Michelle Ockers:

So we of course are telling the backstory to the Queensland Rail episode we did on the All Aboard for Engaging eLearning. And what was interesting after the episode was published, I saw Sharni pop up on a thread on LinkedIn to say I'm so thrilled that this program got the recognition that I think it deserves and it was quite an effort to get it to the point where we could proceed with it. And I thought, who's this Sharni person? What's her part of the story? So I was quite intrigued, Sharni. So let's tell your part of the story because I think there's a lot to learn from it as well. So you were working at Queensland Rail at the time you started advocating for a better solution for induction and compliance refresher training. What was your role at the time?

Sharni Nowland:

So I was the senior digital learning advisor at Queensland Rail. I originally started at Queensland Rail in 2010 and then through the many restructures that occur in a lot of organizations in different roles and I guess a more streamlined corporate learning team that replaced a larger corporate learning team. I found myself in the role of that, only senior digital learning advisor for the whole entire organization. And it was through that role of playing different parts and engaging with the different business streams within the organization that we came about this need to refresh what we were doing in the induction and onboarding space. So it was, I would say, a good 12-month journey proceeding the engagement of easyA as the vendor to help us actually build the product itself.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. So the story here and why I thought this would be really valuable for people to hear about is around how you built the case for change because that can be quite a challenge and we're never given a free meal ticket. Particularly with a large-scale program such as the All Aboard. So I want to go back, not just to the version prior to All Aboard, which Julian did talk to us a little bit about, but I think the story almost starts one version before that and how induction was happening, because that helps us understand the evolution and the history and how things got to the point that they did with the program?

Sharni Nowland:

Oh, absolutely. And I think Queensland Rail, like a lot of large corporations, organizations, when they're looking at their onboarding and induction training, where you've got to have the legislative requirements, the tick in the box type training that we have to communicate well new employees as they come on board and the requirements around the annual refreshes, taking that best practice approach to learning. So when I started with the organization, it was 10 online separate modules that did cover the various things like code of conduct, risk management, hazards, emergency management, all of those things that you would expect in an induction learning product.

Sharni Nowland:

And then we also had a one-day face-to-face workshop which gathered people from all parts of the business, and geographically spread. We did have one up north that was run for up north employees. And the scope was that those who could actually come in centrally to the Brisbane office could participate in this one day. And it was facilitated by some amazing facilitators. And it talked about our history as an organization, what we did, the different

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business streams. So a lot of business knowledge that you probably don't get when you're onboarding just with a solo manager from time to time.

Sharni Nowland:

They don't delve into that detail because it's trying to get you, I suppose, onboarded and quickly into your role as soon as you possibly can and being a productive member of the team. So that was fantastic. And the face-to-face workshop, our one-day workshop was actually called the GO program. Queensland Rail, we are really great at acronyms. So we've actually been-

Michelle Ockers:

You certainly are.

Sharni Nowland:

Absolutely. So GO actually stands for general orientation. So meaning that it's just a general orientation program. You understand like the employee benefits and a bit of a history, a bit of an expectation around Queensland Rail as an organization. What you get from being an employee at Queensland Rail, the career opportunities. Being a very large organization Queensland Rail really supports the different directions that you can take in your career.

Sharni Nowland:

It's really quite mind boggling where you come into an organization and where you can end up being. It's not just up, it's about across diagonally, the scope that you get especially when you go on maternity leave or family leave or wherever you are in your history. And it's those type of workshopping opportunities that you get during that one day. Really, I suppose putting itself as an employer of choice through that one day face-to-face.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. So there's an element that's about connecting with others and connecting with the organization as well.

Sharni Nowland:

Absolutely.

Michelle Ockers:

Unfortunately, that program became unsustainable for some reason.

Sharni Nowland:

It did.

Michelle Ockers:

Do you want to talk to us about what happened there and why it became unsustainable?

Sharni Nowland:

Yeah, absolutely. So as I said a little earlier on, through restructures in the organization and the support of the corporate learning team became very streamlined. It was unsustainable to have facilitators delivering both required role specific training as well as a one-day face-to-

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face workshop training. So through that, the GO program, the face-to-face became a manager's checklist for want of better words to assist managers, whether you are an expert hiring manager, to another hiring manager to come in and basically take the new employees through some of the things they may not necessarily think about covering off, like I said before, employee benefits, the intranet, how to log onto the learning management system and what mandatory training. So it was basically a checklist.

Sharni Nowland:

What happened with that checklist though is that it was added to the employees' history as a required piece of training. As we all know with learning management systems, once it's required piece of training or mandatory training and that goes against your compliance rates as well. So we had a history of at least three years of following up these checklists to improve our compliance rates. With an organization of six and a half thousand employees, it was a very big feat to try and get those compliance rates up and get those checklists coming back in. Because those checklists also covered Thursday right through to end of probation, which three, six, 12 months, whatever those probation rates were at that point in time for particular employees.

Sharni Nowland:

So you're noncompliant from day one because it shows up as this is required training. It could be six months down the track by the time you finished it. So it was a very big challenge for the organization with the compliance rates more particularly around the GO program than the new All Aboard program.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. It's interesting isn't it? Because you can clearly see that the stuff that you retained and put into the online learning is the stuff that's kind of safety critical legislative required. While it's not undervaluing the things that the manager was responsible for guiding people through and orientating them through, they didn't necessarily go to the heart of safety and of legislative compliance yet because they were made into a piece of compliant training, it created this whirlwind of follow up and administrative activity. So it probably says something about the way you govern compliance and mandatory training. What else was happening with mandatory training during this period? You'd streamline down the content when you redesigned the program.

Sharni Nowland:

The 10 products were redesigned into one full compliance product. So the content was basically all of the technical owners or content owners of those 10 products were basically what shoved to determine what content needed to stay, what content could be left out. And it's becoming an eLearning onboarding that covered off your safety risk code of conduct. It was a fabulous piece of work at that point in time and brought in the element of gamification. It was built in flash, so with flash products they have to load in one singular hit.

Sharni Nowland:

So for our Learning Management System and our geographical spread and bandwidth in some of our remote areas proved a very big challenge to complete a 90-minute product, which was blowing out some timeframes to three and a half, four hours' worth of this online training. So there were a lot of challenges just understanding our organization and the different implications of having such a big product to deliver as the only onboarding product

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besides this GO program checklist that we had. We did receive a lot of feedback, which is fantastic, and I think that's with anything, that journey for me is really getting into the guts and appreciating the feedback that comes back. I think sometimes as instructional designers we take on what's important, but sometimes we let some other things go that we believe may not be important.

Sharni Nowland:

My lesson was all feedback is really important and it should be balanced out within the scope of what you're actually working in and what you're working against at that point in time.

Michelle Ockers:

So obviously you had some technology issues, you had some challenges with all of the follow up around the manager training, which in theory if you'd turned that compliance requirement off, that might've at least taken some of the pain away, but you felt that there was still a case based on the feedback you were getting for the induction refresher training needing to be improved. What kind of feedback were you getting or what other issues were there that you knew you needed to do something?

Sharni Nowland:

Yeah, so I think putting the feedback on the actual product itself aside, that was only our induction product. The refresher products were actually different. So we had this induction product that covered emergency management, so your fire evacuation topics. Our refresher only covered the fire evacuation and emergency management topics, but we also had to do without an induction for the way our learning management system basically also enrolled employees to do it annually. So we have this double off of content first and foremost. Then on top of that, over the course of three years, we've had the tack on annual refreshes. So when things happen in an organization and say for example, the amount of cases opened with HR around code of conduct issues, then of course you've got the executives asking for code of conduct to be an annual refresh training. That one was actually a face-to-face to really engage and provide some scenarios around what is acceptable behaviour, what is not acceptable behaviour within the workplace.

Sharni Nowland:

Then we had a couple of other tack on modules that were happening. We also had people from the organization, technical liners of content are one that springs to mind with security awareness. So the spike in a lot of security awareness training and the requirements around that. And became the answer, how do we manage all of these tack ons in the face of what it's actually costing an organization to complete this training and two, are we actually achieving the outcomes that are required as a result of this tack on training? I suppose it's those little things that start getting to you, you start thinking and you start turning them over in your mind thinking, how can we do this better? How can we do this better? And for me it was, we just need to kind of throw the baby out with the bath water for want of a better expression now. I really hate that one but it's what comes to mind.

Sharni Nowland:

And just to start all over again and really delve into why our compliance rates were so low, especially in certain areas of the organization where 12 months is not a requirement for them to come off trains to do their learning, yet we have 12 month requirements to get us the roles in our LMS system saying you have to do this every 12 months.

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Michelle Ockers:

Right. So people are actually rostered off shifts. So there's a hard cost to the organization, a labour cost impact every time you take someone offline to do some sort of learning.

Sharni Nowland:

Yeah, absolutely. But we were expecting them to do this 12-month learning, but we weren't giving them the time off their rosters to actually complete with learning. And it's not as simple, well, just do it. It then impacts on the way the timetables change for getting people from point A to point B. So it's not as simple as like, I'll just take Joe Blogs off from running that train from Ipswich to Caboolture so he can complete his 12 months.

Michelle Ockers:

There's a customer impact.

Sharni Nowland:

Exactly. There's so many implications and not all strains of the organization have the same rostered time off for their learning either. So it was around identifying, so what does the organization look like in terms of how they do their learning, when they do their learning, where they do their learning? What are the implications around our legislative requirements? Because we can't just say just because they don't come off the trains every 12 months to do their mandatory training. But under legislation fire evacuation, you actually have to deliver a 12-month instructional service to our employee. So how do you get around that? So it was looking at all those different complexities of this situation and then trying to be able to identify something that is scalable and flexible around our organization but still meeting the requirements.

Sharni Nowland:

And just one example of that, with our train crew instead of actually getting them off the trains every 18 months to complete this online training of full fire evacuation, it was looking at the legislation and saying what will actually meet that is a set of instructions that are sent out that they can do that every 12 months when they sign on in their 15-minute period prior to actually getting on the train and driving the train.

Michelle Ockers:

There's two things that strike me there Sharni. The first is that we'll have a lot of people listen to this just nodding their heads going, "Oh my God, yes I know that mess. I'm living that or I had lived that and I've had to figure out how the hell to get on top of it." It's quite the jigsaw puzzle to put together. And the other thing that's really interesting and I just want to applaud the action you took there and I have heard a couple of cases of other people doing the same thing is tracing back the requirement and really challenging the stakeholders saying "well, this requires ... the legislation is saying it's ABC. Well, let's take a look at the legislation together and let's look at other ways of meeting it." I think that that's a really positive, worthwhile thing to be doing. So I applaud that.

Sharni Nowland:

Oh, thank you. I think there was a saying around at that point in time that "Sharni says no. Sharni says no." Sorry, it did get around the organization, don't try and challenge it because Sharni will say no at some point and send you on your way to think of a different way to do that. And I guess that challenging the thought process of the content owners because they are very, very passionate about what they know and they want everyone to know what they know and that is just not the case. And challenging them going, doing the same product

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every single year is not getting your outcome because I can assure you that any time that bell rings, people are standing up going, well what do we do now?

Sharni Nowland:

But it's clearly outlined in that training product that everybody does every single year yet you can tell by people's faces, do we evacuate now or are we just prepare to evacuate? Not being able to tell the difference. So, it was actually challenging those mindsets going, "We're not actually meeting our outcome at this point in time." You're not getting those people to understand that this is the evacuation time, this is an alert time and know exactly where they need to go at that point in time. So it was challenging-

Michelle Ockers:

You've done your work there, you've really dug into the legislation, engage with stakeholders. What else did you do to analyse the needs and identify solution requirements?

Sharni Nowland:

Yes. So the other thing that we did was a lot of data mining and churning around non-productive time that it was taking not only for employees to complete the learning at both induction and refresher, but the follow up that was happening as a result. And not just saying this is a 90-minute product and induction, actually looking at the LMS data reports and looking at how long people were actually spending in that product itself to really come up with a figure going, "This is what we thought we were spending on induction, this is what we are actually spending on induction." And then forecasting that based on the average of new employees we're getting every year.

Sharni Nowland:

Also, with the refresher training, looking at the actual times as well and just calculating it down to a cost because I knew that if we needed to make a change and we wanted to redevelop something, one, I wouldn't have been able to do that first and foremost by myself. I knew that we would need to engage a really great vendor to support us on that journey that had the team of people to make this look very professional really schmick and exciting and engaging and a one person's being just can't achieve that level of quality especially when you've got a whole other workload that they're trying to do.

Sharni Nowland:

And I knew that it was going to cost the money and a lot of organizations look at the finances around, well, if you're going to spend this much amount of money, what are we actually going to get out of it? And for me, it was demonstrating how much money we would save in the one, two year, three year post putting the products out there, what it would actually save the organization in hard money. And that was basically the business case that was put forward. I didn't think the anecdotal or the feedback they were getting from the evaluations was really going to hit the mark with passing and executive team members to really invest the capital for these products to be developed.

Michelle Ockers:

So the qualitative feedback itself wasn't going to be enough to amount the case the investment that you needed to make towards-

Sharni Nowland:

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Exactly. It was enough for me to build the business case to my manager around the need that I needed to do this piece of work with the team for our employees. That it definitely was not going to ... in my mind, it wasn't going to hit the mark with the senior and executive leaders. I think money does talk, unfortunately. And I think the way that I drove that, it really hits hit the mark.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. So did you use data from anywhere other than your learning management system in the business case?

Sharni Nowland:

Yes, we did. So our payroll system around average wages, we had to pull that data in as well to understand employee numbers. So we did tap into our people and culture/HR, human resources, change it to assist with pulling some of those figures and some of those numbers. We did have to use a few averages just because the organization is so large and to drill down to the finer details of that, it would have taken too long. And my mathematical equations even in that Excel are just not there. So we did have to work on a few averages, but it did prove the point of we need to do something. If we want to save money in this direction, this is where we go.

Sharni Nowland:

And also, I suppose pulling in the idea of retaining employees. So having a look at some of that data around how long from the start to when employees were leaving Queensland Rail, what was the average employee life cycle?

Michelle Ockers:

What did you then do with that information? I guess you made some assumptions or was it more-

Sharni Nowland:

Yeah. You need to kind of make a few assumptions, based on the roles of employees, where they were geographically spread and whatnot. Taking some assumptions going, would they have lost one guy if their onboarding experience was significantly better than what it actually is at this current point in time? And I kind of felt, being with the organization for such a long time that ... especially sitting in the corporate area, just losing a lot of that beautiful organizational knowledge. When I first started, people talked about above ground below rail I'm like, "I don't know what that means."

Sharni Nowland:

They'd talk in a language that in corporate land sometimes you just don't understand, or you just take for granted with frontline employees. And I just felt that we just needed to bring that back that our focus really is on our frontline employees because they are customer facing. They are the ones who really do get our customers from point A to point B and we really need to look after them and onboard them and make them really open their eyes up going, you have chosen a great organization to work for because it is a great organization.

Michelle Ockers:

So who worked on the business case with you, Sharni?

Sharni Nowland:

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Predominantly it was myself, but I did ... Lauren, she was fantastic. She fed a lot of the information back to me from the learning governance group that she had established.

Michelle Ockers:

Was she in the learning team?

Sharni Nowland:

Yes, she was. She certainly was. Sorry, I think Julian or Naomi spoke about Lauren's part in the last podcast. So part of Lauren's role was around that learning governance and getting the learning managers from the different business streams together. So that learning governance was there. So we didn't have these tack on topics that were happening. Anything that did want to be tacked on or felt that we needed to have as a mandatory training was basically funnelled through this group for the group to approve is this something that's required? And if it is, in what other way could we find a solution or a treatment for that option.

Michelle Ockers:

So you used a governance process?

Sharni Nowland:

Yes, absolutely. And Lauren's very thorough, very detailed person in regards to that type of thing. So we've worked very closely together to get that information and pull that information and put that into the business case. So she was absolutely amazing and I knew when I left I that the project was kind of like handed back to her after the engagement of EasyA.

Michelle Ockers:

So I know when I've worked on business cases in the past that having someone from the commercial team is always a really, really good idea because they understand the numbers and they also understand how decisions get made on business cases. So how did that work in terms of you doing some numbers, you're putting it together. The business case obviously has to be presented in some way. Who does that? How does it all get pulled together to present?

Sharni Nowland:

Funnily enough, even though obviously we do have our business case for a project work that happens within Queensland Rail, especially for the large projects. Funnily enough, because this, even though it was significant investment, it wasn't in relation to the big projects that happen in the organization. So we didn't have to go to the nth degree for the business case. So it just went through our general manager to our senior executive who then took it to her team to have that approved. In terms of capital expenditure, it really was kind of like a small piece of the pie.

Michelle Ockers:

An infrastructure organization has some big projects, right?

Sharni Nowland:

Yes.

Michelle Ockers:

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The budget you needed still required a rigorous business case to be put forward, but it was within ... The term is escaping my head right now, but it was in basically within the procurement authority of a later at a certain point in the organization, so it simplified the process a little.

Sharni Nowland:

That's exactly right.

Michelle Ockers:

Apart from working on the business case and looking at the data and what the data said, you were also developing solution requirements and I believe you ran some workshops. Do you want to tell us a little bit about that?

Sharni Nowland:

Yeah, absolutely. So part of the workshops were around the learning governance group. So identifying from the learning managers in their business streams, what was working, what wasn't working. Obviously we had already pre identified through our low compliance rates that co-program just was not working. However, we were challenged with finding a solution. We couldn't just take it off as mandatory training. We were challenged with finding a solution to replace that and I'm always up for a good challenge. Then we also ran some workshops. At that point in time, Lauren had pulled together kind of like a lunch and learns with other instructional designers in the business streams. So we kind of went from a decentralized model. So going from a centralized model of the corporate learning team doing everything for the organization to a decentralized where we were the governance around the learning.

Sharni Nowland:

So we worked with a lot of the instructional designers that were employed within the other business streams to, I suppose, get the consistency around learning and how we did that. Support them in regards to the learning, design and assessment approach guidelines that we had adopted and getting their feedback on ... And they were really great because they had a lot of one-on-one contact. They might've been facilitators/instructional designers, so a lot of contact with our employees. And then we also had our training evaluation forms that were coming back in from some of our in lines as well. So we were taking that on board. And it was during that time that working one-on-one with some of the instructional designers and getting out in the business, just having those general conversations as well. It wasn't just all around the formal workshops, it was also the informal workshops and documenting some of those anecdotal comments that were actually coming back.

Michelle Ockers:

So you actually went out and talked to people in the business?

Sharni Nowland:

Yeah, absolutely. And I suppose gaining their feedback, you never know what talents sometimes there lies within organizations until you have those conversations. And people just have some really brilliant ideas. Oh, it'd be so good if we could do this or how about if we do that. And one of the ideas that we actually bandied around, which I knew from a logistical financial point of view, we would never get off the ground, was actually around going on kind of like a Queensland Rail scavenger hunt, like an actual physical scavenger hunt. And using QR codes on your phones to bring up the story of the different locations that we had just in Brisbane itself. And that way you could adopt it for our other geographical locations. But I just knew that logistically and financially it would probably be one that would

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just be no, not at this point in time. And at that point in time it would have been a reasonable thing to have said, being the people who signed off on the financials.

Michelle Ockers:

That sounds great.

Sharni Nowland:

Oh, absolutely. Augmented reality of going on a scavenger hunt just sounded fantastic.

Michelle Ockers:

Sharni, this is such a good example of not being seduced by a great idea and a shiny new toy, but thinking through that desirability and feasibility and practicality as well and going to requirements rather than solution too quickly.

Sharni Nowland:

Yes, absolutely. But you always keep those things in the back of your mind anyway. And as you're turning through the feedback and gathering that feedback, those ideas do morph and churn over time as well. So it's, I suppose, shooting for the stars and hitting the mantel piece, but it's a really good looking mantel piece at the same time too.

Michelle Ockers:

And I can almost say you were looking for a concept and Naomi talks in episode 48 about the concept that was eventually landed. So you had this idea that you wanted some sort of concept into the program.

Sharni Nowland:

Yeah, absolutely. And it really centred around who are we as an organization. I just think it is such an important thing for employees when they go into ... accept a role in any organization to really understand what opportunities are ahead of them. Why they have chosen such a great organization to work with. What makes them tick? What makes them work? And the concept kept on coming back to that all the time. We wanted an edgy product. We wanted some gamification. I wanted to spin the refresher training to an adaptive learning because I was sick and tired of just seeing us all doing the same products every single year. The same quiz questions every single year, and we still didn't know what was expected of us. And the fire evacuation emergency procedures. So it was around, we've given this information and induction, we should really be knowing it and practicing it throughout the year.

Sharni Nowland:

So when it comes to the annual refresher, let's test what we know first and then refresh what we don't know after the fact. So yeah, just completely spinning what we do, taking the focus away from the tick the box, we have to meet, we have to do this topic, we have to do that topic and understand what we really wanted to achieve in onboarding. And it really came back to that cultural piece of you've chosen a fantastic organization to work for. This is what we do, this is how we do it. And we have got some of the most passionate employees working for our organization and characters that you will just really enjoy working with and you'll enjoy coming to work every day. I think that for me was the piece in a nutshell and going into the requirements workshop with vendors and that's basically what our scoping was. Yes, we have to meet checking the box. We have those topics that we have to cover, but first and foremost, this is who we are as an organization.

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Michelle Ockers:

How did the range of vendors that you worked with at that point, through that whole selection process, what was their response to that kind of briefing?

Sharni Nowland:

Very varied. So being a government owned corporation, we do have to go through that pretty strict-

Michelle Ockers:

Tendering process?

Sharni Nowland:

Yeah, absolutely. And part of that was actually inviting them to the requirements workshop to talk about what we're actually after and then inviting them to then if they wanted to continue in that process to provide back to us what their concept would then be from what we have given them, and what we were hoping to achieve. And I'd probably say out of the vendors that were in the workshop, Naomi was the one who was asking the right questions and the right probing questions.

Sharni Nowland:

And it was kind of like, from that their proposal spoke the language that I knew that I was speaking in my head and I knew that they would be able to achieve what they needed to achieve. The quality of proposal was absolutely amazing. What they actually proposed and what came about and what evolved were probably different. Not in a sense like an A and a Z product, but it was probably an AAB product. So it evolved really nicely over time once we started really getting into the nitty gritty and talking to people in the organization around those stories. And once we had that engagement, I remember sitting with Naomi and she took me through their requirements workshop of really unpacking what that actually means and we just started talking about design, some of the hopes and desires and what we actually wanted to achieve.

Sharni Nowland:

And that's when she went away and she came back and she said, "What about these?" And I thought, I love the idea of a journey we're all aboard, we're going on a train trip and that's basically how I would call it, All Aboard take two really came about.

Michelle Ockers:

It's interesting, isn't it? When you're seeking to work with a partner, be it internally or externally, it's that kind of, do they get me, do they get where we're going and can we work together is just as important as do they have the technical ability to deliver on this.

Sharni Nowland:

Absolutely. And that ability to think outside the square and to also challenge. And I think that's what I really enjoy the most is, I don't necessarily like the idea of taking something that somebody has given me and just doing it the way that they want me to do it. I like to challenge the thought process of changing things up a little bit and thinking about how can we approach this a little differently to really achieve the outcomes but in making it engaging, making it fun. And I think that's what it comes down to as well, making the winning fun. It's not all about the dotting the I's and crossing the T's and because it's mandatory and it's legislated, it has to be boring. It doesn't actually have to be boring. We can build some really

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fun edginess into it. And that's something that Naomi does extremely well. She thinks outside that square and she likes to challenge those thought processes and not just churning out the same thing kind of thing all the time.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, sounds like it was a good match between their organization and yours in this case and the people involved, Sharni. So Sharni, it's been a really interesting look at how you went from ... It was an interesting look firstly at how did things evolve to the point that we're in. And I think we can relate to other stories ourselves of how we ended up with a legacy that we hadn't intended to create or someone else hadn't intended to create at a certain point in time. So that was interesting. And also to hear how you went about once you really identified, hey there, there is a need here to build that case for change, to understand the requirements and engage someone to help with those and it was a 12-month body of work.

Michelle Ockers:

A rush will only get you another mess at times and being quite thoughtful with the way you approach things I think, is a good lesson for people to come out of this story. What tips do you have for others who perhaps can see that they've got something that has an organizational wide impact. They know they're going to have to engage a lot of stakeholders to build the case for change. What tips would you have for them for how they go about building the case for change and setting things up so they get a great outcome at the end of the day?

Sharni Nowland:

First and foremost, back yourself. If you have that in-gut instinct that you believe needs to happen, just back yourself in it and you'll pave that journey for yourself. I think understanding your organization not from a corporate point of view is such an important lesson for me. And I guess what I'm trying to say from that point of view is understand what your frontline employees do in an organization, how they do it, why they do it, what makes them tick. The complexities around their rostering. Just all those things that they face on a day-to-day basis. For me, it was such a great lesson getting out into the organization, not being stuck behind my computer, just developing product after product, after product to meet those requirements, understanding what they do, how they do, those operational complexities, what they face on a day-to-day basis can really, I suppose, define where you want to go from there.

Sharni Nowland:

It will help you challenge your ideas of your approach of what you've done before. And when you're building your business case is understanding how that top layer of an organization makes decisions. So what makes them tick? So if you're working for an organization where financials are extremely important, try to churn those numbers around what is costing your organization to do something versus what it will cost the organization to do it if we did it right. Looking at the outcomes and challenging the ideas that just because we've got a product there doesn't necessarily mean we're getting a return of investment, doesn't mean we're getting those behaviours in place, doesn't mean that the people are actually doing what they're supposed to be doing just because we've got a product in our learning management system. And just being passionate about what you're actually trying to achieve. That basically the tips, but I think first and foremost is back yourself and trust your gut instincts.

Michelle Ockers:

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Thanks Sharni. Some wonderful insights there and I hope people appreciate the backstory to the episode. I feel a lot more complete now myself with the whole story. And so if anyone would like to get in touch with Sharni to find out more about this work or if anything about the way she works has sparked your interest and you'd like to engage her in further conversation, you'll find a link to her LinkedIn profile in the show notes. Thank you so much Sharni for sharing your work and insights with us today.

Sharni Nowland:

Oh no, thank you and as I previously said to you before, I'm just so excited that this product has gained the recognition and the rewards that it absolutely deserves. It was a long time ... the pre-planning and just the immense amount of work that Julian and Naomi did, and Lauren did getting the product into the learning management system with all the stakeholder engagements that we have heard about in the podcast. I feel so blessed and privileged to be part of that whole entire process. So, yeah, it's exciting.

Michelle Ockers:

Thanks again. Bye.

Sharni Nowland:

Thank you. See you.

About Michelle Ockers

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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