

**Learning Uncut Episode 56**  
**Kristina Tsiritakis – Making Learning Human**  
**Hosted by Michelle Ockers**



**Michelle Ockers:**

My discussion with Kristina Tsiritakis from Deciem is one of the most intriguing and exhilarating Learning Uncut conversations I've had.

Deciem is also known as The Abnormal Beauty Company – and there is definitely something both abnormal and beautiful about the way learning happens at Deciem. Founded in 2013 in Toronto, Canada, they've been a disruptive player in the global beauty industry. They set out to change the conversation around beauty and to educate customers so they could make self-informed choices about skin care practices and products.

When the organisation had grown to 700 employees in early 2019 Kristina joined them to set up the learning function. Now, 14 months later, there are 1,000 employees working in what Kristina describes as a people-centric culture. To develop the organisational learning strategy Kristina started by seeking to understand the culture. It was quite different to her previous organisation where she had spent 10 years, and she realised that a very different approach was required to learning so that it would resonate with the Deciem culture.

Listen to this episode to hear about how the strategy has been built around reimagining content, campaigns and community. While the learning experience platform at Deciem is central as the 'watering hole' around which people gather to partake in these activities, the secret sauce is engaging with people as whole human beings – making learning human.

**Michelle Ockers:**

Welcome to Learning Uncut Kristina.

**Kristina Tsiritakis:**

Thank you.

**Michelle Ockers:**

Can you please introduce us to Deciem, who they are, what they do, how they do it?

**Kristina Tsiritakis:**

Absolutely, so Deciem's also known as The Abnormal Beauty Company, and we were founded in 2013 in Toronto, Canada. And the goal was to do everything others don't do. So Deciem actually means "ten in a sequence", and the concept was to create 10 beauty brands and launch them at once. And everybody said that was impossible, and it was too much, but we've always kind of been a little bit disruptive and a little bit rebellious.

**Kristina Tsiritakis:**

The founding of the company was really meant to be very anti-corporate, very self-directed, a collaboration and collective of creative people who could explore and learn together. And so that kind of creativity is really part of the culture, I think it's lent to the learning culture as well to be able to explore. And in terms of the products, we make beauty products but the goal with our beauty products was to really change the conversation around beauty in the beauty industry.

**Kristina Tsiritakis:**

## **Learning Uncut Episode 56 Kristina Tsiriotakis – Making Learning Human**

So we're very famous for speaking to our customers as scientists, and to creating education and transparency around products and ingredients. And the outcome of that has been this whole movement of "skintellectuals" who've taken charge of their learning when it comes to skin care. And we don't have sales goals in our stores, we don't tell people what to buy. We educate them and through that they make self-informed choices.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

So it's been a very special thing to see the power of education to inspire people to choose, and also the community that's been built around that. So we've got this incredible community of, really teachers, who are teaching one another about skin care. They create learning tools that they share on social media and they're so involved, but none of it's imposed, it's really happened completely organically which is very special.

### **Michelle Ockers:**

It is special, and it's very different.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

Yes, it is.

### **Michelle Ockers:**

And it has been commercially successful, the company has gone through quite a growth trajectory, if you can talk us through that as well.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

So the growth arc has been really extraordinary. When we were founded there were two or three people that started the company, and within just a few years we went to a few hundred, and by the time I joined last year we were at about 700 employees, and now 1,000 globally. So you can imagine the experience for our people to become part of this organization that's really taken the world by storm, disrupted the beauty industry and has grown up to 1,000 people in just a few years.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

All products made in house, all science innovated in house, all creative done in house. So really everything done internally with such a human and personalized touch, and we are the human world of beauty. That is really our goal and our purpose is to have a really people centric, human experience, and to be a family. Our founder created the company to create a sense of family, and we have that both internally and externally.

### **Michelle Ockers:**

And we're going to talk a bit more about the whole idea of internal and how the way you've approached the customer has influenced learning in a moment. Tell us a little bit more about the people who work in your organization, what type of roles, what kind of environment, what type of people you tend to recruit, attract, having the organization.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

Very famously we didn't hire people who had traditional backgrounds in things like beauty, because again, the company was all about a creative space and not about the typical mindset, that fixed mindset. We wanted people who had a growth mindset and an appetite for curiosity and exploration. Of course when a company grows really quickly you have role changes very quickly, and a real need for some more formalized learning. You're learning on

## Learning Uncut Episode 56 Kristina Tsiriotakis – Making Learning Human

the job and you're learning through experience, but with roles changing so quickly and the company becoming global so quickly, of course things are shifting.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

And last year it was really clear that we needed to bring L&D in house formally, which is where I got involved which was pretty extraordinary to have an opportunity in my career after almost 20 years in beauty to have a blank canvas in a company that was still aligned with education and community engagement, but that also had people that really had no idea what L&D was. I remember on my first day, if I had a dollar for every time someone had come up to me and said, "So, what's L&D? Is it training?" There was this confusion and this ... a little bit of fear. There was anticipatory anxiety that we were coming in, but also is this really corporate? Are we going to be told what to do? Where do I fit in? Is this a dialogue and a conversation? And of course our people were open and curious, but naturally with any change, there was apprehension too because it was a shift, and was it a sign that the company was losing its magic and its autonomy?

### **Michelle Ockers:**

So at the time we're speaking, it's 14 months I think since you started in your role, is that right?

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

Just about, yeah. Just about. Unbelievable.

### **Michelle Ockers:**

You walked into this really interesting, vibrant, still relatively young organization in corporate culture. People are curious, but also a little apprehensive. There've been no formal learning and development function ... well no, let's put the word formal aside for a moment. No learning and development function, and you walked in anew and you get the opportunity to build it from the ground up, which can both be exciting and a little bit daunting at the same time. Where and how did you start to figure out what the learning strategy would look like and what approach you were going to shape the learning in the organization?

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

Well there were a lot of things. I think the first thing was really observing and reflecting ... I even kept a diary actually on what the cultural experience was. I had no documents, I couldn't read about the company strategy anywhere, I couldn't read about the values anywhere, I kept hearing, "That's so Deciem", or "That's not Deciem", but I didn't know what that meant. And I was having a hard time myself because I'd come from a company that I'd been at for over 10 years, and there was no disconnect between where I ended and the company began. I really felt like I was a part of that company, and here I was trying to figure out what is this culture? How do you define it?

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

So I drilled it and I would observe where I saw culture being reflected and where I would think, "Well that's kind of what it feels like to be here", and those moments were things like watching the creative team collaborate on something, and watching them be so democratic and inclusive and respectful of each other's artistry. And I would think, "Well that's the value right there." And so you're seeing these learning moments, but they don't come in a PDF, they don't come in a presentation and I kept thinking to myself, how do I capture that and translate it? And I studied history in school, so I think I really started to think almost like a historian, or like a cultural anthropologist. Especially for a young company that doesn't have

## Learning Uncut Episode 56 Kristina Tsiriotakis – Making Learning Human

its history artefact, but it is history still and it's something that there's a blank canvas for me, I can't find it anywhere.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

So there was a lot of observation. All the typical stuff of needs assessment, the surveys, the interviews, the on the job observation, the cognitive walk throughs, the review of resources and artefacts if they existed, or the noting of the fact that they didn't exist. There was a lot of lack of processes. It's like falling a little bit-

### **Michelle Ockers:**

It sounds just like this huge, sense making process that you had to go through and I love the fact that you were diarizing and reflecting and making sense of everything as you were moving through this.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

Yeah. And just capturing it because you notice things in different moments. Like a needs assessment, for lack of a better term, but it's not a day, it's a living, interactive thing that was happening alongside my own orientation and onboarding. And so out of all of that started to emerge some really clear themes. And I think things like word clouds can be really helpful when you start to play with what are the themes that are rising. And there were themes of self-direction, of autonomy, of inclusivity, of co-construction or co-creation, of people centric. These were of a family-oriented feelings and these were all of the words that really started to form and shape the approach that I wanted to take to learning, which was something that was completely choice based.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

Had enough structure to guide people, but the autonomy that held true to the culture of DeciEm that was completely collaborative and co-created, that wasn't about hierarchy but where everybody could be both a learner and a teacher, that was just in time so that people could learn as needed, in the flow of work, and that really put learning about the individual, learning about the organization and the interplay of those two things at the heart of our content. Because all the other stuff exists, it's not difficult to curate off the shelf content, it's difficult to seamlessly integrate into a new organization, or one that you've been a part of and to really feel that you're truly a part of it and to have this living relationship with it.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

And that's what I wanted us to achieve because the core purpose of DeciEm was to be a family. So how do we do that and how do we do it globally when there's so many disparate things and so many gaps that need to be bridged?

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

And then alongside that all the typical stuff, you're reading all the great articles and research about what's going on in the learning industry, you know flexibility is important, you know digital first is important, the rise of the campaigns culture, collaboration, 360 feedback. All of these things are so evident, and then the question is how do you bring them into your organization in a way that doesn't feel imposed? That actually fits, and the right timing for where your company is at, because if not it's an imposition and that's never going to be organic and it's never going to gel.

### **Michelle Ockers:**

## Learning Uncut Episode 56 Kristina Tsiriotakis – Making Learning Human

So when we were preparing for this discussion, you spoke about things you were trying to balance and you listed some of those off there. Balancing and guidance and self-direction, balancing structure and freedom, balancing the individual and the collective. How did you navigate your way through striking a balance ... or let me ask the question slightly differently. What was the most challenging balance to strike and how did you resolve that?

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

I think corporate versus anti-corporate, because all a corporation is a group of people that come together, much like family, that have interplay and where the individual and the team and the larger group have a relationship. And I think there was a sense, and there often is, I don't think it's Deciem specific that there are these two binary experiences of being either corporate or anti-corporate. And I just thought if we take that word out and we put the word in family, and actually we just look at it the same way and all of the relationships that we approach with our family we approach similarly, then we start to look at what's appropriate in the workplace very differently.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

And that's where I started to realize why do we think that being an employee stops at 5 p.m. and then we start being a person? All of the things that happened to me before 9 a.m., or whenever I log in, I'm bringing into my workday, those are things that are on my mind, things that I want to learn about and talk about and interact about. So how do we make it one whole thing and we stop having a binary approach to things?

### **Michelle Ockers:**

Can you give any specific examples of decisions you made or choices you made once you'd reached that conclusion that the way to strike a balance was to look at people as whole people?

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

I think the biggest thing for us was we decided that we wanted to work with an LXP and make that our North star and our heartbeat and our compass. And the reason for that was, again, I'd experienced in the past in my career so many disjointed, disparate things competing versus one whole experience. Just like we have this idea that there's personal and there's professional, and those tend to be competing things too and I wanted a sense of wholism. And with the LXP we could achieve social learning, we could achieve all the traditional elements of a learning management system, we could achieve just in time campaigns culture and a new sharing approach, we could personalize and we could blend where we learn outside of work and inside of work, because there's content sharing for things like tech talks and great resources that exist externally and it just seemed so clear that this solution will bridge so many gaps that model what we're trying to achieve, which is a holistic experience.

### **Michelle Ockers:**

So what are the main things that get done in your LXP and what's the purpose of the LXP at Deciem?

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

So our LXP is Thrive, and at the heart of it is this idea of connectiveness. And quite naturally, you don't know why the letter C just kept emerging, but I started to notice that I had one C and then another C and a third C. And those three things were I wanted to use the LXP to really reimagine what the content experience would be in our organization, and again I had come from a model that was really about in house content creation that was quite

## Learning Uncut Episode 56 Kristina Tsiriotakis – Making Learning Human

timely, mostly e-learning, sometimes classroom based learnings, sometimes print resources. But all kind of really disparate experiences again. So you have your e-learning on your LMS, maybe you have your classroom quarterly, and then you've got some job aid that lives in a store or in the bottom of a desk, and it just wasn't holistic.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

And on top of that it was all pushed out by the learning designers, and I just thought, "But everybody's a learning designer, everybody has stories to share and content to contribute." So how can we use this platform to really reimagine the content experience? Alongside that, and I'll kind of dive deep in a moment, but I realized with the LXP we had a huge opportunity to bridge the gap between content and communications and to bring campaigns into the content world. Because when I would see my CEO with her little baby role modelling the values of family and balancing work and family and being so transparent about it, I felt like that's a moment I want to communicate to everybody and capture it. Why isn't that in the content strategy? Why isn't anybody mapping that, and not worrying so much about mapping the typical stuff?

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

And then the third piece was how do we bring in a strong sense of community engagement by really getting the learner involved and co-creating the experience? And making them content creators and community champions and teachers ultimately was the goal.

### **Michelle Ockers:**

Right, there's a bit to unpack there. I get the central role of the LXP almost like the watering hole, just a place people automatically go to. What's interesting sometimes in the work I've done in organizations is the social learning thing you mentioned there, the community building, I haven't had an LXP, I've had an LMS and then I've had the company intranet. And where I wanted to do community building to make it easier for people to engage, I haven't locked them in the LMS, I've put in the intranet or found spaces where people naturally go to for work.

### **Michelle Ockers:**

But it feels like you've tried to take a very holistic approach to the LXP, and it's almost like the watering hole. So it's a place for conversation, it's a place for communication as well. What's your relationship with ... Do you have a separate comms team? And if so what's the relationship with them, and is Thrive the one place for online campaigns distribution, interaction?

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

We don't have a separate comms team, we really brought in comms as learning. And experientially if you were to hop onto the platform the first thing that you're going to experience is whatever that current campaign is that we're promoting, and the campaigns are ... they're not just about the commodity. They're about, right now we're in a Black Lives Matter campaign because we want everybody to be able to have a voice to speak to this, to share resources and to use their voice for what's going on in their entire life and in the entire world.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

So, that would be the first thing that you would notice. And the campaigns are very diverse, fun and playful things like Love Day for Valentine's Day or things that are really meaningful to us like mental health awareness or what's happening in the world right now. Right alongside that we have our company highlights, and that's where the communications come

## Learning Uncut Episode 56 Kristina Tsiritakis – Making Learning Human

through. And as we don't have a formal comms team, we took this on as our own project to create some structure around communications. And part of that was meeting with a lot of people in the organization and saying that we've identified in our needs assessment that people want to understand, they want to know more about where the business is going, what the values are, what the milestones are. And we need you ...

### **Kristina Tsiritakis:**

And sometimes the leaders at the top would say, "Well, what do you want to talk about?" Because when you're so close to the key stuff that's happening in the business, you often forget to cascade it. So we had to create a little bit of structure around that and create a monthly calendar and give everybody a different day in the month and say, "The first Tuesday of the month we're going to have an update on what's happening in North America." Any modality, you want a feed, you want an article, you want a meme with a summary, we don't care, it's up to you, we just want the people to connect and we want the gaps to be bridged and the communication to come through. And we don't want it to come through in an email because email's not human and we're the human world of beauty, we want your personality, your verbiage, the ways that you chose to bold a word. Whatever it is that's authentically you, we want that to come through.

### **Kristina Tsiritakis:**

So, that's always pushed on the front of the platform. Right alongside that, you're going to see any new content that any user ... because it is a content sharing platform, so any user generated content. And it's all personalized because with an LXP you have a lot of curation and you have personalization. So I'm going to see everyone's content, but if I'm particularly interested in leadership development and well-being, then I'm also going to see that content prioritized. So it's very dynamic, it might have almost that Facebook, Instagram style feeling to it.

### **Kristina Tsiritakis:**

And now I as a learner, I can post anything and I can share it with anyone in the organization. If I know that Sally's interested in a growth mindset and I found an amazing tech talk, I'm inspired as a learner to post that and to share it with her and to be involved in driving the learning forward. So, that's your home area.

### **Kristina Tsiritakis:**

And then alongside that in your second are is where we artefact and organization the content. And so we chunk it and channel it, all the traditional ways so it's easy for people to find. We've got channels for our different people departments, we've got channels for leadership development, channels for product and brand, and they're all really graphic and fun and playful. But they all live in one space, and if you click on leadership development, you're going to find something for e-learning alongside video-based learning, alongside a PDF. We can put those into a blended pathway for a more dynamic experience. You can go micro and just watch the video or you can take 20 minutes and do the pathway. So it's really about creating an incredibly diverse experience, but all in one place so people really know where to learn and they have a little bit more fun with it, it's just much more dynamic.

### **Michelle Ockers:**

So the content is a mix of curated by anyone, your learning team or people across the organization plus created. And again a mix of being created by people anywhere in the organization as well as by your learning team I take it. So what does your team create versus ... and we'll talk a little ... well actually, let's step back. What's the role of your team in the midst of all of this? What do they do then?

## Learning Uncut Episode 56 Kristina Tsiriotakis – Making Learning Human

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

So, we've got a lot of stuff going on with our team. So we've got a head of learning change that works alongside me, and a big part of her role is implementation of course for Thrive, bringing any new technology, strategizing and then collaborating, working with these different cultural champions, meeting with different teams to keep the momentum going, any change process she's involved in to make sure it's fully integrated and executed.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

And then we've got a manager of analytics and engagement. She's the day to day operations as well as reading the data and connecting that to engagement. And so when we experiment with campaigns and we want to know which campaigns got our people talking more, which call to actions were more inspiring, do people want to show us their pets more or do they want to have a moment of gratitude, to they want to find an inspirational tech talk. We experiment with these different nudges almost, because sometimes people need an entry point and they don't always know out of nowhere where to create content.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

We've got two learning experience designers, and they create our e-learning, as well as our job aids around anything in our learning pillars. Professional development, personal, there's always going to be in house content that needs to be created by your learning team. And then we've got our field crew and they still run a lot of virtual classroom training. We've always had a virtual classroom approach because we want to scale globally, and it's not fair to have classrooms for corporate but retails having a different experience, or warehouse. So they're facilitating those sessions, they're out spending time with the teams, we know when the stores are open.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

So they're quite busy, but a lot of the work that we do as a team is conceptualizing the context for this learning to come to life. So it's a lot of strategizing around what's going to switch our learners on, what's going to get them posting, what's going to get them choosing to engage with this content. We ran a campaign called "Learn for a Cause", and we said learning is between you and you, the choice is yours but if you complete a module of learning, every module you complete we'll plant a tree. In two weeks we have a thousand trees that are going to be planted.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

So we do a lot of brainstorming around these things. We ran "How to Hack Your Learning", which was a campaign around how do we get everybody teaching each other how to learn? And where does learning even happen? I would always find I was having a manicure and had nothing to do, why not do some learning, or you're waiting for the bus, or you're waiting for the cake to get baked. So it takes a lot of creativity to come up with these concepts to see which ones work and to iterate and iterate in real time as well.

### **Michelle Ockers:**

So the campaigns, how do you run a campaign? Do you have a standard approach from conceptualizing through to running it, to analysing it, to sharing the outcomes? Is there an approach to that?

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

The key thing for us around campaigning is engagement. So what's going to drive community engagement? Is there something going on within the organization, within a particular team in the organization, something we can connect internally to externally? For

## **Learning Uncut Episode 56 Kristina Tsiriotakis – Making Learning Human**

example, we partnered with our social team to create Tik Toks where our team members spoke to their favourite products on Tik Tok, posted them on Thrive but many of them got featured on our external social platform as well.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

So we're looking at what's happening in the organization and how we can move that forward, and then we're looking at what's going on in the world. So whether it's something really fun and playful like a holiday or maybe a long weekend or something significant, like what's been going on with COVID or obviously Black Lives Matter, we want to give people the platform to use their voice to communicate on anything and everything that they've been impacted by.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

I met with a team member of mine earlier today and broke down in tears with everything that's going on, and people need a place to express that and they can't bottle it up and then show up to work and not have that. So, we're always trying to balance the commodity, product and brand stuff, the professional development with the fun stuff going on in the world. A campaign can be a day, it can be a week, we really play with that as well. We want to keep people on their toes, we don't want to have this obviously four week or six-week cycle. We like to keep it really fast paced because people get bored quickly these days, and even when we run a campaign, we might run different engagement challenges around that inviting people to create content, collaborate and get involved.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

Anytime we can invite them to consume content without telling them, we'll build that in there. So we did a challenge recently around our ordinary videos, we'd created some in house content around our videos and the challenge was if you complete ten of these videos and the quizzes alongside them, you're going to get a surprise, P-R-I-Z-E. And they didn't know what the prize was, but we had over 350 hours of opt-in learning and those participants got a one on one session with our chief scientific officer.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

So it's a way to showcase, they can ask any questions. It's a way to showcase what's exciting about our products, get them to choose learning, to consume in a more micro way. We said do one video and quiz a day, so there's some actual transfer happening. And then they get rewarded with something that's really meaningful to the organization.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

So campaigning for us is around action, it's around getting people involved in some way. It's not a static thing where we post something and it sits there for six weeks and there's no relationship or interplay. That's not a campaign at all, really, that's a billboard.

### **Michelle Ockers:**

Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. So engagement is clearly one of the key success measures for the work you do. Early on in the conversation you spoke about roles changing quickly as the organization was growing and at a certain point in time it was recognized that there was a need for someone to be taken carriage of learning in the organization. So we haven't talked much about what is the role-based learning look like, or what are the learning experience designers doing, and how is success determined? That part of your learning strategy. So can you talk to us a little bit more about, and again, I don't know whether the word "formal learning" is in any way applicable to your context of role-based learning, what that looks like, how you determine whether you're being successful in that.

## Learning Uncut Episode 56 Kristina Tsiriotakis – Making Learning Human

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

We create content across the five learning pillars. So product and brand, customer experience, professional development, and that's where we go more granular into the different business units and then the different roles. Of course, we've competency mapped, because we're more interested in those foundational competencies. Specialization and development we have to go external often. We won't be able to teach someone how to create a product, for example, but we can teach them all of those core competencies around innovation. And then the personal development is the fifth pillar.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

So they design across all modalities, across all of those learning pillars. Whether it's, as I mentioned, e-learning, virtual classrooms, job aids, learning programming. We're working right now on a program for our warehouse group. This team, they need to manage, self-manage other and manage complex processes. They're often managing 80 people, they've got big duties. So the experience designers are going to collaborate as always with subject matter experts to capture what's needed in key business units. I think in every organization you're always going broad stroke first and focusing on those bigger groups and then you get smaller and a little bit smaller.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

But, alongside that and knowing that we've mapped out that content over the next few years, and we can only work as quickly as we can, where we use our learners is to create challenges so that they can teach one another. So I'll give you an example. While we're working on this content for our production team, we've invited our community to answer a series of questions around managing, self-managing other and managing processes that we can then feature on Thrive. So, that while we're busy creating some of that more structured stuff, they can actually capture their own learning and trade it with one another.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

So you're trying to figure out how to ask the right questions so that people can become more conscious about what they already know and trade it with one another. And I think that's sometimes more interesting because it involves storytelling, it involves people authentically sharing about who they are, but they won't always do that in a formal way if you don't ask those questions and give them a place for that to live. So we'll send them out an email saying, "We're working on a management channel and we want to feature the production teams. So can you come on this journey with us and share your wisdom because you have something to offer?"

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

So a big part of the content mapping is mapping the collaboration and figuring out where the learning lives inside of your people and how to get them to want to be part of the conversation.

### **Michelle Ockers:**

How do you do that? Because it's more than just saying, "Hey, we want you to be a part of this." What else do you need to do to get people comfortable and confident with sharing what they know?

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

## **Learning Uncut Episode 56 Kristina Tsiriotakis – Making Learning Human**

I think there's always the what, why, how. What are we doing? Why are we doing it? How does it work and what might you be feeling and what might your barriers to entry be? I might actually post that in a video myself, versus in an email, to normalize some of those emotions that I know are going to be roadblocks for people and to say, "You might be feeling nervous for these following reasons, and let's talk about it."

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

Another thing I think is going first and being the first to admit that you were also nervous the first time you posted a piece of content or were invited to get involved. So I think that's a big part of it. Certainly the role modelling of things like the C-Suite and all of your cultural champions, at all levels really. At Deciem we're not about a top down approach. Trying to get that role modelling happening so people can feel a little bit safer, and then maybe using those as examples is quite important.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

One initiative that we ran that created a little bit more momentum and safety around people contributing was a team-based challenge. So we invited all departments to create a team video where they could express, in any creative form they wanted to, how they contribute to the organization. What do you guys do and what's your magic? And we ran it as a contest because we love challenge as well, and the momentum just exploded because it's much safer to go first with a group than it is to go first on your own. And we had the most creative videos come through. We had the finance team that everybody thought was boring and traditional do a Superman type cartoon look. We had video editors we didn't even know existed in the company. So you actually see the creativity come through trying to create it team based first can be really helpful to ...

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

It's almost like, have you ever seen a kitten put their foot on the snow for the first time? And you don't want to go on the snow all at once and they just tap and they're trying to see is it safe? Can I get a little bit further? I think it's like that with change. So are they more comfortable first doing little things? Recently we did something, we did a rapid fire. We said, "Answer these ten questions in an article on Thrive." And the questions were tell us where you are, tell us what new habits you've formed since quarantining, tell us what resources you're using to stay positive, tell us what websites you're using. These were learning moments because we're actually trading ideas on external resources.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

But we said post your favourite meme as your photo. So maybe somebody who doesn't want to turn the camera on themselves yet doesn't have to go all in and be on film and expose themselves completely. They can just get a little taste of it and have that positive moment, and then go a little bit further.

### **Michelle Ockers:**

Lovely. One of the resources I will include in the show notes Kristina is the video for the presentation you gave at Learning Technologies 20 in the UK earlier this year, and it has, and I would encourage listeners who go and watch this, it has the winning team entry from South Korea for that campaign you spoke about, which is just lovely and unexpected, right?

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

That was our winner. It was so creative. There were so many, we actually made a scorecard, it was a totally democratic system. That was one example of where the three C's all connect. We want communication, community engagement and content. Those are the

## **Learning Uncut Episode 56**

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis – Making Learning Human**

three things we're always thinking about bridging to create a holistic connected experience. And in that one piece of user driven or co-created content, the team was so engaged, the views on it were extraordinary, that it actually communicated a lot about how we do business in South Korea. What does the warehouse look like? How does our team behave and interact with one another?

#### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

So you're trying to figure out, and I think those are my three checkmarks, how do I satisfy communication, community engagement and content, and if I can do that, I feel I've created a real learning moment.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

Yeah, I think so.

#### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

And you're trying to find the context for that to happen.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

Yeah, how do you ... Let's go over your relationship with all of that content that's been created and the LXP. How do you corral it? How do you figure out, out of all this stuff that's been created and shared, which of it is transient, which of it do we take and make easier for people to access and find again and build into the enduring artefacts? And how do you organize? Who's doing that and what are they doing so that it's not too hard to find stuff that's relevant?

#### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

That is the love affair of myself, my head of learning change and learning operations. And we manage the channels, it's all mapped out and we've got, I think I'd say about 20 channels that are all related to our five learning pillars. So we've got product and brands channels, we've got, again, customer experience channels, different aspects of professional or personal development, and then organizational channels that are really about driving the organization forward, helping people understand who our people are, what the teams look like and what the values are really in the company.

#### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

And our job is to assess, does this piece of content hold a mirror up to any of those things with permanence? And if so, then we pull that into the artefact content. What's very cool on Thrive is users can nominate their content as a piece of permanent content, they just use the tag "discover me", and then we'll pull it into the discover page. And obviously you're chunking it, part of content, you can't have a sea of content, that's like the internet and it's completely overwhelming. So you do have to manage the channels and make sure that the messaging is really clear.

#### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

So we've got a channel, we used to call it "How to Thrive", we thought it was so clever, How to Thrive. Nobody knew what the heck we were talking about. The channel was renamed "Learn how to use Thrive" because that's what the channel was about, so the messaging has to be really clear. And to that point, I don't think I've spoken a lot to the fact that we do a lot of work teaching people how to learn and communicating how you learn at Deciem.

#### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**



## Learning Uncut Episode 56 Kristina Tsiriotakis – Making Learning Human

So we have dedicated channels that are about learning. We've got videos that we've created that show you how to navigate the Discovery Channel, "Click here if your appetite today is for this kind of learning", "Click here if you feel like getting to know our people", "Click here if you want to learn about the products", so that it's really clean and clear. And every week we actually host a half an hour drop in session where people can come and learn how to learn with us. And if they have a half an hour, they can ask us any question and we'll walk them through all the cool ways you can use the platform.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

All the way from micro to macro learning, and all the way from being more of a spectator to be fully engaged. Because not everybody wants to comment post, like, share and create content right away. It's cumulative and also some days you feel it more than other days, it's like anything your level of activity and your appetite shifts. So we want to normalize that and just keep the conversation going.

### **Michelle Ockers:**

Yeah, it's really been fascinating hearing about your work and the approach and really refreshing Kristina, and very different from the approach still being taken in many organizations. And I think quite different, we talked early on about having been in another organization for 10 years and then moving into Deciem and the approaches, the learning strategy, learning looks quite different in two organizations. What has this meant for you personally? How have you reacted to that? What have you had to go through personally to make the shift from one type of culture to another, and just shift your own mindset and practices to introduce learning in this very different way to Deciem?

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

I realized that I had tunnel vision, I think that's the biggest thing I'd realized. That I was so set in the way that I was seeing things that I was not able to see all of the other ways that learning could be approached, cultivated or reflected in an organization. And leaving that environment where it was, we make content, we run a six-week campaign, maybe we do classroom a few times a year, maybe we pull in a little bit of curated content, but maybe people use it, maybe they don't. Leaving that environment to realizing that you can create such a blended, flexible micro to macro co-created strategy that really reinvents what a learning moment is and when and how people learn and how they get involved. It's really been transformational, and I do think that it's hard to see that if your technology doesn't serve you the right way.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

And if I'm being honest, because you don't see how you can bridge those gaps when everything is so disjointed. So I'm very thankful that Thrive pushed me, because in the beginning I didn't quite get it, I was like, "How are we going to do all of this in this one place?" And then your mind starts to ... it's like any change, you go from resistance to exploration and you start to say, "But wait a second, maybe I'm the one who wasn't seeing that there's another way to teach people and to actually get people involved within teaching. And there's another way to approach learning altogether."

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

So I'm so grateful for that. I left a company I was at for a very long time, it was a beautiful company and I was ... there was that moment of what am I doing? Why am I getting uncomfortable? But I know I need to get uncomfortable, I know that's where growth happens. And when you do and when you give it all away and you reinvent it and you say,

## **Learning Uncut Episode 56**

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis – Making Learning Human**

"I'm willing to let go of what I've been holding onto", something new comes through that can just be so full and so rewarding and so different.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

Some of our listeners are going to be sitting with this right now and thinking, that just sounds so amazing. How do I do that? And many of them won't be in the situation where they're in a brand-new role in a young, fresh organization, the culture might be quite different there. And you are, I guess, are able to pitch yourself in that situation. So you've come from an organization with a certain way of doing things and a certain technology infrastructure.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

To give people heart, if they're sitting there thinking, "But, I've all these disparate platforms, I'm in a different place. But I'd like to do more to make learning more human, to make it more connected, to respect people as whole people." What tips would you give them? What would you say to those people who are in that situation wondering what they can take out of your experience and what you created and adapt some of it?

#### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

I think looking at the three C's, I would encourage people to really look at their communication strategy and to really try to bring that into the learning space and to find those micro moments where things like values are reflected and the true essence and magic of people are reflected. And most companies have a social platform, so whether or not you're not using your LMS or ... there's going to be a space where we can encourage community engagement, co-created content and campaigns moments as learning moments, even if they're in disparate spaces.

#### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

So to that point, when it comes to community engagement, I would ask yourself what campaigns are you running? Are you including collaborative call to actions where people have a little bit of an entry point where they can give of themselves? Are you using fun challenges to get people to choose learning versus the feeling like it's been prescribed? Are you campaigning for learning? Are you doing learning campaigns that again, teach people how to learn, or get people excited about learning for a cause? Are you doing cause-based learning, which is a really great thing?

#### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

And then when you look at your content that you're creating in house, is there a way that it can be more collaborative, that people can be featured more, that you can allow people to be the storytellers and the teachers? And I think there's such easy ways nowadays with video, with the fact that we're all little Quentin Tarantino's that we can create the structure for that.

#### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

And when you do that you have to tell people why there's a value in what you're asking them to do. You can't just ask them to do it and not explain the value of campaigns as learning. A lot of people don't understand significant frustration and the decline in employee engagement when we don't tell people key things that are happening in the company. So it's not enough to just say, "Hey, I should get the CEO to post videos on our social platform" and expect her to do it in her busy day. You've really got to sit and teach people how that bridges a gap and creates a more holistic organization.

#### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**



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## Learning Uncut Episode 56 Kristina Tsiriotakis – Making Learning Human

So part of our job is to not just ask people what, but really explain why and really how it's going to impact the organization. And I think if you do that and you focus on the how and on bringing people into the space, I always say, "We're just the bridge. It's not our platform. Thrive is everyone's platform, we're just trying to hold a mirror up to the organization." When you start speaking that way, I think your audience starts to say, "Oh, maybe there is something more going on here than "training", and they really see that it's really a people first approach.

### **Michelle Ockers:**

Absolutely. And right now we're, at the time that we're recording this, we're still undergoing massive change in the world. We're not through the pandemic and all the effects of that by a long stretch, but one of the things that's come out of it is there is more openness to change in organizations. And now really is the time to be curious, to be courageous, to experiment.

### **Michelle Ockers:**

And so for our listeners, have a think about what you can take out of those three C's and what you can start introducing and working with right now because there are lots of gems in there. If you are doing something differently, if there is some experiment you're trying, something that's cutting through in ways that excite you and move the organization to a place that is more holistic in their approach to people and to learning, can you share that with us on LinkedIn and Twitter? Just use the #learninguncut, so others can join in the conversation.

### **Michelle Ockers:**

We're going to share Kristina's LinkedIn profile on the show notes. And please engage with Kristina, ask her questions, be curious. Thank you so much Kristina for sharing your work and insights with us, it's been such a delightful conversation.

### **Kristina Tsiriotakis:**

Thank you so much

## **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*



## Learning Uncut Episode 56 Kristina Tsiriotakis – Making Learning Human

- *Internet Time Alliance Jay Cross Memorial Award – for outstanding contribution to the field of informal learning*

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