

Michelle Ockers:

I'm welcoming back Kristina Tsiriotakis, the Global Director of Learning and Development at Deciem. A little over a year ago, in June 2020, I spoke with Kristina in episode 56 which was called Making Learning Human. In that episode we discussed how she crafted a learning strategy that aligns with the organisational culture and embraces the whole person who turns up to work everyday. Deciem had reimagined content, campaigns and community, leveraging a learning experience platform as the 'water hole' around which people gather.

Kristina is one of the most fascinating guests I've had on the podcast, a sentiment that I know many listeners share. In today's wide-ranging conversation Kristina updates us on learning at Deciem over the past year. A core element is something that Kristina calls human journeys – a wholistic and balanced approach to learning that is aligned with organizational performance and embraces the human. An aspect of our conversation that stood out for me is the fluidity of Kristina's approach – always being in launch mode, using data to guide you to where to put attention to enable learning, and the role of listening and synergies in building a learning organization.

Perhaps something else will stand out for you. The conversation is so rich that I suspect you may want to listen to this episode more than once.

Michelle Ockers:

I'm absolutely thrilled to be welcoming Kristina Tsiriotakis back from Deciem today. Welcome, Kristina.

Kristina Tsiriotakis:

Thank you so much for having me.

Michelle Ockers:

It's an absolute delight. We spoke - about a year ago, your first episode 56 was published at the end of June 2020, and it's early July as we record this, and it was called, Making Learning Human. It was a delightful episode and one of our more popular ones. And I think we're going to continue to explore this idea of making learning human, but perhaps looking at how you've done that a little bit differently over the past 12 months. So perhaps, let's start by talking about what's been happening at Deciem in the past 12 months with the organization in an incredible period of time in human history.

Kristina Tsiriotakis:

Absolutely. Well, so much has been happening within the last year at Deciem. We've really been in hyper-growth. When we spoke last, we had just about 600 employees. And now we've got almost 1,300. So you can imagine just the speed with which we've been growing the organizational goals and all of the changes going on in the world and needing to figure out how to quickly take care of our people within all of

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this change and also realize our business objectives. L&D actually really synergized and created strong partnerships under the people pillar with human resources and with some of the other people-based departments. And collectively, we all put together a program called human journeys. And the idea was to really focus on a holistic approach to performance enablement that looked at business objectives but could align those with development goals and human goals or wellness goals to make sure that we could stay on track with the business but also take care of our people at the same time.

So it's a sort of a three-prong model of starting with organizational objectives, aligning all of people's goals within the organization to what we call the plan or our organizational objectives, which is important because we want people to feel purposeful, to feel really connected, and to understand that every individual person's work contributes to this greater whole that we're all mobilizing in direction together. But then, what I'm really proud of is that we got the sponsorship to layer in what we call development goals. So when you create a business goal, well, how are you going to achieve that? What do you need to learn? How do you need to grow? How do you need to be supported? So we've taught our people managers to have human conversations around development to sit down and say, learning takes time, and it is in practice, and it's continuous.

So let's look quarterly at the area of development that will best support you in your overall goals, whether that's a leadership pillar, a technical skill, or more related to product and brand. And now, let's look at the three E's of learning, the three different ways that learning is actually going to manifest in your day - to - day, and let's create - we've actually used an OKR model. Let's create some quarterly OKRs around your learning. Are you going to learn through formal education? Are you going to learn through new experiences and stretch assignments? Is there coaching, mentoring, or exposure - based conversations that we can help align you with so that you can learn more holistically? And that's been really cool because when we look at the almost 15,000 organizational goals that we have amongst our 1,300 employees, almost I think 44% of them are around development and wellness goals. And wellness goals are around saying, well, it's important to be purposeful and to achieve productivity achievement orientation output are so important.

You've got to learn, and you have to have the space and the intention for that, but also, you've got to stay well and whole and balanced. And so, which dimension might your cup be empty in? Is it a spiritual dimension, the mental, the physical? We've actually taught the eight dimensions of wellness so that our people again could create really simple micro-goals around wellness that we believe really are connected to their holistic development and ultimately connected to organizational performance. And I think one of the coolest things that we've done through having really great senior sponsorship around this is we've published our quarterly results with the entire organization. We've looked at the plan, and we've said "As a whole this is where we're at. We've achieved X amount of our 15 organizational objectives and key results by first quarter, by second quarter." And there's real celebration around it. We have our amazing CEO run live broadcasts on Thrive where she'll share those updates where we'll celebrate those key milestones and stay connected globally to our achievement and our development, our growth holistically as one

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organization. So I'm really quite proud of that and grateful to Deciem for the sponsorship to say we will integrate learning into organizational goals and understand that that's a key dimension of engagement and of performance. It's not just about ROI and some of those traditional measures of success.

Michelle Ockers:

You've given us an amazing overview of the direction you've gone and some of the key initiatives you've undertaken in the past 12 months, Kristina. I'd love to dig into some of those a little more closely. I think for listeners who haven't listened to episode 56 yet, go back and listen to it either now or after you've listened to this episode to round out your understanding of the body of work. I think important to pick up on Kristina. I don't know whether you still consider yourself within Deciem, your team, a relatively new function in learning and development. When we last spoke, you've been there about 14 months. So it's coming up to two and a half years since your role was established. The first L&D role and you've established the function from scratch inside Deciem. How is the fact that you've been able to build a team from scratch, and you've been doing this body of work and shaping it? How is that set you up to be able to undertake things in a different way, do you think as opposed to people who maybe are in organizations where the L&D function has existed for a long time and has done things in a certain way.

Kristina Tsiriotakis:

I think one of the components that's been most central to our integration within the organization our director of HR, Randa, said L&D is like the glue. And I thought that was a really cool comparison because when you're looking to bring something together, you just pick up the glue. You don't think about the glue, but the glue helps hold things together. And when you're done with it, you don't see it anymore. You just see how things are held together or connected. So I think if you're a good learning team, people don't necessarily notice you. You're just kind of everywhere, and you're just - you're always part of the conversation. And when we were quite new, and maybe didn't have that same seat at the table and we were establishing our currency, arguably we are still new. But in that first year especially, I think we took a mindset of continuously trying different things. We have a culture of continuous learning, microlearning.

So we never spent a lot of time planning really large programmatic initiatives and kind of appearing and then disappearing. We've always had a continuous model and a spaced model. And I think that's really important when you're trying to nurture a culture of continuous learning. And we've always taken the approach that communication is learning, talking about learning, teaching growth mindset, teaching people how to recognize learning. We've run tons of campaigns on that to really embed that language because we know a language is culture and creates culture. I think we did a lot of that in year one. And when COVID hit, and I think so many organizations turned to the L&D function as HR, as people leaders rather than spending too much time trying to be pretty about everything, or I'm not mobilizing quickly. We just jump in. I think that's a very Deciem approach. Our founder was like that you say yes, and you figure out a way.

One initiative I'm really proud of is many of our retail teams, the stores were shutting down, and we had two options to either have a lot of employees and people out of

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work or to come up with a way to keep our team working, which they wanted, of course, to be doing and so within five days we put together a program called the Retail Reboot. Just using what we had, being creative. Not worrying about getting it perfect, but the idea was that we would have blended learning experiences, live curated exposure - based challenges, workshops, all gamified. And we actually had our retail team members solve real business problems. We said, well, what we've got this time with you. Let's just try this. Let's jump in, and we'll just - we're building the plane and flying it, and it's okay if it's iterative, and we'll just keep moving quickly. And I think that's so important when you have that opportunity to impact the business. You just figure it out even if it means longer days or taking a leap, and being willing to try and - I think that really is a growth mindset of not being afraid of imperfection, but taking those moments to build those relationships. What ends up happening through that is you built your currency. We had this amazing seven - minute - long thank you video from the retail teams thanking us for this month - long intervention where they felt so included that they actually helped us build programming around onboarding and mentorship. And it was an amazing cross-team collaborative co-created learning experience for them, but it wouldn't have happened if we'd said five days. You've got to be kidding me.

We can't make this happen, and so I think just that willingness to move quickly and to learn as you go is really important. And I think that mindset of believing in synergies when the moment comes to you, just taking that moment, is also really important because it never goes as planned. The timing never works out the way that you think it's going to. But if you just allow - that's actually been my mantra this year. Grace is allowing. I think if you just allow, then really beautiful things can happen, and you end up building so many great relationships and building a learning organization which is what we're all here to do.

Michelle Ockers:

There's a couple of things I'd like to pick up on there because I think they're really great takeaways for listeners of the podcast. And the first is this idea that you just jumped in and tried something. You did an experiment. You didn't worry about making it perfect. And I think a lot of learning teams, particularly in the early part of COVID, had similar experiences where the immediacy required people just to take action and to do things in ways they might not as a learning team normally do them, to take some shortcuts, to not perfect it to not polish so much just to get something out to try it, to see what works to iterate. And I think it would be a great pity if we lost that as we ease out of COVID and some of the immediacy and the time pressure wears off. If we can sustain that, I think that would propel L&D forward in many ways. And the other thing, I loved your glue analogy.

So Josh Bersin, a couple of years ago, well, maybe a bit longer now, maybe around 2016, was talking about the idea of invisible L&D. And if we're doing our job really well, people just won't notice us because learning will just be part of the way the organization works. Now that saying, that phrase, never caught on because it's obviously quite threatening to be invisible in the organization. But I think the analogy, making ourselves the glue of the organization in the way you described it, I think that's a really lovely analogy that people might find they can embrace more completely than the idea of being invisible. So thank you for giving us that analogy, Kristina. I think it works beautifully well. So, where to go with all of this? There's so

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much in there. I think it's one of the things that's really intriguing me is this idea of how do we connect, or have you connected, individual purpose and some of the goals around individual development and wellness into organizational goals? What does that look like? How do you make that connection and ensure that you're getting the leadership team sponsorship that they're seeing the connection?

Kristina Tsiriotakis:

Well, we took a model that - we took an OKR model. so it really started with -

Michelle Ockers:

Sorry, can you explain OKR first because some listeners may not be familiar with that term - OKR.

Kristina Tsiriotakis:

In organizational strategy, it's looking at objectives and key results. And it's a good model for goal setting in an organization because it's inherently agile. And recognizing that this is the year of agility and that businesses and people need to pivot quickly, it's a really relevant model to say this is where we're going as a business, but we recognize that we're in fast - paced changing times. I think a lot of the time, enabling performance can feel really archaic in companies because the goals that you might have set the year prior can expire very quickly, and they can be really pocketed or siloed and not have that bigger holistic picture. And therefore, your individual contribution doesn't really feel connected to the greater work of the organization, which affects pride and connection and cohesion ultimately. And so, we started with this model, and we said we want to make sure that the entire organization has goals that essentially waterfall down or ladder up to these organizational objectives. Some of them are going to be cross-team goals. They're going to be shared, and there's going to be a better understanding of how we work in teams. I think we're no longer in a functional mindset anymore. We're across team and a global mindset now, and that's a really beautiful thing because it just opens up the room, and it creates, again, that holistic sense of purpose.

At Deciem, our purpose is to be a family. So we really think about a global approach to things. Then we thought to ourselves, well, learning has to happen to support all of this. We've got three different learning pillars at Deciem, and we know that different people are going to need to focus on a different pillar at any given moment and to support whatever their unique goals are. And so, what we really want to do is empower our people leaders to have those conversations to allow for individualization and personalization when it comes to their development. When I think about if I were going to the gym and I had a personal trainer, and they gave me a one-size-fits- all exercise routine that didn't fit my current need, my current appetite, my current willingness to commit, different people have different time constraints. And sometimes, you want more formal education. Sometimes you really want a stretch assignment or experience - based learning or to be exposed to different thought leaders.

[So we thought, well, we just want to construct a model that enables this conversation. It's a dialogue. It's a two-way conversation. It's far more micro. This isn't about creating a year-long programmatic development plan that you're going to give up on three weeks in because it's too hard to sustain. So we really just wanted

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to take that micro approach because it's embedded in our performance enablement technology. It's a parallel approach, so your organizational objectives and key results are loaded in, as well as your development goals, as well as your wellness goals. So it's all able to be kind of tracked and updated through technology that you can constantly update where you're at and your progress in terms of what you've committed to. If you're having a busy month and you need to pivot, you're able to change those dates, keep goals going, and if necessary, just like you might take a break from the gym if you're really tired and your muscles hurt one week. I think just having that agility and normalizing the idea of continuous learning over time, that it's not about an end state where we then measure did we see X amount of improvement in this individual? It's actually about, are they in practice all the time? Are they showing up to learn all the time? That's the goal for us.

I think learning time has gotten a little bit of a bad rap and what I sometimes see as a very binary mindset to learning. It's either learning time as a KPI, or it's a behavioral change. When I think most truth lies in an "and also" mindset, which is I think far more abundant where we can say well, there's value in both of those things. And for us, there's great value in somebody showing up. Just like if somebody were to show up to the gym and commit 10 minutes, 15 minutes, a brisk walk, or a fast sprint. They're showing up, and that's really matters to us. Even with myself, I started to meditate this year which has had a huge impact on myself, and I had a real fixed mindset about meditation. I thought I couldn't do it. I'm not going to be Zen enough. Will I be X more Zen? But I just broke it down in a really micro way, and so I'm just going to do this. It doesn't matter what that outcome is. It's just about showing up, even if I'm thinking about washing the dishes the whole time. I'm here, and that counts for something. And it's amazing how if you just keep showing up, the changes do happen over time. You don't necessarily notice them, but they do, and then one day, you blink, and you realize you're just in a different space. And I think at Deciem, we really do understand that is how learning takes shape over time, and to think about it in sort of the before, and after of did we get the outcome. To me, that's actually quite a fixed mentality around what learning really is because most of the things we learn, we should if we're not in practice. And so that - that's been central to nurturing a mindset of continuous learning within our people.

We created a whole toolkit called learn from everywhere, what we taught everybody about social learning, collaborative learning, and self-directed learning, classroom. We wanted them to understand the language of learning; the three Es. We taught them how to select their learning pillar. We taught them about learning and practice, and people loved that we put it into a blended pathways, some digitized, some job aids to give everyone the same vocabulary that I think sometimes we jealously keep a guard. It's like, why doesn't everybody else know about this language that gives them the framework to really take charge of their own learning at any point. And honestly, Michelle, I laugh sometimes. We have this joke that we've created a monster now because the phone doesn't stop ringing. We have team members reaching out. They want us to help them with their development and have conversations, and we get incredible emails. And I told you earlier; we formalized internal comms here under learning.

And so we do continuous surveys with our people. We're looking at NPS and assessing their learning time and the impact. And we've seen the shift in our people,

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and in their engagement and within the organization as a whole to be one year into this holistic approach to development, and to see almost 15,000 goals in our technology that are aligned to the organization, aligned to development and to see people showing up and participating in a culture that as I mentioned to you last year is not compliance-based. Remember, we're a culture of inspirational learning. We don't tell our customers what to buy at Deciem. We don't tell our people what to do. We want them to choose, and it's been very cool to see them continue to choose to invest in themselves and to have the appetite for it.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. I love the way your thoughts just flow and how you tie everything together. I want to come back and just put a couple of little placeholders in some of the things you unpacked then. In terms then of linking individual goals and purpose to organizational goals, it feels like it's both a top-down and a bottom-up process, that you have some organizational goals that are performance goals that get flowed down to people, and that there are potentially some development goals. There might be some specific skills they need to develop to achieve those. But then there's this space, and particularly around personal development and wellness goals for the individual to set those. And there's a sense of if we embrace wellness in our people, if we build wellness, then that allows them to show up and perform well. So they supplement what we might recognize as harder business goals. Have I kind of got the essence of that?

Kristina Tsiriotakis:

So this wasn't just sort of an office - specific initiative, but we're going to be brazen enough to do this across our entire population because everybody needs purpose. And it needs to see how their work is connected. And the next quarter, we linked in those development goals. And so, based on your specific business goals, now, you're going to have what we call a human one-on-one, a human conversation. And we have these one-on-ones weekly or bi-weekly, depending on the business unit. And you're gonna have that conversation that's around coaching and feedback support and motivation and personalize where you need to focus your development, and we taught our people leaders how to host these conversations. We taught our people how to participate in them.

We don't really believe in fracturing like this is what we teach a people manager versus an individual. It's one community, so everybody should have access to that information. And through that, the development goals setting, including the focus on the three different Es could be committed to, and then in these weekly or bi-weekly conversations, that's where the continuous conversation about it happens. Okay, where are we at? How are we doing? What are the barriers? Where are we struggling? Where have we fallen off? How did the learning go? What did you learn? I think it's really about the continuous conversation? It's not about loading a goal into a tech that it doesn't get in the airplay after that, sort of like buying the exercise machine, but then it sits in the corner right, and it collects that. First, it's about continuous conversations, and the wellness goals came in last because we really wanted to phase it at Deciem. We take an iterative and a phased approach to everything because we believe that - that's how you nurture things over time rather than overwhelming people all at once, and how you sustain cultural change and any

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kind of nourishment. It takes time.

So our last phase was to bring in those wellness goals. So there's already been an understanding of business impact, that good feeling that I contributed. I've reset these goals quarterly. I see the impact of my work. It's been communicated across the organization. I now see how my learning and my investment in myself is connected to that, to my performance, and I see that those interconnections. And now, I need to make space for my holistic wellness to think about am I taking a break, am I working nine straight hours, and forgetting to go out and get some vitamin D and energize myself. Am I stretching? We do a ton of wellness interventions. We had a two months of wellness Fridays that we just wrapped up recently where we brought in different guests in the different dimensions of wellness because we think about all of them. We think about financials. I'm a very spiritual person, so spiritual, mental physical, and we want those conversations to happen in the workplace. It's not a nine-to-five. And anything that an individual might be impacted by within their psyche, within their physical being, is gonna affect their ability to learn their inspiration or their motivation, and ultimately, their performance. And if we don't - I don't even like the word performance. It feels very sort of output-based. But if we don't actualize, contribute, create something, we don't feel well. Everybody - we're all here to create and to achieve.

And so we just see those things as one holistic experience just like we see performance, enablement, leadership, and diversity training is one holistic program as well. We look at things really holistically and really look at the interconnections between those things. And on that note, when it comes to the leadership dimension, we've mapped out our continuous learning interventions, whether they be live, whether they be digital, or async. And we've looked at all of that holistically, too, and taught our people how to select those content experiences based on their area of focus across these dimensions. We don't think leadership training sits in one side and diversity training sits in another side, and performance enablement and people leadership sits in a separate area. It's all one big thing. And so I think we have a very - it's a bit of a mosaic, I guess at Deciem. It's a real holistic approach to learning strategy, I think.

Michelle Ockers:

Personalization; you mentioned personalization, and you've talked a lot about continuous learning. I know you have an LXP which you love. You called it the watering hole, the north star in the last conversation we had. There's a lot of focus on personalized learning and personalization in learning and development at the moment, but I think we're all looking to technology to solve the problem of personalization for us. And when we talk about personalization, it's often about using technology to surface needs and feed content to people. But the take you have on it is it's around interaction. It's around continuous conversations. It's around continuous feedback; that goals are set quarterly, and they can be adjusted. So it's very much a human approach to personalization, yet you have an amazing technology platform.

So I think I just wanted to really flag that, but I think sometimes, we've lost our way with what personalization really means, and we've taken the human out of it and tried to outsource personalization to technology. There's a lot of effort when we think about it that needs to go in from the part of managers in particular to achieve that

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kind of continuous conversation, that focus. You talked earlier about rolling out a toolkit, your Learn from Everywhere Toolkit, and I know many other organizations have embarked on campaigns or approaches with the goal of embedding continuous learning. They've produced toolkits, but they've struggled to actually get a shift in behaviors and engage managers. In the learning performance benchmark, which Mind Tools for Business publishes, lack of manager engagement is still the number one challenge that learning and development leaders are reporting. So how do you get from “here's a toolkit, here's a model, if you like, a way of approaching continuous learning that we would encourage you, the manager, to engage with in your people” - How do you actually make that shift from here's the tools, here's the resources to actually making the shift to the managers investing the time, seeing the value of continuous learning, and making it a priority? What's the magic there?

Kristina Tsiriotakis:

I think it's one intervention at a time and continuous follow-up. And when I say we have a culture of continuous learning, I mean continuous. We've had 590 different live interventions within the last year, and many of those were around human journeys. We didn't do a kickoff, and I see this a lot actually when I talk to other L&D leaders that maybe you'll switch the lights on for your program, your initiative. And it's like ta-da, and you've done the big party and sort of like and then what? And actually, there was a question that Thrive had posted on LinkedIn a little while ago about launch strategies. And I forget the question, but my answer was like the launch is never over. It's never over.

And so, when we embarked on human journeys last year, we still have the mindset that we are in launch a year later. And so what that means is we're looking at our data every month. We're reaching out to different people leaders that are struggling, and we're actually booking conversations and saying, talk to us. How can we help you? What do you need? We met with our production team not so long ago, and their challenge, of course, is just access, right? They're on the front lines. It's shift work and COVID times. And we said, well, what would you like us to do? What's the solution? And they asked us to run some interventions on a Saturday. We said okay, what time? And so you're listening to your people, and you're asking them what is the barrier? Is this working? What can we change? It's so collaborative when I say we really have a co-created approach, like we'll shift. You tell us how we can do this better, and we will.

And so, every month, we look at that data. We're on it. I think I've said to you before Thrive is a baby that we see every day, and it's the same with any technology that we use or any program that we run. And we're always looking at those strategies, whether it's with the people leaders of those people leaders. Do I need to first connect with them? Am I sending a message that they should be sending? Do we need to have more unity and be sending this message together? Should we be listening more than talking? I think it's all of those things. And personalization for me also means really looking at the differences in your business units. So for us, it's retail production in our office environment, and they do have very different barriers and very different realities. So we actually created different pods for human journeys, and those pods were based on some of those different barriers.

So how could we slightly customize the experience based on that different pod to

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spread the message in a way that they could - that could be received and that could work. But we're doing this month over month. I mean, we're one year into human journeys, and I can't wait to crunch the annual data. So we can now look at okay, what's next your strategy. How are we going to take this to the next level? I do think the organizational alignment was pivotal, though, to really work with our senior leadership team, our C-Suite, to ask them for that sponsorship to have them show up and give those messages. I mentioned to you; we do things like broadcasts on Thrive. So they might just be quick little messages, continuous messages from our leaders. Not that one email that goes out at the launch, but continuously communicating that message. We're blessed now that we're running internal comps because we're able to keep that communication going, but I think for organizations where those departments are separate, they're like your peanut butter and jelly. You shouldn't know where one ends, and the other begins. You should be best friends to really make sure that messaging is coming through.

Michelle Ockers:

How do you get that level of senior leadership engagement and sponsorship? What have you asked for, and how have you asked for it in terms of leadership engagement?

Kristina Tsiriotakis:

Well, I love to write a good strategy document. I love to present the external context, the internal context. I love data. I'm a bit of a data nerd, and so I'm always collecting it. I'm on top of it. I'm analyzing it. I'm looking at the insights. What's corollary, what can we say is more directly causal, and then presenting our framework. I think, sometimes, it can be hard to articulate your framework. What's my vision? What are the - what are the goals of this? What are the evaluation metrics? What are we trying to achieve? And then, quite frankly, there's that side of what am I asking for? Am I asking for money? Am I asking for - we're asking for time, and we've been really blessed to receive that sponsorship. But for us, one of the ways that we always work, we're as collaborative as we can be with ideas. We really work as a whole in the people team. I have an amazing VP of People who's been absolutely incredible. We work closely with our director of HR. And so we really work as one unit. It's not just can L&D save the day. It's about that teaming mentality.

And then, when we're presenting an idea, we collect a lot of insights from our people. We might do focus groups. We might do surveys. We might do interviews. We're assessing needs, and I think needs assessment is so important to our work and sometimes forgotten. I don't see it come through enough in some of the white papers on L&D. And so we're - there's purpose there. There's rationale. There's logic. I think when we're asking for what we're asking for. And it's always based on our context. Every decision we've ever made for Deciem is for Deciem, and it's not because of what's going on in the rest of the L&D community or what other companies are doing. We pay attention. We listen. We're curious, but then we're making choices for our people, and I think that's a really important thing too. Then you share your idea. Give people time to pre-read so they can sit with it. I think that's something I've learned over time is giving people some space. And then, it's all about having that dialogue and not being afraid. It's hard when you're sometimes working with senior leaders. You can be really intimidated. You can lose your voice. You can feel like I'm supposed to be adapted in this environment. But actually, they've hired you to advise

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and to have the courage to offer counterpoint. And if - and that's psychological safety, and I'm really blessed that we have incredible senior leaders who nurture that environment.

But sometimes, it's just a matter of finding the courage to do that and to say, but actually, have you considered this perspective as well. And also, it's not - again, it's not about that either, or either we do this, or we do that. For me, it's always back to the - and also you make a great point and also what about this? And I think that's sometimes how you can get that buy - in. And if you can't get it across the whole organization, I would encourage people ask to pilot. Do pilot. I think pilots are so important. Or start with a smaller area of business, whether it's one region at one business unit, to get more data to prove that impact. So I think those are some of the things we've done. And then we just showed up everywhere. Any time anybody asked we're like, here we are, and eventually, you just become the glue. I think that you just become part of - it's like Thrive is part of the conversation. There isn't a day that somebody doesn't mention Thrive. And I think little by little, L&D has become - I keep making this joke that if I had a dollar for every time, people mentioned the value of learning now I could retire.

I feel like it enters every conversation. I'm so proud of that every time we welcome a guest in for a diversity training or a leadership training, everybody is so conscious of the value of learning and the importance of placing time on it. And I think we just kept saying it, reminding people. Okay, this campaign didn't go so well. Let's try again. What can we do differently? And you can't quit. If it's not always going to go the way that you want it to, but I think you have to know your truth and know what your purpose is, and what you're trying to achieve and have thick skin because sometimes, it's a timing issue. Sometimes, you have a great idea, but it's just not the right moment. Can you play the long game? Can you sit with it? And can you wait for that opportunity and this synergy? And then when it's there, you're like, all right, now, let's go. That's what I've learned.

Michelle Ockers:

There's some amazing advice in there, and it's a very balanced perspective you bring to the role of learning in an organization. And perhaps, the - and also is part of that because it's about organizational performance, and also embracing the human. That they are not an either/or option, that they sit very comfortably side by side. And as an L&D leader, you're bringing both elements into the conversation around sense of purpose and why we do what we do in learning and development, which I just love. There's this sense of - and I get this from some of the other guests we've had on learning and development about owning your space and recognizing that you are there because you bring certain expertise. And that's what the organization is inviting you to bring and to add value through. It's not a matter of having to feel that you have to prove your worth or that you have to kind of fight for that seat at the table, which is language increasingly that I'm not enjoying or appreciating or thinking is adding any value. It's like just the table is everywhere now, and you can just step forward with some confidence and look to where you can add value.

There is one thing you've talked about a couple of times, which I think again is often discussed, and there's a lot of debate around. And it's this idea of time for learning. How do we create time for learning? It's repeatedly the number one barrier that

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individuals will cite around why they're not doing more learning. I don't have time for it. I'm too busy. Time gets in the way. What does that mean to you at Deciem, time for learning? And what does time for learning look like at Deciem?

Kristina Tsiriotakis:

Well, I think there are two things that I think about a lot. And the first thing is that if we're conscious and intentional, almost every moment of our life can be and is a learning moment. And so, I think there's an opportunity to shift our mindset around how do we get more conscious. I think a lot of humans have become a lot more conscious this year, and when you step into awareness, the world looks different. And suddenly, you're having this conversation with you and I. It's a learning moment for me. I will leave this conversation and think about the experience. And so if we can teach our people to get into that mindset, then learning is always happening, especially if there's reflection - if there's intention and there's reflection and that further application. And that's one of the reasons we really wanted to bring the conversation to experiential learning. And what does that really mean? And how can we recognize that?

But the second piece that I don't think we can throw away is that time scarcity in this COVID world, especially where more work has been piled on most people. There's been more initiatives, more need. We're moving quicker. Some people are racing through the day, and that is where we lose consciousness, right. You're in tunnel vision, you're in maybe crisis mode, and you're unclear. And that means there isn't always an opportunity for that formal development, that opportunity to learn about new ideas, what I would call kind of the - some of the cognitive stuff, those great ideas that you then want to be able to integrate into learning through experience. And when we do need to look at what's happening in an organization. If somebody feels like I put in a 60-hour work week, and I didn't have a moment to show up and hear an incredible guest talk about mental health or have exposure to this incredible storytelling from senior leadership, then I think we have a duty as an organization to ask, well, why not? Are we actually looking at the big picture around somebody's experience? Are we making sure if they're in our case, in production or retail, that they're on the front lines? Do they have a minute to actually get off the floor and dial into a great conversation?

And so, for me, learning time is not just about a vanity metric, and that's another one that I have. I don't think any metrics are in vanity. I think all metrics have value in context. And they're all important in context when we look at the bigger picture, so this kind of canceled throwaway conversation about aspects of learning, canceling classroom. It's all - it's very binary to me, and I think it misses the big picture of the whole. So for me, when we look at learning time at Deciem, we say, okay; well, this is how much time our people in production have versus our people in retail. What we're really looking at is the context, like what is really happening in this environment day-to-day, and what can we do to make sure that those who want it are able to find the time to invest either in a formal or an informal learning intervention? I don't think that means that you're not agile, that you say well, it's this amount of time constantly in this area of the business because any kind of an agile model is going to look at the way that things ebb and flow. But it means that we're paying attention to where there is or really isn't inclusion, and for me, an exclusive environment is one where we

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don't nurture access to all kinds of learning, experiential or more formal.

And so that's where I think it's important, and I just like you read it, you might read an article about is it LMS? Is it LXP? Is it classroom? Is it digital? It's all got value within that bigger picture. So when I hear those kind of binaries, I think I always advocate and protect what I consider to be the underdog. And I start to think, well, hang on a second. There's got to be more to this conversation than just like, well, this is the silver bullet now or out with the old and in with the new. Somebody said to me recently, wow, you have such a modern approach to learning. And I said no, I don't think I do. I think I have a really - it's all ancient wisdom, seeing things holistically. And looking at the whole human, trying to look at the interconnection between things. There's this whole other conversation about like the future skills of work, and I think most of those are the most ancient skills of being human actually. I don't think that there's anything modern or post-modern about them. So I just think we have to look at the whole more than anything.

Michelle Ockers:

And one final question around time. How do you measure learning time? You said you're tracking learning time. Is that through participation in events, consumption of content?

Kristina Tsiriotakis:

Well, we look we certainly look at formal education, and that will be through live interventions, through any kind of digital consumption as well. And that will give us one metric through various spreadsheets. It actually takes a lot of time to track that. And then, in terms of the experiential learning, we assess a lot of that again through one of our technologies that we use, but we don't blend those numbers because if we blended those numbers, then arguably, everybody's learning 40 hours a week.

So we do assess formal education separately, and then within that, we also split what's happening live versus what's happening sort of just in time and slightly more self-directed because again, we want to understand our people's, their appetite at different times. And when we see dips organizationally, we want to ask ourselves are we pushing too much right now, or do we need to pull back, or are there more priorities or bigger changes happening within the business? So it's not really an annual view. We're looking at it weekly. We're looking at it monthly, and we're fracturing it based on the business units and different regions as well so we can derive as many insights as possible to better understand our people.

Michelle Ockers:

So you take a very dynamic approach to what's happening in learning, constantly trying things, watching the data, this idea that you're constantly in launch mode which allows you to be very adapted. I really like that. I have one final question before I ask you whether there's anything else you'd like to share. You've talked a lot about approaches which I think require your learning to be quite responsive and be willing to go out and spend time in the business having conversations with leaders supporting and reacting to what your data is telling you is going on in the business. That takes time and capacity. Can you talk to us a little bit about your learning team, the size of your learning team, and kind of the way you run the learning team to

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make that time and space available to do that important work?

Kristina Tsiriotakis:

Sure, well, we've had a few pivots this year. We formalized internal communication. So we've got our head of internal coms and our associate manager, and they work very closely with two new roles; a head of content and engagement and a head of programming. And they're sort of my triangle, my trinity. And again, we're looking holistically at the intersection between content programming and communication. We've got some specialized roles. So we've got some production - specific L&D team members and then some retail-specific or product-specific. And then we've got a specialized role around human and leadership training as well.

So those are our three learning pillars; product and brand, human leadership, and technical skills. And we want to make sure our team members can specialize that they can spend time in those different areas of the business to constantly be having those conversations and assessing those needs. We're up to 15 now, and actually, one of the things we did this year that I think really helped support the team was we brought in LPI Learn, which was great for our own team. We really think about how are we making sure that their technical skills are still being developed, and we looked at the L&D capability map that they offer and their development goals; their technical goals are really focused on some of those different areas of L&D that we want to make sure we're nurturing their mindset. And whether it's the marketing aspect of L&D strategy, and that's been really impactful. Again, it's about continuous micro and space learning.

So whenever we've got our monthly meet, we roundtable, and everybody shares something that they've learned from LPI Learn that month. And that's - so they're learning from each other. They're learning socially, sharing how they apply that learning. And sometimes, gold is in the details and in the smallest thing. You might hear how your peer applied something, and that one little nugget might stick in a different way. And so, I think it's really important as a learning leader to be thinking about how am I nurturing my team to continue to develop their L&D skills? Am I making sure they're involved in the community? Do they know about wonderful programs like yours where they can listen? Is that a learning goal? That could be a great exposure - based goal is to listen to a few episodes, or you select key episodes related to their particular area of growth. And so, that's something that we spend a lot of time looking at to make sure that, for me, that we're supporting the next generation of L&D leaders. I always say when I've made myself replaceable and insignificant, I've done my job. When I'm obsolete, I've done my job. And so we're always thinking in that mindset, and once it's able to run without you, you can drop the mic. That's something to be proud of, and so that's the goal ultimately.

With all of my love for Deciem, the goal is for me to say, actually, I have nothing else to offer. I gave everything that I had to offer. I think that's probably what keeps me going and keeps me feeling like this isn't work. You just get up every day, and you think how lucky I am to be doing this incredible work, that it's just such a joy and feels like such a gift. I think keeping connected to that keeps your creativity going, and it keeps you in abundance rather than in lack because it's easy to see the barriers that if you stay in the abundance, I think that's where a lot of doors open up and that's where you really start to change the energy in the organization. I often

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pinch myself even to be invited back to speak with you, like what an incredible gift. And I think, well, how did I get so lucky out of all of your amazing guests? And I think it's trying to stay in that energy, that frequency as hippie-ish as it might sound, of that abundance that it just keeps connections forming. And then the next thing you know, you've helped to nurture the kind of organization that you truly believe in, and that really helps people. I think that's a pretty cool thing.

Michelle Ockers:

That is such a lovely place to land this conversation, Kristina. Beautiful wide-ranging conversation. Thank you so much for coming back and sharing with listeners how the world of learning has continued to evolve at Deciem. I mean, there's some truly amazing insights in there. So thank you so much for sharing back into the community today. I Really appreciate it.

Kristina Tsiriotakis:

Thank you so much you.

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1. Download the Story tagger app
2. Create an account using your email address
3. Enter the code MYLDWHY
4. Follow the prompts to record your story.

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About Learning Uncut

Learning Uncut are learning and development consultants that work with learning teams and/or business leaders to accelerate learning transformation. We specialise in supporting organisations to create or update their learning strategy, enhance their learning team's capabilities, align learning to business value, and implement modern learning approaches.

We are highly collaborative and pragmatic. We partner with organisations to align learning to their business needs, unleash continuous learning, and build capability to help them thrive.

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About your host, Michelle Ockers



Michelle is the founder of Learning Uncut. She is an experienced, pragmatic organisational learning strategist, L&D capability builder and modern workplace learning practitioner. She also delivers keynotes, workshops and webinars for learning and broader professional or workforce groups at both public and in-house events.

Michelle received the following prestigious industry awards in 2019:

- Australian Institute of Training and Development Dr Alastair Rylatt Award for L&D *Professional of the Year – for outstanding contribution to the practice of learning and development*
- Internet Time Alliance Jay Cross Memorial Award – *for outstanding contribution to the field of informal learning*



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