

Learning Uncut Episode 96

All In! Oceania Women's Football Development

Emma Evans and Annie Kennedy
Hosted by Michelle Ockers



Michelle Ockers:

This episode was published one week after International Women's Day 2022, so it's fitting that this story is about a capacity building program for women's football in eleven nations across the Pacific. The program is run by Emma Evans, the Oceania Women's Football Manager, who joins us alongside program facilitator, Annie Kennedy from Capability Group. While this development program preceded the Oceania Women's Football Strategy, it's one of a series of initiatives that is giving women more opportunities in the game and is using football as a tool for social change. The program supports Womens Development Officers in each country to develop their leadership and life skills, build their self-confidence and connect with each other, providing support as they grow a local team and build women's participation in football in their country different roles. Along the way participants find their voice and gain a sense of permission to create change. Emma and Annie share excellent tips for those in Learning and Development who would like to increase the social impact of their work.

On another note, have you ever looked at the resources shared in the show notes for each Learning Uncut episode? There are two I strongly recommend to any learning designers and facilitators. The first is a high-level outline of the Capability Group's learning model. The acronym for this model is PEAR – Prepare, Explore, Apply, Reinforce. It's well worth a look. The second is a paper recently published by Nomadic titled *Cohort-based learning: why now?* It contains a series of principles for cohort-based learning through interactions over an extended period of time. While not specifically used to shape the solution discussed today it's an excellent resource to inform the design of effective peer learning and I thought it was worth sharing.

If you find today's episode inspiring and helpful please let others know – let's celebrate and share great work being done in L&D.

Michelle Ockers:

Welcome to the conversation, Emma and Annie.

Emma Evans:

Thank you, Michelle. Thank you for having us. Looking forward to it.

Annie Kennedy:

Yeah, really looking forward to it. Thanks, Michelle.

Michelle Ockers:

Well, it's a wonderful story. It's a very special story and, I think, quite different from probably any of the preceding 95 case studies that we've had on the podcast. So it's nice to bring something fresh, and I think really impactful for our listeners. So Annie, let's start with yourself. You work for Capability Group in New Zealand. Can you give us an introduction to Capability Group, who they are, what they do, and some of the values? Just give us a feel for who Capability Group is.

Annie Kennedy:

Capability Group, the head office is based in Auckland in New Zealand. So we have a team spread around the country, including myself down in the south of New Zealand. We also have an office in Sydney and Singapore as well. And we have people around the world. Actually, we have some of our design teams sitting in California, South Korea, so we are truly exploring this new way of working that we're all going through at the moment, and we're very much about that sort of organizational development consultancy. That's kind of at that intersection of behavioural psychology of learning design, of learning technology, and we're very passionate about creating impactful learning experiences.

We have a number of different focus areas. So we'll have the change management, OD focus area, we'll have the learning and leadership, which is becoming more and more sort of dialing up the digital

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learning capacity as we go more and more into the blended learning space. We have a wonderful design team, graphic design animators, augmented reality designers, and what have you that contribute to that. We have a virtual reality experience that we're able to weave into those offerings as well. And also our partnerships with the likes of Axonify, that sort of learning platform, microlearning reinforcement tool that we can weave into, what our offerings are, and Degreed. We have our sister company, Added Insight, that is that talent assessment capacity as well.

As someone who is working with the organization now for coming up seven years, that's more than twice as long I've been with any organization. It's such an alignment to me with the purpose, which is connecting people and changing lives through learning. I'm so connected to that. That could almost be my individual purpose. And the values that we hold as part of that is 'creative.' For us, we don't want to just do off the shelf, churn them out. We really want to get a feel for where our clients, our partners are at and to create something impactful and meaningful. And something that's going to create a ripple effect. We're very passionate about this kind of notion of a ripple effect beyond the people we're connected to, what's that ripple beyond that, and this case study, I think, is becoming a bit of a poster child for that.

And another value for us is 'human.' We are generally passionate about genuinely connecting with people. We love connecting with not just with clients like Emma, for example, but the people that we take through whatever the experiences are that we're a part of.

And lastly is the 'visionary.' We're just kind of itchy and scratchy, and we're always seeking to find what's an even more impactful way of doing this. What's sitting out there emerging that we can kind of dabble with and test and look for partners in our clients to test with us and grow with us, and some kind of new territories as well. Does that sort of give a bit of a feel?

Michelle Ockers:

I think it gives a great feel of how well-rounded Capability Group is. I was surprised being in Australia, I hadn't heard a Capability Group until mid-last year, and I've been super impressed with the dimensions you bring to the work you do. And kind of the values and sense of spirit, I think that connects really nicely with the work we're going to talk today about, Emma.

We're going into the sports domain today. I think this is the first sports story we have had. So lots of firsts being ticked here. So, Emma, we're talking about football. Would you like to introduce us to how the game of football is structured at a global level and where the organization you work for, Oceania Football, fits into that?

Emma Evans:

Yes, certainly. So FIFA is the world governing body for football, and Oceania Football is one of the six confederations that sits below FIFA. And then, I guess below the confederations there's all of the member associations or countries. So Oceania Football has eleven member associations below us, and our job really is to support the development of football in all of those eleven countries. And that ranges from the high-performance side and providing competitions to help teams qualify for world cups. But it also looks at the grassroots level and how can we grow the game and have a social impact on all of those eleven countries.

So using football as a tool for social change is a really big priority area across the pacific and especially in women's football as well. So it's a really rewarding job, and you can, I guess, work across all of those areas. And the impact you're having goes much beyond the high-performance side in competing at an international level, but you really see that social change happening. And you're improving, I guess, the lives of women across the pacific, and that is such a rewarding space to be in.

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Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, I can imagine, of course. You're the Women's Football Manager. So what does that mean specifically about your role in football in Oceania?

Emma Evans:

So last year, I've been in the role for three years now, and last year was the first time Oceania Football has released a women's football strategy to really help drive change in that space and improve the woman's game across all areas. So my role, in particular, is to oversee that strategy and make sure that we're progressing the woman's game again across all levels, so from a grassroots perspective right through to a high performance. But one of the key focus areas in bringing that strategy to life is to make sure that we have the people on the ground to support that delivery, and that's I guess where the capacity-building program comes into it. You can't do this on your own, and it's really about developing and growing people within each country to help bring our vision to life.

Michelle Ockers:

So you've been in the role three years. From a personal perspective, what does this role mean for you in terms of your own—yeah, we hear a lot these days, and I hate some of the jargon, but we hear a lot about that the need for a great re-engagement because people are getting burnt out or feeling unfulfilled and wanting more out of their roles. In terms of when you think about your personal aspirations, goals, and so on, and what being in this role means for you, do you want to talk a little bit about that from a very personal perspective?

Emma Evans:

Yeah, I think, for me, it's an area that I love to turn up to my job every day, and it's an area that I'm so passionate about. And when I started working in football, I'd been a player for most of my life. And you think what you do is because you're passionate about football and you want to see football improving within your own country but also globally as well. But the more time I think I spend in this space, you realize that it's much more than that. Especially in a male-dominated environment, it really is about trying to give other people opportunities, woman opportunities in the game. And I feel like I have been very supported on my journey by both women and men over the years, but I know that's not everyone's experience.

So, for me, it's it really is about giving other women the opportunities that I've had, and I guess trying to make it easier for the people that come after us as well, and I know that. I guess it's a privileged position to be in where you can have that level of influence, but it's definitely a position that I don't take lightly, and I think it's so rewarding to see the changes, more women engaged in football, and more women going on from football to do incredible things in other areas of the workforce as well. So it's an extremely rewarding job, but it also doesn't feel like a job. It's enjoyable to turn up every day, and I think that's what keeps me going even when there are challenges.

Michelle Ockers:

There's this Japanese concept of Ikigai - what gets us out of bed in the morning - and it feels like you really have found that sweet spot in your role, Emma. It's lovely to hear. So the women's football strategy, is that focused on women playing the game of football, or is it broader than that in terms of women's involvement in the sport, in terms of their involvement in the male leagues as well?

Emma Evans:

Yeah, it covers everything, and actually, the Capability Group played a really big role in helping us bring this to life, especially when we were going through the consultation period with our member associations. And we settled on a title of All In, and where that came from, I guess was this mentality of we don't want to be selling a message and having people buy-in; we want everyone to be all in. And that stretched far beyond just the playing field and what that looks like for women from a participation perspective, but it went the whole way across the game and also the whole way across our organization. So it was really important that we had full engagement from all staff at OFC, but then also all staff within the member association.

So we wanted to know what it was going to take, what woman needed in the game to really progress it from a playing perspective, coaching, refereeing, but then also what we needed a lot of the leaders within the game to offer for the support for doing that and getting the buy-in from the general

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secretaries. we didn't want to just sell the message and convince them that it was the right thing to do. We wanted them to genuinely be a part of it from the beginning and talk to us about what some of their challenges were and what their role was and helping us overcome that as well. So it really does cover every area from participation to visibility to education. We look at the performance side of things, but then also the culture. And when we talk about culture, we're referring to the culture of governance within the game and how can we lead by example as a confederation to then hope that the member associations do the same. And I think all five of those pillars will help us in working towards a much more equal Oceania for everyone; men and women, girls and boys, making sure that the entire region is progressing at the same rate.

Michelle Ockers:

And we're talking about a more equal Oceania, not just within the realm of football, but this is the social impact dimension as well, Emma, I imagine.

Emma Evans:

Yeah, definitely. And I think on a global level, football has such a huge platform and huge reach, and you really can see the difference that it makes to communities. And through so many of our programs, it really is giving kids the opportunity to have this fun, happy and safe space to play in where when things are tough, they do have an outlet or an escape that they can go to as well, but they can also see the opportunity that it provides them later in life. They can use football to get an education. It can provide them a job.

There are so many, I guess, opportunities that come through football, and it really is highlighting that. There also is a lot of work that we do, for example, with Tonga and the tsunami and the volcanic eruption that they had recently through our social responsibility program. We also provide disaster relief programs, and it's how to reconnect and re-engage with communities and give them somewhere where they can come together and just get that community connection back. So I guess the programs, while they are football, the purpose behind each program is so much bigger than that and the impact that can have on connecting people, especially after such disastrous situations. It is really important, and I think we have a big role to play in doing that.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. And Annie, what point did Capability Group get involved? I'm curious about the stakeholder consultation, but I think, Emma, you said something that suggested that perhaps Capability Group supported the consultation phase as well. Is that right, Annie?

Annie Kennedy:

Yeah, and so that was part way through our relationship already that through a design thinking approach, and I wasn't personally involved in that side of it. But yeah, that was quite in-depth. That all in was about giving people a voice and a say, and we supported Emma and her team through that.

Michelle Ockers:

It's such a powerful phrase 'All In,' right. I'm often fascinated with the power of language, and it just captures so much about what you're trying to do and giving people a voice, and it really resonates with that human-centered design approach and strong engagement with the people that—you're doing things with people rather than two or four people which comes from a completely different space. It's not at all patronizing or condescending. Very inclusive, which I can see how important that is for this particular program.

So in terms of the stakeholder consultation, before we start talking about outcomes and design, it sounds like that was a fairly lengthy process. Who were the key stakeholders you needed to get involved, and how did you do that?

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Emma Evans:

Yeah, it was a very lengthy process. It probably took us about a year from start to finish, I guess, of doing the consultation of collating all the findings and the insight that we got from that. The stakeholders, I guess, to begin with, was our own organization. So the Oceania Football Confederation and making sure that, internally, everyone was heard. And that went from being a woman in a male-dominated environment through to our general secretary and president. I'm talking about how what they see the game needs and what their personal experience have been as well.

FIFA played a big role in that, so they have their own women's football strategy, but it was also important that we were feeding into that and connecting with them on their global vision that they have for women's football. And then, of course, the member associations that we work with on a day-to-day basis, everything that this strategy is about is growing football and is creating that social change within their environment. So for us, it was crucial that they really took a lead in and what they needed. And talking about the barriers and some of the challenges that they face and hearing it from their own perspective, and that was from men and women within the organizations themselves, but they also brought in players, coaches, referees, parents, people in the game I guess that don't necessarily have a voice at the highest level. It was a way of kind of flattening that hierarchy if you like and making everyone feel heard.

And where the Capability Group helped with that was we created a workshop which had about 10 questions and the women's development offices in each country then ran this workshop locally within each country. So they took, I guess, a little bit of a step back in there and then, just facilitated the workshop, and it created a great discussion again amongst all of the staff and all of the other people that they brought in to be a part of this process. And I think it they fed off each other, those conversations really went a lot deeper than we ever expected them to. And then following that, it was great to collate all of this information and feedback that we got from so many different people, and really pull out those common themes and what were the barriers and what were some of the solutions to overcoming them. And I think when you bring everyone in like that and make them feel a part of it, they want to see it brought to life in the future.

And the connection that that's created between me and my colleagues within the organization and also the member associations, it's really given women's football more of a voice and a platform to challenge decisions that are made but also to go to people for support when we need it. Whereas in the past, I think women's football has set in isolation, I guess, and really tried to drive things just within our own people stream rather than leaning on colleagues to help when we need it.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. I think what's interesting to hearing you talk about that is it was after the first cohort had been through the capacity building program, and then in a position where they've been starting to facilitate the workshops as per the expectation coming out of the program and in a space of more confidence and capability to be able to hold that space as they sort of went through that task. I think that was kind of an interesting timing as it happened. Not planned, but really well done in the end.

And the other thing I don't think we've really kind of mentioned much is that there's a lot of energy sitting around at the moment because of the world cup that's coming up. Do you want to talk to that a little bit, Emma?

Emma Evans:

Yeah, definitely. So in 2023 the FIFA women's world cup is coming to New Zealand in Australia, and it's the first time we've had the women's world cup or a senior world cup hosted within the region. And it can be hard to explain to people just how big this event is. And hopefully, by that point, we're able to have people come into the country and not so many restrictions for both New Zealand and Australia. But it's provided this real energy and inspiration, I guess, for each of the member associations to really have something to focus on.

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that will go through to a playoff tournament to play off to get into the world cup. And it really is the first time where, I guess, the world cups fell in reach for so many of these member associations. And with all eyes being on the region, it does mean that there is this huge focus on women's football and what can we all do, what is our role to play in making sure that women's football is given every possible opportunity to get to the world stage and really thrive there. So it's a massive opportunity, and the women's development officers are really excited. But it also provides opportunities for them to learn and grow as well as individuals.

There's a huge level of excitement around this at the moment, and it definitely is very timely with the development we're seeing in these individuals, and it hopefully provides them some more opportunities to come over the next couple of years. And programs like this have now formed part of the legacy coming in.

Michelle Ockers:

So let's talk about the program. We've got lots of great context. So one of the initiatives coming out of the strategy was the capacity building program. What were the outcomes that were sought from the program?

Emma Evans:

So I think, for me, it actually came before the strategy, which is interesting. So when I first started in the role, FIFA had a fund, the confederation fund for women's football. And that was there for the confederations to choose how they spent it and what was the most important. And it came a couple of weeks after I was started the job, so I was very new. In the past, that type of fund is often spent on competitions, and we do know that competitions drive development, and it is something for people to aspire to. But what I saw was a lot of men working in the women's game which is great, and we need them and that they play a huge role in giving it the credibility that it deserves, but there wasn't that many women. And the women who were working in the game, they had a lot of challenges, and they did face a lot of barriers to get to where they were, but they were really strong women, they were really driven, and they were really passionate about what they did, but they were so isolated.

So for me, one of the first things I wanted to do and the vision I had, I guess was really to build a team in each of the countries. Ideally, women that young girls could look up to and aspire to be, but also in the Pacific, it's really important to have women in roles of leadership or even in coaching just so parents can feel more comfortable sending their daughters to training as well. And culturally, that's extremely important to have these women leading these programs. So it was to try and get at least one woman's development officer or development manager in each country. And then, from that point, it was to try and grow a team around them, so they weren't left on their own.

Papua New Guinea, for example, has eight million people and one woman leading the game, and it's just impossible to try and drive the change that we want to see if you're there isolated. So how can we help her really get a volunteer base around her initially and really support the growth of the woman's game? And I guess that's where the idea of running an ongoing training program for these women came into it. It wasn't just let's get a group of people together and run some football programs, but how can they be supported, how can they be developed and gain leadership and life skills that will help them in all areas of their life, not just football, but it increases their rate of employability. Yeah, so it was how can we grow the volunteer base, but how can we make sure that women in the game feel supported and hopefully stay in the game in the long run and give back to the game in the years to come.

Michelle Ockers:

So it was about attracting women to the game as well as building their capabilities. So the two in combination were around generating capacity, right?

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Emma Evans:

Very much so, and attracting women to the game in an environment that was supportive, that was accepting, that was safe for them as well was really important for us. And there's so many opportunities, I guess, for women who are confident and don't mind being in a room full of men, but there's not many opportunities to connect with your peers. And for a lot of people, coaching is seen as a as a pathway, and there's a lot of coaching courses, but we know that that's not the only opportunity in football.

So to try and attract women to something that it didn't matter what your skill set was, it didn't matter whether you'd played football previously, but come in, and we'll show you what those avenues are. Is it that your skillset is in administration? Is it that you like taking photos and you can take photos or videos of events, and maybe you can write a story on it, and it was really just trying to find and show women different ways of being engaged in football that they might not have known from the outset?

Michelle Ockers:

So what skills or qualities or mindset shifts, what was really needed to go beyond just those women who were confident enough and able to make their way into the game without the support of the program? What were the shifts that you were most wanting to create to make this a place where more women felt comfortable and confident and attracted and wanted to contribute to?

Emma Evans:

I think the first thing was trying to develop, or not develop but get people to realize what they had to offer. And it was developing that self-confidence and getting them to know their why as well, what did they want to contribute. And sometimes, I think you don't know. You know you have something to offer, but you don't know what exactly that is. And by gaining more confidence in themselves and their own ability and connecting with others around them, I think slowly, they start to open up, and they start to share stories, they start to realize what other opportunities there are for themselves, and that was kind of the base of it. And I think what we've seen, and Annie can talk to this a little bit more, but on day one of these workshops, it really was for the facilitator to create this safe environment where everyone could let their guard down and slowly over the course of the workshop develop that confidence that they could then understand what they have to offer.

Michelle Ockers:

So Annie, let's bring you in. You've been the lead facilitator on the program. Would you like to talk us through the design of the solution, and then we can talk through how some of these things like creating a safe environment, what that looked like, and what you saw as you facilitated? So let's start with the solution design.

Annie Kennedy:

Yeah. Well, so it started off as a face-to-face to a three-day program in Auckland, bringing the Womens Development Officers over. So that was where the design was initially, and it was around creating the outcome of well everything that Emma has just described really. It's tapping into the existing experiences and skills and strengths that participants have with the ability to—with that more awareness and understanding of that to be able to apply that and grow confidence and at the same time benefit football, as Emma was saying.

So it was decided to do a train the trainer and to build the facilitation skills of the Womens Development Officers to be able to run programs in their own regions. It was going to be a three-day workshop, and that three-day workshop was to start off with a very self-leadership focus. And that is thinking about your own - looking at your own life events, looking at a lifestyle wheel and thinking about balance in your own lives, and looking at things like the stories we tell ourselves, that mindset, and how we inhibit ourselves or enable ourselves. And as Emma was saying, connecting to their why. We use values. We kind of explored personal values, and so in that first session, we beefed up an icebreaker exercise at the start, and that was easy for the Women's Development Officers to run and to start to kind of break down sort of any little barriers as you would expect.

And then, as you start to progress in that first day, by the time you're getting to share things like personal values, there's that shared vulnerability that deepens trust, and connections start to kind of evolve. And then in the second day, it was more about what is this leadership thing. Let's understand

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a little bit more about that, and then delving into strength. So really helping to understand what is unique about what I bring and that it may be quite different to what it looks like and sounds like to other people, and actually, that's something I should work with, not hide about.

And so really enabling to sort of truly begin to understand themselves in that context, and then understanding the role of relationships and listening skills and asking questions. And then in the last day with some very practical simple tools around, okay if you're going to be running - which the expectation for them at the end of that, the woman participating in the program that the Women's Development Officers were running is to run a little girl's football festival. And so giving them some simple tools like what's a simple project plan look like, and what do we mean by stakeholders and who might that be, and what do we need to do about that, and what are some of the considerations and then also some simple tools around running effective meetings as well.

And then the expectation is to go off and to run a football festival for girls festival. But throughout the three-day program that these Women Development Officers will be running, they're also putting these women into peer learning groups. So they're getting a deeper dive, higher trust to connect and build relationship but also support each other and hopefully beyond the three days to support each other with the projects that they're going to be going out and putting together. So the theory was to do a train the trainer for the Women's Development Officers in Auckland, but it all kicked in about the time covid started, so we ummed and ahned didn't we Emma, about do we wait and see because it might not last that long. But clearly, luckily, Emma made the call. Let's just go online. So we quickly flipped it onto online.

So I found myself in the early days of us doing lots of these online, it was kind of one of our first ones to adapt to an online Zoom lead environment. So beefing up the Prepare and Apply, using the same peer learning group model that we needed to lean on in between the two hours Zoom workshops representing every each of the three days. It's a big ask to replicate that in a short period of time, so we've beefed up the peer learning group model. And what we do—you want me to keep—I'll just keep talking.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes, keep going. It's fascinating.

Annie Kennedy:

So once we started and I'll keep going on that facilitator experience for me if that's okay.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, please do.

Emma Evans:

I was very conscious of the cultural aspects and me not having that face-to-face informal connection where you get a feel quite quickly. As a facilitator, you read the room, and you make those little conversations, and you get a feel, and I was going in call to a Zoom, and luckily, able to tap into the expertise and knowledge that Emma was able to bring through her experience already in the role. I think we kind of handed over the opening and the closing for the Zooms, didn't we, Emma, with the woman opening would share that responsibility how they chose to open. It would usually be a prayer in closing with a prayer, and I have to say Emma and I both agree our favourite part of the Zooms is the end because they suddenly burst into life, and this is delightful where they have to say goodbye to each person before they get off the call, and we're patiently waiting because we want to debrief and we end up having to kick people off because they won't leave. But it's just so delightful. There's so much love, and there's so much connection, genuine desire to connect.

So we did lots of breakout groups and the Zooms for them to start to kind of share and me traveling around quickly trying to see where people are at. But the peer learning group thing, I think, was really impactful.

Michelle Ockers:

So you think that's the key mechanism, particularly when we talk about these online environments where this whole idea, well, how do I build psychological safety when you're asking people to be very

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vulnerable, people who don't necessarily know each other open up about a lot of personal stuff. Do you think that the peer group is kind of the key to creating that sense of safety or what else is important for a facilitator in the online environment to create that sense of safety and vulnerability?

Annie Kennedy:

I think there's something about how you present yourself as well. So I never present myself as someone who is perfect and got it together. So it was the early days of jumping into online Zoom facilitating. So there was clunkiness at time. I'm still clunky at times, even though I've been in the space for so long.

Michelle Ockers:

Oh Annie, welcome to the human race.

Annie Kennedy:

But I own that clunkiness, and then I'll connect it back into the story in my head when I got that wrong and slipped my mute button on by mistake is that I was going, oh, I'm not good enough or something. I would connect it back to the content and really try and model it as much as possible so that you're not seeing - because especially, what I pick up with this particular cohorts or the both cohorts we're now doing is that level; this is such an element of respect for the role that I play. And to humanize, in some way, I was very conscious right from the start and trying to bring a great dialing up, which kind of is my vibe anyway to dial up the warmth and the connection and have lots of laughs.

We've had so many problems and so traveling around the breakout groups within the Zoom, they blew me away how intimate they became very quickly, and then it just beyond that into the peer learning group scenario where they're running it themselves between the workshops in an informal way. They were able to build on that. And what started to surface was natural leaders. And so we started to notice because, at the same time, I was coaching on a one-on-one with the participants of the program. So I got a deeper connection and relationship and understanding where they're at.

Michelle Ockers:

Can I just ask that one-on-one coaching? Was that part of the original program design when you were doing face-to-face workshops, or was that something that you incorporated when you took it online?

Annie Kennedy:

I'm pretty sure it was initially planned, wasn't it? Oh gosh, that's a really—

Emma Evans:

I don't know, actually.

Michelle Ockers:

I think the whole virtual space; early on, there was this hesitancy around, oh my goodness, we've got to do the face-to-face thing, we've got to figure out how to do it online, but I think it's opened up in many ways, a richer range of opportunities to build connection, to stay with people for longer periods of time, and to help them to apply—and it strikes me that this one-on-one coaching, some of the programs I do, that the one-on-one sessions as well as the group sessions over a longer period of time because you just split sessions over longer. You don't have the travel issue to face.

I think it opens up a lot of opportunity. And some of what you're talking about feels like maybe there were opportunities there that you might not have had in the face-to-face design.

Annie Kennedy:

I think so. I think because it was more of a longitudinal kind of feel to it as well because it wasn't a condensed having them and travel over for a short period of time, so there was the time to apply and reflect in between in that role. So I think you're probably right. Maybe it was the coaching one-on-one came as part of the design; sorry, a bit fuzzy on it. As part of the design in that online conversion, but it made a huge difference in the depth of safety, I think, in terms of the vulnerability where people could go. And also, me starting to understand some of the cultural challenges that some of the women were experiencing; I couldn't even imagine that.

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So getting that context was really valuable, and being able to dial some things up or down to kind of help meet certain needs that I started to understand a little bit more. And so then, they'd have a two-hour Zoom. They have one-on-one coaching with me that have about a 90-minute, two-hour Zoom with their peer learning groups without me in between, and then they'd have another. We'd repeat it two more times. Then, they would go off, and they would run their own workshops in their regions, and the intention was to stay connected to your peer learning groups.

So those natural leaders that popped up in those one-on-one coaching sessions was able to— I think it was like holding up a mirror, wasn't it, Emma? Able to help them to see actually this is what you've got and the difference you're already making in this group of women. And it just unleashed, I think for, didn't it? What's your thoughts, Emma?

Emma Evans:

Yeah, it really did. And you can see it now and the likes of Fiji, Tonga, just how much influence they realize they can have, and I think that's so important. They realize that they can run these programs, they can lead them, and they can bring in a group of women around them and really take control of that situation. And it's brought them this power, I guess, that they know that they can have more influence than they thought they could have originally. And it's such a - as Annie says the connection amongst the Women's Development Officers is so genuine. And there's so much love and laughter, and it's such a positive environment, but I think they now also take that as leaders into their own local workshops and try and have that same connection with the participants.

They know how important it is to have that authentic genuine facilitator that's in front of a group of people who probably are nervous and probably are out of their comfort zone. So I think the connection that has been created at their facilitator level is now definitely passed on to the local level and their workshops, and I hope that it continues. And I think that's often missing and especially in sport or in football in particular. There's often not that genuine collaborative approach, and I think that's what we've really created here. I think it is going outside the grain of how football normally operates where there is quite a hierarchy, and there is one person who's leading and who is in control, whereas we've tried to really level that playing field and ensure that we're all on the same surface. And that's what we've created and what Annie's managed to bring to this group of women.

Annie Kennedy:

And it's interesting, I remember talking to one of the women who said she doesn't feel she has permission to have a voice because of that hierarchy, and so she has so much to contribute, and this has given permission. Through the program it assigns permission to her to step into that space and to really grow, and it's just awesome.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes, this idea of voice, it was something - I take notes as I listened to these conversations - It was something I kind of circled early on when you were talking about the consultation process because that's about voice as well. So are the Women Development Officers then facilitating the same program back in their own nations?

Annie Kennedy:

No, this is what we tweaked this new cohort going through. It was a bit of a big ask looking back that we expected them to go straight into a train the trainer without experiencing that themselves. So running alongside just to give some context, New Zealand football has a woman leadership program that we designed, and I've been having the privilege about to facilitate as well, and Emma's very much involved in that as well. And so, in fact, that's where the connection to us came from was from the first New Zealand football woman and leadership program. A participant reached out to us, and Emma was part of that connection.

And then now we've had a second cohort of women leadership at New Zealand football. Emma and the women's development officer at New Zealand football made the decision to weave them into this new cohort going through this capacity-building program. So now, you've got the New Zealand federations and the member associations in the Pacific getting to know each other in a shared understanding with the desire to grow capacity and confidence and women and girls around them.

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And I think doing that as well also gives them the power to say this element really worked in this way as it is, or actually, we'd like to see more of this particular module and expand on that further. And we've given them the flexibility to do that, and I think it's really important; the culture and the context in each country is so different, so there might be certain topics where they need to spend a bit more time on, and it is really up to them to choose what those three days look like when they're delivering locally, and they can go deeper on some topics if they need to.

Michelle Ockers:

Right, so they can contextualize.

Annie Kennedy:

Yeah.

Michelle Ockers:

And how do they attract women locally to the program? What does that look like, and what support are they given in that regard, Emma?

Emma Evans:

Yeah, so this is a really key part of the program. And I think so often in football when we have advertisements for certain workshops or courses, it's always the same people because it's only ever reaching our football network, our existing network. And so what we've really encouraged them to do is to look beyond that and are they a woman in the community that they might be a stay-at-home mum for example and not have the opportunity to work, but actually, this could provide them with something away from home and something new to try. So it's looking at their own personal networks and are there people that they think could benefit from it. It's knowing the communities and having that connection, so it might be teachers that are wanting to do a little bit extra. It might be people that are involved in football at a club level, but they might have just been dragged in because they're a mum or a daughter of someone, and they don't really have a set role to play.

So it was trying to think differently about how you attract people, it's conversations, it's having flyers up, it's advertising it in their newspaper. So it's I guess that's going back to kind of traditional ways of advertising too, so it's not just sending an email out, but it is how can we get this message or this advertisement out in our local communities. And that will slowly evolve, I think, over time, and they have the ability to run multiple workshops in different locations. And high schools is another one. Can they attract teenage girls to this and slowly develop their leadership skills over time as well. So it really is using every network that they have and trying to get that reach as far and wide as possible.

Michelle Ockers:

So let's talk about impact then. Let's start with impact at an individual level, and you've shared a lovely piece of feedback from, I think, someone from Fiji who's one of the Women's Development Officers. And with permission, I'm just going to read some of that out because I think it summarizes it fantastically.

She says "from the facilitator's point of view, we not only achieve the course objectives, we have unlocked brilliance in the participants. We've empowered them to come out of their comfort zone. The stories shared ranged from emotional ones, some full of laughter, human interest stories, and some stories I haven't heard before from the same people I played work and socialised with for years. We see shy people open up and share their views, present in front of other participants, able to work with other participants whom they haven't worked with before." It goes to voice and confidence and connection. You chose to share that particular piece of feedback with me. What is it about that represents to you, Annie, the impact you saw this happening on the individual?

Annie Kennedy:

I just feel all emotional just listening to you read it out again. I just think it's unlocking something in individuals. And it's not just those individuals, the participants. But can you imagine how the Woman Development Officers and the team that were facilitating that what's been unlocked and seen what they've been able to create through the environment they've created as they've guided these young women? So there's so many levels to what's been unlocked here. And then if you've got these women and girls who are starting to recognize the potential and the strengths and what's already existing in

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them, and how we're giving them permission to step out and actually make something with that to be their authentic selves and see what the opportunities are and how football becomes a vehicle for that.

I don't know. I just think it's that I said right at the very beginning this program, for me, is like the poster child for the Capability Group where we talk about connecting people and changing lives and our desire to create ripple effects beyond just a project. I feel like, can you imagine the ripple effects when someone's able to feel like that. And the shifts just in the way they'll be interacting with people in the days maybe the weeks even hopefully the months beyond that. It's just pretty cool. Emma and I get lots of emotional moments.

Emma Evans:

Too many.

Michelle Ockers:

That's because this is making a difference in the lives of individuals. And I imagine Emma; there's an impact you're seeing at a team or sport participation or club level as well as at potentially a societal level. What observations do you have about that bigger impact in the sport and your strategy goals?

Emma Evans:

One of our key goals and the strategy is to have two teams at the 2027 women's world cup. And part of that is making sure that we have the infrastructure and the human resource in place to achieve that. And we're seeing more women's club teams pop up. We're seeing more welcoming and open environments. We're seeing national teams in the past they would go into camp just before a tournament. So the team might get a week together before they're preparing for an international tournament.

Now, we're seeing year-long programs develop, and the Womens Development Office is playing a key role in driving that. Some of them are coaching. Some of them are just the driving force behind it and bringing everyone together, and I guess making sure that things are happening as they were said they would happen through the strategy. So the opportunity that's there now in trying to get more opportunities for equal playing time, equal training times, making sure that women have access to the same venues that the men have access and they're not training in a quarter of a pitch somewhere, that they're actually getting the same facilities to train and play on as the men do.

And as Annie said, giving these women permission really to step into this space and fight for what's right and fight for these opportunities and it's enabled them not only to facilitate competitions or workshops for women, but it's really given them the courage to step into a role much bigger than that and that covers all areas of opportunity for a woman, and they can go to their general secretaries and have these conversations and ask for more, and I think that's really important, and something that I didn't think would be possible in such a short space of time.

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So that, as Annie said, that ripple effect it's not just upskilling people, but it's going into seeing more community programs run, more national leagues run, more opportunities for national team players. And it's become bigger than I thought it would. I thought it would take much longer to get to this point, but again, it comes back to that all mentality and the general secretaries and the presidents and the clubs and the member associations have all played a role in agreeing to this strategy and to this vision for women's football. And therefore, we all have a responsibility to bring it to life, and it's great to see everyone really stepping up to do that.

Annie Kennedy:

We often talk about, Emma, don't we when we look back and go, do you remember the very beginning when we quickly went let's go online and what that's going to be? And Emma literally had to send laptops and headphones out to the islands to enable these women to be able to get onto Zoom. And then we'd have women sitting in a—I remember someone sending a message to me and chat once saying, Annie, I'm sitting in a corrugated iron like just a little cover outside, and there's a big storm, and there's lightning, and I'm really scared for my life. Is it all right if I sign off now? And just that initial, and no skills to be able to sitting on the laptop and using anything like Zoom to now, we just see just what they're doing in their own space with—

Michelle Ockers:

Incredible reach and impact. So let's look at tips. We always like to finish with some tips. So today, I'm inviting you to share some tips for those in learning and development who would like to do more for their work to have social impact, which is becoming increasingly important that organizations—there's an expectation that organizations will play a part socially, will exercise social responsibility. So perhaps if we start with you, Annie, as a facilitator in a program that is having deep social impact, what tips or suggestions do you have for those in L&D who want to do more to create social impact?

Annie Kennedy:

I think it's making the time to understand the context. I think I was the way that we created the design that enabled me to have those one-on-one conversations where I was able to get a deeper personal vulnerable true understanding of some of the challenges in someone's life that painted a picture for me that I don't know how else I would have had that understanding that it enables me to be sensitive to that or enable things that I hadn't thought about before as you kind of weight various aspects of the program. So really making the time to understand, I think, a context that's just so different to mine, so, so different. That would be a big one.

And I think being open to the learning that you receive as you create—it's great to sit in Auckland and make this big design. Then as we through those connections, whether it's in the groups or whether it's on one-on-one or through—and getting to know Emma in the team more and more, it's been willing to work in true partnership with Emma, and I and the rest of Capability Group have a really strong high trust partnership. We're able to constantly communicate and go as we're understanding this more and as these things are surfacing and showing us like we've got natural leaders here or we've got these other challenges here, that we're able to together just react and just test and explore and not fear. We have to be rigid, and this is what we said we're going to do.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, thank you. So the flexibility in the partnership is important. So what would you add to that, Emma, in terms of tips for doing something like this, that's going to create social impact?

Emma Evans:

I think it's just echoing Annie's words around understanding the culture and the context of the community or the group that you're working with or the organization you're working with to create a safe and accessible environment. And if you don't understand the needs of the participants or what their current reality is, we can make assumptions, but the impact might not be as big as it could be. So, where we've really seen the most success is understanding our people, understanding the reality, and continuing to, I guess, have the courage to evolve the program as it goes.

So, where we started from, we could continue to roll out that program. But to ensure that we're having the impact we can, we have to adapt, and we have to listen to feedback from the participants. And that's been crucial in getting to where we are today. So for me, it really is having the courage to adapt,

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the courage to be flexible, and the courage to trust people and hear what they have to say; we don't know everything. And even though we're here to lead and to facilitate these programs, we have to hear what the participants have to say. And that's where the most value is going to be seen.

Michelle Ockers:

Thank you so much, Emma and Annie, for joining us for this conversation for sharing this marvellous piece of work that's been underway to transform women's football and Oceania.

Emma Evans:

Thank you so much. It's been a huge pleasure to talk to you, and just yeah, thank you for making the time to understand it and share it.

Michelle Ockers:

I'm sure our listeners will get a lot out of it.

Annie Kennedy:

Yeah, thank you, Michelle. It's fantastic, and it's great to have a platform like this to share what is happening in the world of sport as well.

Michelle Ockers:

Fantastic, thank you.

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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 experience, 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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