

Learning Uncut Episode 68
Amanda Ashby – Year in Review
Hosted by Michelle Ockers



Michelle Ockers:

Welcome to the final episode of Learning Uncut for 2020. Amanda Ashby is back to help me review the stories featured in the regular fortnightly episodes this year. Long-time listeners will recall that Amanda was our editor until the end of 2019. She works at PwC in Sydney leading digital learning and learning technology. Amanda is an active member of the Australian Learning and Development community and remains a strong friend of the Learning Uncut podcast. I thank Amanda for her thoughtful preparation to look back over the year with me and reflect on themes, insights, and favourite episodes.

I'll be taking a very short break over Christmas, with the podcast returning in three weeks' time on 5 January with a Professional Development special.

Speaking of Professional Development, if you are an L&D professional who is in a place to make or influence change in your organization take a look at the Emerging Stronger Masterclasses which are running in March 2021. I'm hosting these alongside my Emergent Series co-hosts, Laura Overton and Shannon Tipton. We'll be joined by experts from the podcast series to guide you through a hands-on experience with peers from other organisations to identify breakthrough actions to address the biggest challenges that you are working on in your organisation. Use the link in the show notes for more information.

Michelle Ockers:

Hello, Amanda. It's so lovely to have you back on the podcast.

Amanda Ashby:

Thank you, Michelle. I'm excited to be back.

Michelle Ockers:

It's been lovely that even though you haven't been the editor for a year, you've stayed in close contact with the podcast. And of course you were a guest alongside Laura Overton and Jelle Buiting for our 50th episode. And this, as we record this today, this is episode 68, which is a mark of how quickly the second half of the year has gone, right?

Amanda Ashby:

You've had so many episodes this year with your normal in disruption. It's been non-stop podcasting.

Michelle Ockers:

Sometimes it's felt like it, particularly the Disruption series, which I'll talk about in a moment, that was one episode a day for 15 days straight, early in the pandemic. So I didn't do much else other than podcasting for three weeks, but it was an amazing experience. So in terms of format, those of you who have been long-time listeners will know that our regular format is a fortnightly case study, a story with a learning professional about a real learning solution they've rolled out in their organization, or an approach they're taking to learning occasionally as we will discuss, it's someone from elsewhere in the business, including a business leader now and then. So that's the spine of the podcast, which I've maintained throughout 2020.

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And I've added into the mix something called the What Happened Next episodes, which is like a follow-up.

Michelle Ockers:

So some of the earlier guests have come back 12 months or more on from their original episode to tell us the unfolding story of their body of work. This year, I've had 12 guests from Australia and New Zealand on the regular episodes of the podcast, and seven from overseas. We went global this year. So I've had guests from the US, the UK, India, Canada, Denmark, and the Netherlands, and one story which was about an organization in the Philippines, but the guests were Australian. And on top of those regular fortnightly episodes, 25 of those, I also ran the special Disruption series when the pandemic first hit in March-April, which was all about different approaches which learning and development professionals may have needed to use for the first time or scale up quickly due to not having face-to-face as a delivery option.

Michelle Ockers:

And then the Emergent series, which has run more recently for four months from mid-June through to October, co-hosted by Laura Overton and Shannon Tipton, which is taking a longer term look at approaches to support learning and development to become more relevant, effective, and emerge stronger from the pandemic. So Amanda today's episode is all about those regular stories, the 25 regular fortnightly guest episodes from the core of Learning Uncut. So before we start, I know you love a good bit of data. Don't you Amanda?

Amanda Ashby:

I do. I've been waiting for the numbers, Michelle.

Michelle Ockers:

At the start of the year we were sitting on 19,000 downloads, and I sat down and I thought, "What would be a really ambitious goal for the podcast this year?" And I thought, "Imagine if I could get to 60,000 downloads." And as at today, 1st of December, we're sitting at 69,492, which is just amazing, like 50,000 downloads this year.

Amanda Ashby:

That's incredible. I'm so glad more people are hearing all the stories.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, I am too. And I've no doubt that the Disruption and Emergent series really helped to attract people to the podcast, that they really met an immediate need. But what I've found is that the listener base has shifted as well. We've now been downloaded in 103 different countries. And the number of downloads, it used to be very Australia and New Zealand-centric, and of course that's understandable when all the guests were from Australia and New Zealand. However, now about a third of the downloads have been from the United States. That's I think been off the back of the Emergent series in particular, and thanks to Mike Taylor who has shared some of the episodes in his newsletter. I think that's helped to promote it to the US listeners. So around about two thirds total across Australia and the US, and then the UK, New Zealand and Canada are our next biggest listener base.

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Michelle Ockers:

So hello to everyone from those countries, and to some of our countries where we've had one download. Thank you very much. Thank you very much to Nigeria, to the person in Libya, who has downloaded the podcast. It's really great that we have listeners even if it's just one here and they're in such far-flung places. The most listened podcast two episodes overall, it really shifted. For a long time, there were three podcast episodes that just people listened to more than others. And I know these were some of your favourites from last year, Amanda. Beth Hall from Cotton On, Damien Woods from National Australia Bank, and Gareth Killeen from Reece.

Michelle Ockers:

For a long time, it kind of moved backwards and forwards between those three, but as new people have joined the listener base, I think they've just gone right back to the start and started listening right from the start. So the very first episode, the introductory episode has had more listens than anything else now, as people try to figure out what it's about. Then really interestingly in the past two months, and I'm not even going to ask you to guess, because there's no way you would've picked this one out. Episode eight with Gail Bray, Project 100 – Transforming Vocational Education and Training is now the most listened to episode in Learning Uncut. Does that surprise you?

Amanda Ashby:

It does. So I'm really curious. I wonder what in there has sparked everyone's interest.

Michelle Ockers:

I don't know whether it's the US space and there's an interesting vocational education over there that sparked an interest. So I'm thinking of inviting Gail back to do a What Happened Next episode, because I know she's continued on with some really innovative work. The next most listened episode is indeed Gareth Killeen, Using Human-Centred Design to Transform Learning, episode 39. And then Shawna Marie, episode 32, Supporting Work with Human-Centred Design.

Amanda Ashby:

Interesting how human-centred design is coming out strongly and people want to hear those case studies and stories.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. There's always been a strong interest in anything to do with human-centred design for the past two and a half years. Now, another one that's really interesting is the most listened to episode from the 2020, the 2020 episodes, is one that I actually recapped because I hadn't listened to it for a little while. I listened to it a couple of days ago and it's a really, really nice solid piece of work from Bee Hepburn at Xero about leading a distributed learning team. And I'm wondering if that's gotten a resurgence of interest because of the pandemic and people having to learn to work effectively in remote teams.

Amanda Ashby:

And there is some great information. I re-listened to that one, again just on the weekend and the way she talks about the 80-20 rule and how they've distributed this so much good learning, whether you have a global team or how you're looking at structuring a national team, she shared so many great learnings in there.

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Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, absolutely. It was really pragmatic, really practical. Just straight-forward, common sense stuff, but stuff that sometimes gets lost. We can sometimes over-complicate the way we manage our teams. So if people haven't listened to that episode and are interested in improving how they work as a remote distributed team, I would recommend that one. So let's focus in on the 2020 episodes, and let's just talk about some general themes Amanda. When you cast your eye back over, or your ear back over as the case may be, the episodes for this year, are there any real themes that struck you?

Amanda Ashby:

I think when we look at 2020, it's always going to be the year of COVID-19 and looking back in that lens. And when I was listening back and reflecting on the episodes, it's almost in three parts of a pre-COVID, the COVID reaction, and then moreso in Australia and New Zealand, the almost post-COVID or the ability to plan for what happens next. And you could hear along the way the challenges people were having and also the ways they may have set themselves up for success. So I listened to episode 47 with Julian Davis and Naomi Waldron, who talked about creating a digital learning onboarding program for Queensland Rail, the All Aboard, I thought how perfectly they were set up and ready to go and could have leverage.

Amanda Ashby:

And I really enjoyed the AITD episode, which was episode 60. So the Australian Institute of Training and Development, so spoke around the journey we've all been on, on how to frantically convert to virtual and digital to meet a need now, but also be sustainable in the future. And I thought having an industry membership body was such a great story to share in that. And then I think it was actually in episode 61 with Damien Woods from NAB, and his reflections on what was helpful and meaningful at the time. And it was enable resources, get resources in place that enable others to scale and to cope. And I think that has woven through a lot of the ways, how do we help others help themselves now more than ever? Because no one was equipped to take all the learning and make it digital ASAP. And so prioritization and planning really came through strongly. I mean, just how we were reacting. What were you hearing in the things Michelle?

Michelle Ockers:

I think you've done a really nice kind of walk through in terms of the timeline for 2020 and some of the shifts that came up. We had a couple, apart from the Australian Institute of Training and Development, we had one with Sunder Ramachandran from GSK which focused very much on how they used a collaborative gamified approach to learning for their sales team which worked really well. That was episode 63, it was called Game Mechanics for Learning in Lockdown. And I thought that was a nice example to your point where you were talking about Queensland Rail already have taken all of their onboarding online. GSK were really well set up to be able to adjust to the post-COVID era because they had the technology in place to do that, in a similar way to Reece and Gareth Killeen talking when he came back on the program about experienced centred digital learning strategy in episode 58.

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Michelle Ockers:

And he talked very much about being able to support, without a facilitator there, peer-centred leadership development and the learning and development team being able to monitor what was happening in those groups through a digital footprint, because they had invested in the technology. So I think they were some really nice examples of responses to COVID that were enabled by the work that had been done pre-COVID. So examples really, I think, of the promise of technology, and this was something we spoke about, Amanda, in the 50th anniversary or the 50th episode, where we were talking about technology and at the time Laura Overton said, "Well, it's time to grow up. We've been playing with technology for so long." So I think there's this theme about, for many organizations who had put the work and the effort in pre-COVID, this coming of age with the way that they're using technologies. I think we see that very much reflected.

Michelle Ockers:

There were some other themes that I really appreciated. One was this idea of going to Gemba, which was a phrase that Trish Uhl shared in episode 48 with Rachel Horwitz about launching learning engineering at Mars. And she and Rachel spoke about going out and spending time in the business, really understanding the work environment and how critical that is to the work that we do as learning and development professionals. And of course, they're not the first guest to have spoken about that, but I saw that woven through a number of the episodes. Episode 67, which was the last case study episode about my work with Helen Blunden at Coca-Cola Amatil, Work, Connect and Learn, where we spent time out in the manufacturing sites looking at the environment for the maintenance engineers before launching a community of practice and linking the work we were doing to the use cases they had nominated were of value to them.

Michelle Ockers:

And one that I thought was really brilliant, which was the episode about Codesafe from David Broadhurst and Rae Grech, Making Construction Safer, episode 49, which was all about working on developing videos of safe work procedures by actually going out to the workplace and working alongside the staff, performing the actual tasks and discovering in the process that some of the safe work procedures as written weren't fit for use. And I thought that was just a brilliant example of how going out to where the work is done really creates a better outcome all round. So going to Gemba was a big theme for me for 2020. Were there anything else, any other themes or things that really struck you from the episodes?

Amanda Ashby:

I think there was probably two more around... I feel like we heard a lot more about self-paced to digital learning stories. It was quite consistent through a lot of the ones happening at different organizations and self-lead ones and also unsurprisingly, but every time that you had a learning leader and a CEO on just the importance of setting the learning culture and how that gets embedded into an organization, there were a few speakers, which I'll hold off to my favourite episode ones that just so passionately spoke about how to embody it, how to lead it, but also how to get it out of L&D and infuse it into an organization, which is far more critical.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. So I'll hold off on going there as well, because that was a big theme for me and that some of my favourite episodes were around that theme. There were two other things I wanted to pick up on. One is about practical fit for purpose approaches. And apart from the Queensland Rail onboarding program, which we've already talked about, which I think was a really nice example of something that was very fit for purpose, given the scale of onboarding

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in that organization, using an e-learning approach. And they put a lot of effort into the cultural fit. There were two other episodes, which I thought were great examples of something that just worked because it fit the business environment. And one of those was Tony Dunford in episode 55 talking about Micro-credentials: What's Not to Love? And how they've used micro-credentials at Westpac to really take the approach of how do we use workplace-based evidence to gain recognition of skills for our staff and the work they'd done on that? Really practical.

Michelle Ockers:

I've shared that with so many of my clients, because there is this real interest in qualifications and credentialing but it's a way to bring it into the workplace and get work recognized. The other one, which... it kind of surprised me the level of interest this one got. It was the Forty Winks episode with Debbie Key, episode 54, Low Budget, High Impact. A one-person team, basically a \$40,000 budget but done really smartly to suit the organization. So I think many people were drawn to, and many learning and development professionals are in small teams, don't have a big budget and want to know what's something practical we can do within the constraints we have. So that was a standout thing for me.

Michelle Ockers:

And then there was just this thing I picked up on this year, I was really captured by language, and the language that some of the guests used when they talked about learning. Just some really beautiful language, Kristina Tsiriotakis from Deciem, and the way she talked about their learning experience platform as a watering hole, for example, really captured my imagination. And Gareth Killeen, and just the whole level of empathy and connection and coming from a place of service to the workforce that they are there to work with and support at Reece. So if people are looking for just the cues that your language can convey about how you feel about your work and the approach you bring to your work, I think a couple of episodes were worth listening to, Amanda.

Amanda Ashby:

Love that example.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes. Yes. So favourites.

Amanda Ashby:

So I have a few, but I really tried to narrow it down. It's so hard. And it's actually building on some of the ones you just mentioned. So Kristina from Deciem was my favourite episode of the whole year, hands down. Her vision, her approach, her success and her three CS around community engagement, content and comms is so inspiring and you could not walk away from that episode without wanting to run a learning campaign. The authenticity and the passion that she shares it with is just one of the better case studies I've ever heard anybody talk through.

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Michelle Ockers:

It is. And one of the insights I got from that, which again I shared with so many people, she made the comment that she didn't realize the extent to which the technology she was used to using was restricting what she could see and what she thought was possible. And it's like, where are your biases? Where are your blinkers? Where do you need to bring a set of fresh eyes?

Amanda Ashby:

And I love that because so often I know I've caught myself at times or in my team. We go, "Oh, I know that's not possible because of the technology." So now we really try to separate those who are going to press the button from those who are having the big ideas. So we keep the big ideas around, but just such a point in this year where we were relying on more technology, how much more it can enable you. And it allows you to do things other than just pushing out learning to people.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. Yeah.

Amanda Ashby:

I also loved Tony Dunford episode 58, Micro-Credentials. He was just so spot on, and I thought he created... The way he so succinctly talks about them as recognizing current competency for a specific skill or skill area, and the recognition of application is brilliant. He's so succinct in how he talks around it. And I agree in the value that it brings to a workplace, value it brings to people and how they are transferable. And he made a great point around if you're hiring, you're often trying to understand people's capability and how much this can help. And I just think how much we'd all value going into interviews, being able to say, "Great, they have evidenced and they have applied this skill, not just studied it." I think it's where a lot of large organizations are moving to, and I think the depth that they shared on their approach is a brilliant case study.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes. Yeah. Agree, agree. And the bigger vision he has for micro-credentials, not only in his organization, but as you say right across the corporate landscape where if we can just be recruiting. Because we know what the credential stand for, we can be recruiting for cultural fit and for the personal qualities and characteristics. What a difference that would make.

Amanda Ashby:

Yeah. He's a great advocate. And then I have a tied third. I couldn't... So I absolutely have to say episode 62 with Luke Warwick from PWC. And because one, I am such a fan of the work that they do, but I got to live this program as a learner and like many in L & D, there's probably very few times you've not touched a program, you've not been involved in their design. And so the joy it was to go through a program that I hadn't designed, that I hadn't been a part of, and that I learned all these new data skills and data wrangling and data visualization was incredible. It is such a transformational piece of work and not done with huge teams of people either. I look at my colleagues who pulled off incredible work and data in a very big COVID change. I so highly recommend listening to Luke's episode and talking about that.

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Amanda Ashby:

And if you ever think you didn't need digital skills, the way that it's changed my work practices, I had not anticipated. It just opens up a different way of thinking and things that helps us think through scenarios differently which I love and enjoy. And then I tie that with Gary Ridge's episode from WD-40. What a joy this episode is, and the passion that he has for learning. I went out straightaway and bought more WD-40, which I'm sure was his plan. But if you're looking for a CEO with a focus on leadership and learning, he's remarkable. I've read so much about Gary since, and I've just started his book, and what a joy to have Gary leading your organization and providing that opportunity for people and just how much you can just tell that he lives that in his organization.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. It was like a star moment for me. I was quite fan struck to actually have a conversation with him. Was brilliant, because I've admired the work that they've been doing on learning culture from afar. So he was going to be my number one, just because personally for me to be able to have a conversation with him was incredible. And he's a fantastic leader. I think he and Satya Nadella from Microsoft, if I could nominate two leaders I would just love to work with at some point in my career, it would be the two of them.

Amanda Ashby:

Well, you can count Gary as working with us on a podcast, it's a start.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. I don't want to make any promises, but imagine if I could get Satya Nadella on the podcast, what a coup would be.

Amanda Ashby:

That's a good 2021 goal.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, we'll see.

Amanda Ashby:

Like Gary is your number one episode for sure?

Michelle Ockers:

He was my very favourite, yeah. Just as he was my only business leader. So he and Luke Warwick were the two people who weren't learning and development leaders that I spoke to this year. And Luke was on my shortlist as well, Amanda, but definitely Gary, just for the sheer authenticity and the quality of his leadership. And if we could just clone him and spread him as learning and develop professionals across every organization to work with, I think we'd be looking at a very different landscape in terms of the way learning is valued and approached in organizations.

Amanda Ashby:

Love that. Yes, we all wanted Gary.

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Michelle Ockers:

Yes. And with Luke, one of the things I really liked was, and it didn't twig until we were well into the discussion that I had with Luke. Yes, it was an episode about digital skills and digital skills uplift, but that the way it was done, it was also building learning culture. I loved the way the Accelerators who were that 1% of people at PWC are invited to go on and do more advanced digital skills development, are left in their roles. They're not concentrated in a single business unit or a single team to take charge of digital learning or digital skills or digital transformation for the organization. That spread right throughout the organization. Basically they work three days a week. They're given one day to continue to build expertise and one day to support others. And that in terms of organizational change and an approach to enabling change, I just thought that was outstanding.

Amanda Ashby:

I know it's incredible. I'm lucky enough to see it and work with it, and the culture change that this program has built and it enables our strategy. It's made us all more capable professionals, and I have a go-to of someone in a people and culture team that understands what we're trying to do and has the expertise, so helps upskill us all. So the power of that network is incredible.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, absolutely. Now, did you have anyone else on your almost short list, Amanda?

Amanda Ashby:

I cut it there because otherwise I'd keep going. So who else is in yours?

Michelle Ockers:

I had one other, and that was Katrina Moss from Shopify, which was episode 64 about adopting growth mindset in an organization. Katrina, I met when she was in Australia in, let me get this right, 2018, I think. And she spoke at a workshop that Arun Pradhan, one of our perennial favourites on Learning Uncut, had put together about her work on growth mindset. And I had wanted to have her as a guest ever since I heard her speak. I think in terms of the ideas around self-directed learning and learning culture, which was definitely a theme woven throughout the year, the way she has just advocated and championed growth mindset and how approachable the idea of growth mindset is, how easy it is for people to wrap their heads around it. But then the way she's worked in the organization to have it integrated with their values with the rest of their talent management system, with identifying very practical everyday ways that people can apply the idea of growth mindset to be learning on a continuous basis.

Michelle Ockers:

I think that's really powerful, and perhaps whilst there is no such thing as the cargo cult and just picking up something and dropping it into another culture, I think it's a really nice example for organizations to consider of how you can approach building a learning culture using growth mindset.

Amanda Ashby:

I loved her story and how she talked about the fireside chats and one of the points I think that you really helped draw out as well, that absolutely she brought it to life in the organization and helped give it life, but how true its success was that she'd gone on parental leave and it was still there. It was still living and breathing in the culture of the business.

Michelle Ockers:



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Very much so very much so. And there's something about the sustainability of things and the longevity of new approaches to learning that we introduce to organizations that it takes a while for them to really take root and anchor themselves in an organization. And in the What Happened Next episode very early in the year with Arun Pradhan, where we followed up on his work with Learn to Learn and building learning agility in organizations, he spoke about the key difference across the organizations he's worked with, where there are some organizations where it just hasn't taken hold well enough so that when a key person moves on, there's this key person risks. So when the L & D leader moves on, the momentum stops as opposed to those organizations where it's really been embedded properly and it's more self-sustaining, which is really the case at Shopify.

Michelle Ockers:

You know what else I really enjoyed about that episode with Katrina? And this was something she specifically requested. She wanted to talk about her personal experience as a dyslexic and why growth mindset was important to her and her realization when she discovered growth mindset. All the shifts she'd made, she realized she had a label for shifts she'd made as an adult learner when she found motivation for personal learning and was able to work through her own personal learning challenges to really find ways to learn truly effectively. And she had asked if she could tell that as part of the story. And I think that is really nice in terms of just positioning the why and how helpful this can be to people who, for various reasons, and it may not be dyslexia, it may be all sorts of reasons, but people who may struggle a little bit with learning and need to think about themselves and their learning capabilities differently. So that was a really beautiful touch that she brought to her episode as well, Amanda.

Amanda Ashby:

Yeah.

Michelle Ockers:

So insights and application, is there anything that you've taken away and you've used, or anything you share often with others out of the episodes this year?

Amanda Ashby:

The two I also share the most is Kristina from Deciem and Tony from Micro-credentials. But I did realize what I was reading back through the books that I now have, it's sitting on my summer holiday reading list. So on that perfect example, Carol Dweck's Mindset. It's been sitting on my reading list for a while, and this was the nudge I needed to do this. I've just ordered Gary Ridge's book, Helping People When at Work, because it's co-authored with Ken Blanchard who... Is there anyone who's never... We've all read The One Minute Manager, it brought back really lovely memories of delivering out some Ken Blanchard training. And I signed up to trendwatching.com. Bee Hepburn from Xero recommended that. And of course Arun Pradhan referenced way back earlier in the year about what he was working on, but modelthinkers.com is now live full of all these wonderful mental models and helping us think differently and better at any excuse to get into Arun's brain.

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Michelle Ockers:

Yes, and there is an episode coming up where Arun Pradhan and Shai Desai join me in January to talk about Model Thinkers. So you can look out for that one as well, Amanda.

Amanda Ashby:

Great. Thank you. I'm excited now. What about you, Michelle? What have you tried to apply?

Michelle Ockers:

So a couple of those ones you talked about. I often share Kristina Tsiriotakis' approach to campaigns. Micro-credentials is a very hot area of interest at the moment, so I often share that with others. A really simple one from Kuva Jacobs, and I think it's episode 65, she and Jason Davey, talking about the work they did with design thinking at Philippine Security Bank. She talked about mindset warmups at the start of working sessions, and in a lot of the workshops I now run, I've introduced mindset warmups just to help people to transition into the space, particularly if I'm asking them to use new collaborative tools, it's a way of helping them to get used to the tools as well, and just to shift some of their thinking. So it's a really small practical example. At a bigger scale, I've picked up some of the approaches from Gareth Killeen, some of the human-centred design approaches, and use them more in my work over the course of this year. So I found that super helpful.

Michelle Ockers:

And there's one other episode that would be remiss of me not to mention because it's rising with a bullet and it won't surprise me a bit if it's pretty soon one of the top three most listened to episodes. It's a very recent one with Sebastian Tindall from Vitality, episode 66, a resource-led learning strategy. It has gotten more comments on LinkedIn, more emails sent to me, commenting around just the calibre of the fresh thinking that Sebastian and his team had to do, because it was clear when you're getting seven days from notification of a new product to it being launched, you cannot do training anymore, and they didn't have a model. They didn't know what they were going to do instead of training. And they figured it out for themselves.

Amanda Ashby:

It is such an impressive story. I think they went from 17 projects to being able to support 83. Like it was quite a gigantic one.

Michelle Ockers:

It is about a six-fold increase in the space of three years and the number of projects that they had to support, really tight timeframes to roll them out. And yet people talk about performance support, but it's like, well, what's the model for how we do performance support or how we lead with performance support rather than it being an add-on or a supplement to something else? So a bigger program that facilitated learning, and it's really attracted a stack of attention, that episode.

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Amanda Ashby:

It's magic. I think he talks about it in there that they had a maximum of 140 minutes of training time a month, and I just think gosh, if you had to be really conscious about we're going to put people through what is the right things, it's a terrific story. It's definitely made me rethink some performance support, ways and objectives and how we really help explain to stakeholders that that is the right way to go forward as well and what that can look like. And I think he shared so much in that episode that you can take away and do some good thinking with.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. And it's kind of a nice complement to Kristina Tsirotakis, although it's a very different context and a very different solution, just that idea of what's blocking our thinking at the moment, and if we need to take a fresh look at things, how can we get some fresh eyes onto things? And perhaps inviting people who don't have a learning and development background, inviting some people from outside of our organization. I'm working with a client at the moment who's looking to set up an advisory board where they invite people from outside of their own organization to be on their advisory board, to bring thinking from other organizations in.

Amanda Ashby:

Oh, I'd love that kind of community knowledge sharing and practice, and just the fresh thinking you can bring in. And that was a good point in Sebastian's, he talked about how he brought in different team members. So all that different thinking and the results you get.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. And while we're talking about community, that's obviously something that comes out in the podcast, is the willingness of learning professionals to talk about their work, the willingness to share and the curiosity to learn from each other. What else do you think just the podcast generally, or the episodes we've had this year reflect about the learning profession, Amanda?

Amanda Ashby:

I think there has never been a more exciting time today in learning. And actually I can say that now at the end of 2020, when we've all gotten through the crazy ones. And I think that the podcast this year particularly told the stories of the leaps that have been made in L&D. I think sometimes we just hear, "We should be doing more. L&D should be doing this." And Michelle you just keep showcasing all these fantastic examples that is happening. And without sharing, we don't know about these. And so we've all got all these buckets of ideas to take from and leverage, and it improves everybody's practices, because there is no one guide you can go to otherwise that says, "How to be a really effective L&D professional." I'm sure someone's now going to send me a link to a book where there is this incurrence to those, but I will refer them back to the podcast.

Amanda Ashby:

So I think there's just enormous opportunity and hearing. I really liked your comment earlier about the language and the time and the changes that you can hear and get vastly different, it's growing year on year. The people are making more business in performance impact and are engaging well with the business and doing the myriad of things that it takes to be a successful L&D professional or team.

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Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. I see lots of signs of maturing. And I know we spoke about this again in episode 50, and are we there yet? How long do we need to keep talking about the same things? But I think we're starting to talk about them in a slightly different way with more examples of what good might look like. The other observation though, is that, and it kind of gets back to where's the body of knowledge? Where's the book that says this is how you do learning and development? Context is so important. And when you just sort of cast your mind across all the different organizations that our guests have come from this year and the situations they faced and the environment they're working in. There's so much variety in terms of where learning and development professionals find themselves and what it might take to deliver a great learning strategy and great solutions to enable learning in the different contexts.

Michelle Ockers:

I sometimes joke about, "Well, we don't have a project management body of knowledge. We don't have the standard discipline." But that's just the nature of the work we do, right? We do have increasingly a level of evidence informed practice, and we have certain people in our profession who I like to call our research translators. So people like Will Thalheimer or Mirjam Neilen, and who do a great job at staying abreast of the academic peer reviewed research and translating that for the rest of us, who don't perhaps have the skills to look at that body of research. But there is no standard way. And increasingly it's about your creativity, your resourcefulness, your understanding of your own business environment. I think the other thing I reflect on is the reality in which we find ourselves in learning and development, and the fact that sometimes things are hard to sustain.

Michelle Ockers:

And I think Denise Meyerson was very courageous in her What Happened Next episode, to come back on and tell the story of a solution which at the time, when she first shared it around customer service training was going brilliantly. But by the time she came back on, she said, "Look, it just wasn't sustainable. It just didn't continue, and here's the reasons why." So there is risk around anything we put out as to whether it's going to endure. The other reflection is we've got two teams whose work we featured back in... I think one of them was 2018, the Bank of New Zealand, and another in 2019 Spark New Zealand. And both of those teams disappeared in restructures. So the work they had done was at risk and never evolved.

Michelle Ockers:

And I think with Bank of New Zealand we talked about agile learning practice and approaches. So I think the work had evolved. But Spark New Zealand, they were doing some really innovative work around performance-based approach. You might remember they even created their own platform because there wasn't a technology out there that could do what they wanted to do in terms of starting with performance. And sometimes there's changes in our environment, changes in our business, changes in our stakeholders. That is the reality that sometimes despite the high-quality work, things can be tenuous.

Amanda Ashby:

I loved that episode. I'm glad you reminded everyone because they were so generous in the resources that they shared. So they'll all be in the show notes for everyone to go back to. And I agree with you in the bravery of the What Happened Next episodes. I love a good sequel, so whether it's good or bad, but I loved the honesty that everyone shared about what did work and what didn't and why. And I agree Denise's story was so brilliant. The examples, the sales increase, the awards they were winning, and then the way it changes. And we've all been through those moments, but I know she would take those learnings and put it to something else. But it's also a good reminder of how we transitioned things well to BAU, so

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it's not just we'll launch another thing and then someone else will figure it out. Often the transition over is where it really makes or breaks. And it's disappointing to hear not everything works through.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. But even in those stories, there's something for us to take away and to continue to improve and get better as a profession. So it's all in the value of showing our work and of keeping it real, which of course has been key tagline and theme for Learning Uncut right from the start. Sometimes those What Happened Next episodes had thrown up some things that turned out differently from what people thought, but in a very positive way. So the story I love to follow is Emma Weber's work with the learning transfer bot, Coach M, and how when she first experimented with it, she just thought, "Well, how could a piece of technology kind of do the job of a human coach?" And how surprised she has been. And it speaks to the value of running experiments and keeping your mind open to trying something different and seeing where it might lead as well.

Amanda Ashby:

And that's a great example, because she talks as well about how I think it was going into six other languages and it's getting rolled out in so many different countries and I've always loved Emma's story where exactly that she was so suspicious to start with and then it's become this amazing model of what's possible with Coach M and the coaching bot, and she's done incredible work.

Michelle Ockers:

She has. So if you were to request a What Happened Next guest next year, Amanda, do you have anyone that you'd like to hear more about their story, about the follow-up?

Amanda Ashby:

That's a great question. I would love a yearly update from Kristina from Deciem, about how it continues to evolve and change and the reflections that she has. And I really like your point before Michelle about how the breadth of industries that you cross. And I don't work in a retail business and I do, I work in a construction business, but from those episodes where you featured those professionals, I've absolutely got takeaways that I can see how to apply. And I think that they ideas that are shared, you can really put your context and application to. So ideally Kristina podcast.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. I will make sure I follow up with Kristina on that. What about topics? Are there any topics you think you'd like to hear more about or topics that haven't been covered much in the podcast that perhaps would be great to get some more episodes on?

Amanda Ashby:

I would really like to hear more around personalization. And so I think there was that real mix around how we're putting people through things at scale. And that was talked about in a few ones, but then how we actually can be leveraging our technology or AI or design to do personalization, I think particularly with large scale programs that is always a tension that you're trying to manage. And I'd love to hear more examples. And I know you did have a great one.

Michelle Ockers:

Henrick Harder and Nick Howe, episode 57 – Personalisation through Adaptive Learning.

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Amanda Ashby:

I thought that was a really interesting story that they shared and how they did it. And I think more particularly as we're all now living in a predominantly digital learning world, how we are all doing that and how it's coming through and what data we're using to influence that is a real interest. And I'm also going to ask as well, I would love to hear more about how people are going on the curation journey, because I feel like we've gone through cycles and I'm absolutely a fan of how you curate learning. And I've been doing a learning program which has been focused on a lot of curation, and it's really highlighted to me about how much you need to get the narrative through, and which parts can you rely on external? Where do you need to put your context in? And I'd love to hear more stories about how people are leveraging curated and third-party content, and winding it through.

Michelle Ockers:

Right. I have some requests from listeners for more stories about leadership, and I don't know that I... I'm struggling to think of an episode specifically dedicated to leadership development, and I think there's been a lot of shift in that during 2020 as well, so I'm looking for some good stories about leadership. And I'd also like to be able to showcase an organization that's done a great job with evaluation of learning.

Amanda Ashby:

Yes, please. I would like both of those. It's funny I talked to one of our vendors a lot about, "How are you doing leadership now? What's everybody doing? How is it being effective?" Because often, not always the case, but often leadership training is associated with, "Going to get you all in a room. It's going to be a good day or two. We're going to give you the secrets to being a good leader before we release you out into the wilderness." I'd love to hear more on evaluation, yes.

Michelle Ockers:

I'm just thinking we have touched on leadership a couple of times. Beth Hall from Cotton On, we talked about the, the leadership development as part of the Cotton On University, COG university. And with Gareth Killeen we talked about the leadership program as part of experience-based digital learning strategy. But yes, it would be great to get more on leadership development. And did you know, Amanda, if people know that they can approach me if they've got an idea or a story that they think might be worth sharing, or if they've heard of someone else, if they want to nominate someone else for me to reach out to. Or they've heard a great speaker at a conference or on a webinar, and they think it's worth me exploring the potential for a story. So I invite people to reach out to me if they've heard of somebody's piece of work or if they've got a piece of work themselves they think might be worth sharing.

Amanda Ashby:

Oh, and please do. If you're listening and think you have a story to share, please reach out. But I love emailing Michelle with, "Could you please have this person." Or, "I love this story." And so I hope that in 2021, we flood her inbox with more suggestions because there are so many great stories out there to share.

Michelle Ockers:

That would be great. That would be great. And I have really at the moment, just the one aspiration for the podcast in 2021, I want to feature a guest from every continent of the world in 2021. So I haven't had anyone on from Africa. I've had no one from South America. I've had very few guests from Asia. I've had the one guest from Europe. So that's one of my goals, is to truly be more representative of the face of learning across the globe, Amanda.

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Amanda Ashby:

Going global.

Michelle Ockers:

Going global. Even more global. So thank you so much for joining me today to reflect on the year that was and for being an ongoing part of Learning Uncut over the years.

Amanda Ashby:

Thanks for catching up, Michelle. It was great to review the fantastic year the podcast has had.

Michelle Ockers:

Thank you. And for listeners, in January, I've got a special treat. It's professional development time in January. So it's that time of year as we look back on the year past, and we look forward to the year ahead, where many of us reflect on what did we learn and what do we want to learn coming up for 2020? So I've got two episodes, five guests across two episodes where I share with them some of the most powerful, professional development approaches that I have found have fuelled my career in development over the past five years.

Michelle Ockers:

So people like Jane Hart, Harold Jarche, Nicole Lam, who uses Working Out Loud. We talk about Working Out Loud circles. I have Arun Pradhan and Shai Desai coming on to talk about model thinking and using models, mental models to improve your cognitive flexibility. And I have Mike Taylor who publishes a newsletter, but he's got incredible personal knowledge management processes himself, and there's much we can learn from him. So tune into those two episodes in January, and then it's back to the regular case studies in late January. Thank you for being one of our listeners, and please share the podcast with others and join in the conversation on LinkedIn with #LearningUncut.



ReThink Learning – A Message from Michelle Ockers

I created Rethink Learning to help learning teams and learning professionals with this challenge. The barriers to learning innovation are lower than ever. Now is the time to

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engage business stakeholders, embed good design practices, work in agile ways and use technology more effectively.

ReThink Learning will accelerate the shift in mindset, skills, practices and tools you need to quickly design and develop effective learning solutions for the virtual environment. You can apply it to your work immediately to redesign of an existing solution or design a new solution as you learn.

For more information on ReThink Learning check out <https://bit.ly/ReThinkLearning>.

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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