

Learning Uncut Episode 74
L&D Sentiment - Stories worth a listen - Donald H Taylor
Hosted by Michelle Ockers



Michelle Ockers:

Since 2014 Donald H Taylor has run an annual one question survey to tap into the sentiment of L&D professionals around the globe. In late 2020 over 3,100 people from 95 countries answered Don's question "What will be hot in L&D in 2021." Don joins me to explore what the results might say about the demands of the pandemic on L&D, and where we are placing our attention. No need for a spoiler alert as I'm not going to tell you what the answer is. I'll leave that to Don.

In addition to discussing the fascinating response to this survey and sharing ideas about what it all means for L&D, we discuss how a topic gets onto the list of options for respondents to choose from. I give Don a couple of ideas for next year's survey based on what the Learning Uncut data tells me about the stories that capture the interest of you, the Learning Uncut listeners.

You can download the Global Sentiment Survey report using a link in the show notes. I've also included a resource suggesting two to three Learning Uncut episodes you could listen to if you'd like to explore some real case studies relevant to each of the 15 topics on Don's sentiment survey.

Many of you will already be familiar with Don who is a recognised commentator and organiser in the fields of workplace learning and learning technologies. If you have met Don, attended one of his webinars or workshops, heard him speak elsewhere or greet a speaker on a conference stage with a rousing "Hurrah" you will know that he is passionately committed to helping develop the learning and development profession. He is also chaired the Learning Technologies Conference since 2000. If you're curious about what Don thinks makes a good story for Learning Uncut – as well as what he looks for in a conference presentation – listen all the way to the end of the episode.

Michelle Ockers:

Welcome Don, what a delight to be having this conversation with you.

Donald H Taylor:

Great to be here Michelle, as always.

Michelle Ockers:

Always a pleasure to talk. So Don, tonight we're talking about the Global Sentiment Survey. And I do say tonight, it's my night, it's your morning. From opposite sides of the globe. We're talking about the Global Sentiment Survey and I've been following the survey certainly over the last four or five years, of course, it started in 2014. And it's always interesting and I think this year is particularly fascinating due to the impact of the pandemic of course. So some of our listeners may not be familiar with the Global Sentiment Survey or the GSS as we call it for short. So can you start by telling us what it is?

Donald H Taylor:

Absolutely, Michelle. So it's an attempt to take the pulse of the learning and development profession internationally. To find out what people are interested in, what's on their mind. So it's a deliberately very, very short survey which people can answer in less than a minute, which about half the respondents do. And it asks one question, what will be hot in workplace

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learning in this case, in 2021? The following year. And people are invited to choose 3 options from a list of 15. And they can also add another option as well, if they want to. And that's it.

Donald H Taylor:

This year it was the eighth year, as you say. We had 3,114 people replying from 95 countries. So it is very widely spread but 91% of those people come from six regions. North America, South America, UK, Europe, India, and Australia and New Zealand. So it's global but concentrated in those areas. There's a lot more you can say about it once you start unpacking what the answers mean to that one very simple question, what would be hot in workplace L&D in 2021?

Michelle Ockers:

So it is very simple and you actually don't define the question or define the list of options available to people to pick from. What are the pros and cons of that Don? Why do you do it that way and what are the pros and cons?

Donald H Taylor:

It's two very good reasons for doing it that way and there are lots of caveats that we have to then put around it. So the most obvious reasons for doing it is, you can define as much as you like but you have no guarantee people are going to read the definitions. So if you go out there with a list of definitions, this is what we mean by these various things. I am certain that a substantial number of people, possibly the majority, will not read the definitions. And you then labour under the illusion of certainty. I know what these people mean, no you don't. They could be answering for any reason at all. So that's one very good reason and I've seen that happen.

Donald H Taylor:

The other reason is that I don't want people to get bogged down in thinking about things too much. Sounds a bit strange but there are lots of surveys that ask people, what are your plans for this year? What percentage of budget will you spend here and here and here? I just want the quick gut reaction. Yeah, I look at that list and these things jump out. And that's what I want from people. For various reasons but the key reason is that the aim of the survey is to try to establish what the people are thinking about that's hot now. Because some of those things, not all of them, but a proportion of those things will become mainstream three, four, five years down the line. And that's what I'm interested in doing.

Donald H Taylor:

But look, second part of your question, what are the caveats around it? There's a whole bunch of caveats that we have to be cautious of and in fact, I devote a whole page in the report to the caveats around it. For example, so first caveat is, I don't know who's responding to this survey. It could be that you've got a butcher from down the road who's replying to it. I think it's unlikely, but it's possible. It could be that we've got people replying... This is quite an important caveat. We've got people replying who are self-selecting because we put out invitations via social media, we put out invitations via email. And so people choose whether to respond or not. So the people who self-select to respond are certainly more technically focused than most other people because they have access to those things in the first place. Secondly they are people who are naturally excited by these things so they're almost certainly people who like technology and like new things and who are technologically adept. So that automatically skews it. On the other hand to skews it in the

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way that I'm interested in, which is the people who are the innovator/early adopter part of the innovation curve.

Donald H Taylor:

And there are other caveats as well that we should probably bear in mind. One important one is when I look at year-on-year comparisons between regions or countries, I can't guarantee it's the same people voting. So if a big thing swings one year, is that just because I got a different bunch of people voting? Or is it the same bunch of people changing their minds? On the other hand, I think it's worthwhile having these caveats because what I'm interested in is, well, 3,000 people are saying internationally about something. I think over time and with enough big numbers, you do see trends coming through which are consistent and those are the trends which I'm interested in. And really, what this provides me with and the people who read it, is a chance to sit back and say, "Well, that's strange. I didn't really predict that. Why is that happening?" It's conversation starter rather than a collection of answers.

Michelle Ockers:

And as we'll talk about soon there was a lot to sit up and look at and go, "That is strange. What's going on there this year?" So we're going to get into that very shortly. So the surveys been going since 2014, so that makes it the eighth year is it, this year?

Donald H Taylor:

Eighth year this year, yeah.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. So why did you start the survey? What was it that sort of aroused your curiosity or that you thought there'd be some benefit in this?

Donald H Taylor:

I had done a number of surveys before this where I asked people the question about, what are you planning to do next year in learning development? And I was very, not exactly depressed, but I was a bit put out with if you ask L&D people, what are you going to do next year? And give them a list of things, it appears that L&D people are going to do more of everything. And it's very indiscriminate. So I wanted to give people a list of things to choose from and I wanted to make it explicitly about gut reaction rather than about a spurious idea of planning. Which was in fact just a reflection of gut reaction.

Donald H Taylor:

So when you ask people, what are you going to do more of? And people say, "Well, I'm going to do more of everything." It just means, I find all these things exciting. So I thought I'd strip away the veneer of planning and budgetary allocation and say, "Let's be honest, what excites you? What do you think is hot?" So that's where it came from, was a dissatisfaction with existing surveys that I had done, not other people. And I wanted to just get underneath

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that and say, "Well, let's be honest, what's on your mind right now?" And when you look at what's on people's minds, that does tell you quite a lot.

Michelle Ockers:

So even with the caveats that you've placed on it, it still serves a purpose then?

Donald H Taylor:

Well, I hope so. Lots of people download it, lots of people listen to the webinars. And if it doesn't serve a purpose then I'm perfectly fine for people to say that. And I always say in the report and everywhere else, "Look, you decide. You decide how much you can trust this information." I present it to you as is, with my interpretation of it. But look, it's entirely your choice what you think of it.

Michelle Ockers:

It's nothing else, if not completely honest. In terms of the transparency, right? What's that saying about statistics, lies and damn lies? Do you know the saying?

Donald H Taylor:

That's right. Something like that. Yes. Lies, damn lies, and statistics. It's Disraeli, originally.

Michelle Ockers:

That's it. Yes. But it's completely transparent there. Speaking of being completely transparent, something that always fascinates me about this survey, so you provide a list of 15 options for people to pick from. You say, "Pick three." And then there's another other category. How is the decision made as to what goes on that list of options?

Donald H Taylor:

Well, it's me. I spend my year on Twitter and LinkedIn. I'm chatting with people and what have you. And I think, "Should I include something or not." And initially it was a bit sort of finger in the air, I'll just pick something out. Over time, I've become much more conscious about what I'm trying to include and not include. So if something is declining over the period of the table, then it's quite interesting to see what's happening to it. But at some point if it hits the bottom and stays there you've got to take it off.

Michelle Ockers:

I think that's the easier decision though, right? As to what to take off if it's kind of going down?

Donald H Taylor:

Well, it is. Yeah. But at the same time I do want to make sure I give things a chance to bounce back. So MOOCs for example, I could not understand what-

Michelle Ockers:

Was 2012 supposed to be the year of the MOOC? Was it that long ago?

Donald H Taylor:

Well, okay. But a steady decline, okay? So MOOCs were, I think I included them in 2015. And they came down and down. They hit the bottom of the table in 2017. And I thought, "I don't understand it. You've got this vast resource of free material available, why is it at the bottom of the table?" And so I kept it on, and next year it was bottom of the table again. So

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this year I've just said, "Look, it's coming down. I don't care how much I love it, it's coming off." Unfortunately developing the L&D function, which is something very close to my heart, as you know Michelle. The idea we develop ourselves. That was second from the bottom just above other in 2019, so I had to take that off. Video, well video was at the bottom just above other last year and that came off because it was number five on the table in 2014. But its time had gone, it had been established, fine. That's a nice little story that, from very high ranking to bottom table, I can take it off. All right.

Donald H Taylor:

So to come back to answer your question, yeah Don but, how do things get on to the list? I have to be very careful because if something is too vague and general it's always going to be a catch-all for people. And I realize that's been a bit of what's happened with collaboration and personalization, which have dominated the table for about five or six years. So I was thinking of adding learning in the flow of work two years ago. And I decided against it because I thought, "Well, it's just too general." It would rise up the table and it will float around near the top of the table without it really being specific enough. So I want things that are reasonably specific.

Donald H Taylor:

Having said that, this year, I thought, "Well, reskilling and upskilling is something lot of people are talking about. It's been around for a while. I don't think it's a flash in the pan but it's a quite specific thing. I'll include that this year." And of course, completely against my expectations, which shows how much I know about things. It absolutely dominated the table at the top of it across every category you can think of, just about. So it may well be around for a while, but I don't think it will be actually. I think for a couple of good reasons it will start dropping down the table. But anyway. So my thinking is I try to find something which is quite specific, which is reasonably hot and interesting for people, and which has a chance of going up and down. So it's going to reflect what people are thinking, but also, has a chance of then being put to one side as other things become more important.

Donald H Taylor:

I get a lot of people saying, "Don, the first five things on this list is really about," and then you can insert whatever word you want. So it's like a Rorschach test for peoples presumptions about L&D. "I look at these coffee granules and I see this," or "I look at these tea leaves and I see that." It's bizarre. So people will always find the patterns they want to find. And people will always say, "Ha, Don. Why isn't so and so included?" And I suspect Michelle, you're about to ask me why a list of things aren't included. Is that right?

Michelle Ockers:

I do have a couple based on what gets downloaded on Learning Uncut. But before we move on to my suggestions, that you may want to consider for next year. One of the things that you just said there about topics moving off the list and some of them moving off the list. And

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you used the phrase, "Well, other things become more important." It's not necessarily that they become less important the things that move off the list is it?

Donald H Taylor:

No, true.

Michelle Ockers:

It may be that they're just more established and more mainstream.

Donald H Taylor:

Well, absolutely. And thank you for making that point because when things come down the table there are a few reasons for it. The two main reasons are either it becomes established, it's not hot anymore. Because hey, mobile learning is number one-

Michelle Ockers:

We're doing it.

Donald H Taylor:

Yeah. Number one in 2014 was mobile learning, mobile delivery. That's just not hot anymore because we do it. Whereas, yes, there are other things which I call wallflowers and curation is one of these. Which comes to the dance but never really dances. It's always of interest to some people but it never gets into the mainstream. And there are reasons which we can discuss around that. And so again, the data is there and what's really interesting is the interpretation of the questions which it forces us to ask.

Michelle Ockers:

So if there were two that I would suggest you think about for next year, based on what gets listened to on Learning Uncut. And my sense of we're not there yet, they're not mainstream yet. Although one of them perhaps. When I looked at-

Donald H Taylor:

Sorry. And that's a good point, Michelle. Yeah. It shouldn't be mainstream. If it's mainstream, well, it's a bit dull. Let's choose things that are a bit more leading edge. Okay, sorry. Go ahead.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. So the first one is human centred design.

Donald H Taylor:

Right. I like that.

Michelle Ockers:

Whenever there's a conversation about human centred design it gets more downloads. And there have been a couple that have specifically been about human centred design approaches that have kind of been in my top 10 most downloaded for over a year now. So that would be my first suggestion. I remember seeing something, Neil Von Heupt is an Australian L&D practitioner and long-time listener of Learning Uncut. And I remember him

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saying on Twitter once saying, "When did learning design become not human centred? Why is there this resurgence?" So that could be interesting to see if people go for that.

Michelle Ockers:

The other one, and I think it's actually very topical given the pace we've had to learn to move at during the pandemic, is Agile ways of working. And I've got a couple of episodes around agile ways of working which I'm going to pop a little bit of a matrix in the show notes for listeners Don. Where I pick maybe three episodes against each of the items on the list this year.

Donald H Taylor:

What a great idea.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. To say, here's three stories that illustrate an approach to, for instance, mobile learning, as an example, which is still on the list. But yeah. Agile ways of working. I think that's becoming increasingly important and I'm aware of more teams, certainly that I've had contact with. Where they're experimenting more with agile, getting a lot more serious about adopting agile ways of working within the learning and development team itself.

Donald H Taylor:

Okay. So this is Agile ways of L&D working?

Michelle Ockers:

That's right. Yeah. Not supporting the workforce to work in Agile ways but the way we work, adopting Agile practices.

Donald H Taylor:

I think there's something there in both of those, I really do.

Michelle Ockers:

Well you have a think about that. We'll go out maybe to the Learning Uncut listeners before you put your next list together. So watch out everybody on Twitter and LinkedIn. I'll come out and poll and see if we can persuade Don here. So Don, enough about the methodology. Although, I think something that will come up in the flow of the conversation is about this group A, group B distinction. By the way, of course, you produce a very interesting and quite comprehensive report which people can download. We'll put the link in the show notes.

Donald H Taylor:

Thank you.

Michelle Ockers:

So you can go and please take a look for yourself because it really will get you thinking and start some conversations. In terms of scene setting you've got four key takeaways this year. Do you want to walk us through those takeaways at a high level and perhaps discuss how

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you think COVID might have impacted what people are paying attention to or what people think they'll be paying attention to in the coming year?

Donald H Taylor:

Yeah. There's quite a lot there actually. Do you want to...

Michelle Ockers:

I'm thinking, you had the four key takeaways around-

Donald H Taylor:

Let's deal with the four key takeaways first. All right?

Michelle Ockers:

Yes. Let's do that. High level.

Donald H Taylor:

And then remind me about the next question

Michelle Ockers:

All right.

Donald H Taylor:

So four key takeaways. The first one is that reskilling and upskilling is number one this year. And it's number one in the most comprehensive fashion I've ever seen. Number one, on this list, for a long while and perhaps possibly ever. So firstly it's 13% of the votes overall. Of course, these 3,100 people. Which is very unusual. As I've increased the scope of it, the size of it, the number of votes that the number one on the list has accumulated has fallen steadily over the years. So the last time we had 13% was back in 2016. I asked an additional optional question this year which, where do you describe yourself as working? And 89% of people answered that one. And in each of the five groups, which is consultant freelancer, L&D professional in the workplace, vendor, education or other. In each of those reskilling and upskilling was number one.

Donald H Taylor:

In each of the six regions it was number one, apart from South America which is the smallest of all of them. So that could be skewed by sampling errors. So reskilling, upskilling, utterly not to my expectation, jumped in at number one and dominates it. And that throws the rest of the table out, which makes it very interesting. But the key question for me is, why was it number one? Well, let's go through the other three things. Then perhaps if you want to we can come back and look at reskilling.

Donald H Taylor:

Yeah. Second one was collaboration rebounds, which I'd love to know your story on this because you listen to people all the time talking about stuff. About their real stories of real success. If you look at the table that we had this year, we had everything moved down because reskilling sucked up all these votes and everything else moved down in comparison with last year. Apart from collaborative and social learning which actually bounced back. It was 9.4% this year, it was 8.3% last year. So it was a big resurgence especially given the dominance of reskilling and upskilling at the top. Why is that? Michelle, let's just put a place

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marker there. This is the second of four things. Why do you think that is? Because you've seen it happen in the people you talk to?

Michelle Ockers:

I've got a lot of stories. When I looked at the list, your GSS what's hot list for this year. And I sort of cross referenced to the Learning Uncut stories. I think I had more stories about social and collaborative learning than about anything else.

Donald H Taylor:

Interesting.

Michelle Ockers:

Which is really interesting, right? I think maybe because of the shift in just remote working and everyone getting on the technology, it's not as hard anymore when you're relying on technology to be part of your social and collaborative learning strategy that people have got. Like the use cases, right? People were already there so it becomes easier, there's less resistance. People are more likely to get onboard with social and collaborative learning approaches.

Donald H Taylor:

You know what? I think you've described that really well, far better than I have. I mean, my view has been slightly fuzzier around it. I've just said, "Look, last year people moved from collaborative and social learning being a theoretical idea to being something practical that was happening. Because we saw people using all these tools, Zoom, Yammer, Slack, Teams. To collaborate and to learn from each other." But I think you're right, I think the initial resistance that people might either have expected or experienced. Because they might have expected it, it might not have materialized. I think that resistance simply wasn't there because we just had to get on and do it. So I think that it's fascinating that your case studies back up that gut feeling we had.

Michelle Ockers:

It's a change management issue. The friction of the change management has gone away. So in episode 67, which is called, Work, Connect and Learn: A Collaborative Approach. That was actually my own story I told in conjunction with Helen Blunden. Of some work we did in 2014 at Coca-Cola Amatil, which was a collaborative learning approach starting up some strategic communities of practice, starting with the maintenance and engineering community at Coca-Cola Amatil. And it probably took eight weeks to get the national engineering manager onboard and get his head around giving it a try. So it takes a bit of effort. And then the effort it takes to sustain it.

Michelle Ockers:

But there's another really great story which I direct everyone to who's listening. About how you can actually make social and collaborative learning the heart of your capability strategy. Not just an add on, not just something you do now and then. But Arup, who are a global engineering consulting, we had Kim Sherwin on in episode 24. So that was one of the episodes in the first year of Learning Uncut. So it's over three years old this episode. Building Capability with Communities of Practice. Arup use a skills networks which are in effect communities at practice, at the very heart of their workforce capability strategy. And the L&D team actually support the skills networks who take ownership of capability build across the organization. So I think there's plenty of precedence. There's lots of other stories but it does take some onboarding of your stake holders to get their heads around it as a way of working. But I think now that resistance has really lowered as have the technological

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barriers to doing something like this. So I think we're going to see more practical adoptions you say, of collaborative learning approaches.

Donald H Taylor:

Absolutely. I think it's important to notice this is not an overnight success. I mean, Jay Cross wrote his book *Informal Learning* in 2006. Which really sparked the whole interest that you didn't just learn from courses. And I think for about 10 years it was then a theoretical exercise. I noted that in 2016, votes for collaborative learning started reducing on the table. That's when it had 13%. And it reduced each year, quite steadily. Although, it was always in the top three or the top four. And what was happening over that period, certainly from 2016 to today was that people were starting to do good work in building up cases of actually making it happen rather than just being theoretical. As you've just outlined. And then suddenly we were able to jump in and say, "Oh my God. We've got to change because of the pandemic." And then the case studies were there that we could learn from to make it a reality. And I don't think there's any turning back now. And it's great to see. Shall we go on to number three on the list?

Michelle Ockers:

Let's do that.

Donald H Taylor:

Number three on the list. So number one was reskilling, upskilling is just explosively hot. Number two, collaboration rebounds. Number three, is people rally to the familiar. Now, I was talking to a lot of people throughout last year in L&D and people were suffering a lot. They're just trying to get stuff done. In that circumstance, naturally, you I think go to what you either have to do. Which is the collaboration bit because you've just got to adapt to the circumstances. Or you go to the things which are familiar and which you know will work. And so the things which maintained their position this year versus last year, where everything else was dropping down the table were coaching and mentoring, performance support, mobile delivery.

Donald H Taylor:

Now, mobile delivery is certainly familiar. I think coaching and mentoring, we'll come back to in a second. But I think it is something which is a known entity in the sense that people know it works. It is something that has been transformed at the moment and we'll come back to that. And then the third thing, performance support. I think performance support people like as an idea, I'm not so sure that people really know how to do performance support. So I think that's on the borderline of being familiar. But let's talk about coaching and mentoring. Michelle, I've been tracking technology in this space since about 2018 and it's very exciting what's happening. But do you want to share anything on that right now?

Michelle Ockers:

We've got a great example that I've been tracking as well through Learning Uncut. We've had an episode, one of our early episodes, episode seven, on a learning transfer bot which Emma Weber from Lever Learning piloted with Marie Daniels from a pharmaceutical company. And we spoke to them in 2018, it was within a year of them trialling this learning transfer bot. We've had Emma back one more time to talk about how that's continued to evolve. I know she's going really strong with a product called Coach M, which is her learning transfer bot, which has continued to evolve. It's exceeded all her expectations around effectiveness as a form of delivering coaching. She often describes it as, you're helping people to have a conversation with themselves. So she's not providing coaching only through the bot, some organizations are using the bot alone for coaching. Others are using

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the augmentation piece, they're using a human coach and the bot. But it's been truly, deeply effective and transformative.

Donald H Taylor:

Emma's actually a great example of that. And because it's based on a really solid methodology of her coaching experience and practice that she's had, which is then applied algorithms to. And when you've got something like 17 years of experience doing this, which you then attach an algorithm to, then you can really get the richness of it. And it's also simple which I think is crucial. There's a lot of stuff coming through, some of it will be very good, some of it will just be bad. Some of it will be all fluff and my concern is that there is going to be a backlash against this in the future because people will think we don't need the human side. I think you can do a certain amount with just technology. For me, it's the augmentation piece, so as you say, which is really where this stuff is strongest.

Donald H Taylor:

Your manager is typically overloaded but a key part of his or her job is coaching. Give them some technology to support them, to take away the administrative load and provide them with tips on how to do a better job as they're doing it. And then they can be doing maybe 10% of the job and the rest if it could be handled by the technology. But that 10% is crucial because it's the human side of it. And I think then you're seeing a really powerful extension of what in that past has been utterly non-scalable. Coaching has always been held back by the fact that it has to be done by people, one-to-one. But now it becomes scalable and that's where the power is. That's one that I definitely marked for future greatness.

Michelle Ockers:

I think performance support is another really interesting area, right? When you think about the developments with predictive analytics for instance. And I know you talked about not putting learning in the flow of work, but the idea that as people are using their day-to-day systems, their operational systems. If you have some form of integration with a resource, a database of some sort. Be it housed in the background in a learning management system or learning experience platform, or some sort of content library. And with predictive analytics you can tell when someone's going to need some sort of support. And I believe that's now coming to be within the realms of possibility, right? That kind of use of technology.

Donald H Taylor:

Yeah. Absolutely. And actually the same thing also applies to the coaching and mentoring stuff which sounds a bit creepy, but if you collect the data in the background and you can look at what people are doing and why. You can start predicting when they're going to need help in particular areas. And perhaps you can look across an organization and say, "We have an issue here, we need to alter the way we're approaching this because we've got a bunch of people all seeming to show up with the same coaching issues in one place. Or indeed the same performance issues in one place." And so although artificial intelligence and analytics have dropped down this year, that may simply be because actually those

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technologies are being used in the background of some of these other things that we're talking about.

Michelle Ockers:

It's interesting isn't it? Because there is that overlap with the fourth of these key takeaways. And in order to really make the familiar more scalable you're going to need to lean into these areas. Which for the moment, have seemed to fallen out of favour in the survey, right?

Donald H Taylor:

That's right. So the fourth one is, the aspirational is ignored. And that goes on with the third one, people rallying for the familiar. In tough times you stick to... I wouldn't want to belittle it by calling it comfort eating but it's a bit like that. You stick to what you know and you don't take risks doing things which are new. So virtual reality, augmented reality, artificial intelligence, and LXPs all suffered on this. They all dropped down this year. I believe firmly they will be back but the drop of artificial intelligence which fell I think 3.3% this year, which is unheard of. And about eight places on the table, something like that. Is extraordinary and that's never happened before. And it happened just because people said, "Look, I love the idea of it, but not now." And I think that happened pretty much across the world, everyone's saying, "I can't handle this."

Donald H Taylor:

And talking to people behind the scenes who are selling AI systems, who are selling VR systems. If you sell it as virtual reality, if you sell it as AI, they found it very difficult in 2020 to make new sales. But if it was part of something else or if you were selling to an existing customer where you had an established trust, then you could make the sales. So there was definitely the case where people were not looking for new things in 2020.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. And I know I've only, apart from the coaching bot with Emma. I've only had one other story which really integrated AI and also augmented reality. Which was an immersive coaching application for difficult conversations, a simulation. Which was episode 59 with Denise Meyerson. So I don't think there's a lot of... And if people have some good case studies around this, some good stories that they'd like to come on and tell I'd be really keen to hear from them. Around how they're using VR, AR, and particularly artificial intelligence effectively. I think we need more good stories. And I think this rally to the familiar is largely a matter of expediency here, Don. Which is I think what you were suggesting before, under pressure we go with what we know. But perhaps as things settle, maybe on the backend of this year or into next year it will be interesting to see what next year surveys says. Maybe some of these other-

Donald H Taylor:

It will absolutely fascinating, absolutely.

Michelle Ockers:

So some of these things that are going to help us to unlock, perhaps and scale up the stuff that is more familiar will come more into favour. And we'll have a little more time to do stuff that's a bit more experimental. That would be my hope anyway.

Donald H Taylor:

For me, it's all a matter of timing with the survey. It's now March, by the end of the year, we don't know. We can have no idea where we're going to be in terms of the virus and people's

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expectations. So it's going to be fascinating but I'm not going to predict which way things are going to move right now.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. Well, I won't ask you to then. But let's go back to reskilling and upskilling -

Donald H Taylor:

But also Michelle, from a methodological point of view I can't do it because if I go out and I'm seen to be saying, "Oh so and so's going to be hot next year." I can skew the results. I'm not trying to say I have a direct tap into 3,000 people's heads worldwide. But I have to be careful not to predict.

Michelle Ockers:

To bias. Yeah. Shades of Taylorism, right? If I come in and observe you and I drop the lights then you're going to react in a different way.

Donald H Taylor:

It's the Hawthorne effect, absolutely. Yes.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes. So let's go back to reskilling and upskilling. And you make the point, and I know you're being little bit provocative when you do this. But you make the point early on in the report about, well, isn't that our job? Isn't that what learning and development is all about, skill development?

Donald H Taylor:

It kind of is, isn't it? Isn't it really that our job is to help people get better at stuff? And it is. And I think if you look at the results and you say that to yourself, I think it's a legitimate thing to say. Because if we're not about training people to do new jobs, what on earth are we about? But having said all that, I think that we have to say why was it so explosively supported this year? Because if I'd put this in two years ago I'm pretty sure it wouldn't have been as rapturously received as it was this year. So why?

Donald H Taylor:

The answer is that there was a lot of stuff going on that was new and different, and there was a phrase that enabled us to describe it all. And that phrase was reskilling and upskilling. The reason why that phrase was in, what I call the ambient word scape, it's in the words that are around us. It's that since about the beginning of 2018, probably. No sorry, probably the beginning of 2019. Reskilling and upskilling, if you look at Google trends for those two terms, was on the uptake. It was on the uptake in 2019 around conversations around AI and the future of work. So it was all about, oh we need to reskill people because they're not going to have jobs for the future. And it was the future of work. And that continued for a year and then in January 2020 World Economic Forum came out with a report about the reskilling revolution and how it was still necessary. Same narrative.

Donald H Taylor:

And then of course, last year it was all about, well, we have to train people because there are new jobs. There was two things there. Firstly, we won't have jobs so we have to reskill people to do different jobs. And classic example, the bank tellers can't see people face to face, they have to do the job online. And so they need to be reskilled for an entirely new way of working. So that's one way of doing it. The other thing is you upskill people to do a similar

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job but in a more digital way. And there's lots of that going on. So L&D teams in 2020 were absolutely doing reskilling and upskilling, it was their job. But they were getting some people to train for new jobs and they were getting some people just the skills to do their existing jobs digitally. And they weren't doing many other things because there was so much to focus on doing that. So it was very prominent in their minds and they could not... If I used the word reskilling, upskilling in the same circumstances without the word having being used so much, it wouldn't have been so popular. But because-

Michelle Ockers:

There's a lot of talk about the skills economy now as well.

Donald H Taylor:

Well, there has been.

Michelle Ockers:

There has been for about two years.

Donald H Taylor:

That's right.

Michelle Ockers:

For about two years we've been talking about it. And if you look at the annual reports from PwC and Deloitte in particular where they go and talk to the CEOs. For them, skills have been in the top three of their agendas for at least the last five years. So it's just that word in the background and then when you see it on a list and you think, "This just describes what's in my mind."

Donald H Taylor:

The other thing is workforce mobility, right? It surges, I think Damien Woods came on from National Australia Bank where he was the GM of learning. He's been on a couple of times. But in episode 61 which was recorded last year he came on and talked about learning transformation. Some of the things his team had had to do early in COVID. One of their centres, which is to help customers in times of crisis, they'd had more than a year's normal worth of demand in one day, in that centre. Right? And they weren't alone, right? Particularly financial services. You heard lots of stories about people having to be lifted out of their regular jobs. Government agencies as well. And just pushing to new jobs, so they had to be skilled up and supported to do those jobs very quickly. So I think that experience has made us aware from a business continuity perspective being agile enough. And I think all these concepts around the pace of change and disruption and agility. They took on a new level of reality for us last year.

Donald H Taylor:

I think there's two things. They took on a new level of reality. We had to do it. It was either formal, so somebody from the top says, "Right. We're introducing this program." Or it's just L&D saying, "we've got to do this." And reacting themselves. But the other side of it is, and there's this word floating around there, reskilling and upskilling which describes it. And because that was available and it was absolutely international because we had all these

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reports coming out which were international. That's what got peoples imagination. So it's the combination of the experience and the way to describe it that led to that.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. Now Don, I've got two things left I'd like to talk about. I mean, I'd like to talk about lots more. We could talk for two or three hours, right?

Donald H Taylor:

We could, easily.

Michelle Ockers:

And when this episode comes out they'll be link to a webinar recording which you and I will have done for Australia. It will be a little bit more Australian centric, but nonetheless if people want to dig in to this and maybe see some visuals and hear you talking about it again, that will be in the show notes if they want more. But there was one thing that caught my attention because it's something I do a lot of work with and that is around demonstrating value and consulting more deeply with the business. They've kind of been in there... I think you call them the perennials, right?

Donald H Taylor:

Yes. The perennials-

Michelle Ockers:

There was something interesting you noticed in a subgroup who responded to the survey. So can you talk to us a little bit about that?

Donald H Taylor:

Yeah. They've bounced around the middle of the table for a long time. And like you Michelle, my heart belongs in the area where we actually show the value of learning. Because without that then we are just another adjunct to the business that could be written off at any time. What happened was, so this year showing value and consulting with the business they weren't hugely down on last year. Okay. Which is good because some options were very much down on last year. So that was kind of optimistic for me or positive for me. But the other thing is I asked the group, as you say, this voluntary question, where do you work? And for the people that said they worked in the workplace, these people were in favour of showing value and consulting more deeply the business, much more so than the general population. And in particular the consulting more deeply of the business piece.

Donald H Taylor:

Also, I divide the group up into group A, which is a small group which respond very quickly and that always interested in the very latest things. And there's a larger more pragmatic, possibly more conservative group, group B. Which is more interested in stuff that apparently is pragmatically can help them get stuff done. Group B, working in the workplace, L&D people. Voted far more in favour of consulting more deeply with the business than the general population of group B. So amongst this pragmatic group, we had workplace people being in favour of it. Now for me, that's a very positive sign for the future because it shows that there are people working in L&D in the workplace who believe in showing value, but believe also that they need to work with the business to understand what value means for the business. And without that you can't show that. We have to keep tracking this. It's the first time I've asked the question about work groups, so I'll have to ask it again next year and

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then I can start tracking year on year to see, is it a continuous thing or was it a just a freak occurrence this year? Is that something that you've seen?

Michelle Ockers:

Be interesting to see how that evolves.

Donald H Taylor:

Is that something that you've seen, Michelle? Do you believe that people generally are more interested in talking with the business? Because I'm always afraid that we are talking in our bubble of people that we know.

Michelle Ockers:

Well, I don't know Don. Because it really resonates with people who connect with me. But whether that's because-

Donald H Taylor:

But that's a self-selecting group, that's the trouble.

Michelle Ockers:

That's what I'm talking about and people are sort of selecting in. And there's a whole group of people who just think, I don't know what I'm talking about. And chose not to come along to things I'm running and so on. I will say, one thing I am definitely seeing in my own business. I do a lot of work around organizational learning strategy. I am getting a lot more enquiries around having made shifts last year, how do I consolidate this moving forward into a really solid organizational learning strategy? So that might layer in with seeking to create value in the business and be able to have the conversations with the business around what does value look like. So I'm seeing more of it, but whether that's just because that's what I'm putting out, I don't know.

Michelle Ockers:

Final question Don. I was going to ask you about what you think the survey says about the future of L&D but we don't want to bias next year's survey so we won't go there. What I'm curious about, Learning Uncut is all about stories, it's all about real stories. So given everything we've talked about today and what you see on the survey, what sort of stories would you like to see on Learning Uncut? What sort of stories do you think we need to be sharing about what sort of activities, what sort of things?

Donald H Taylor:

For me, it's less about the... I listen to Learning Uncut and I absolutely love it precisely because of the way you get people to tell the real stories. I'm a huge fan. When I was a kid I read Henry Mayhew's London and the London Poor. Which is all about talking to real people living in Victorian London. When I was older I read books like Division Street America by Studs Terkel. Talking to real people about their real stories. There's nothing like going to a people who are actually experiencing and hearing what's happening. That's why I love it.

Donald H Taylor:

So what I would love to hear is, I'm not fussed about the topic. But what I want to hear is how did you succeed? So what were the barriers that you faced? How did you overcome them? What sort of person do you have to be to do that? Because I'm sure everybody goes into it thinking, I'm going to do this. They underestimate the issues but somehow they overcome it. And I'm sure that on the way they gather a bit more resilience, a bit more

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strength and they become possibly a tougher person. Possibly someone who's learnt something along the way. And I think for me, that's one of the great things I get out of the stories. Is how people themselves have developed.

Donald H Taylor:

And those by the way, when I'm choosing a conference program, I want to put people in front of people who've got a great story to tell. But who are also inspirational people? The audience can say, "I can see it can be done. And to do it I need to be like this person, not just do what they do but be like this person. I need to think in this way, I need to react in this way. And I need to be perhaps tougher in this area, perhaps more sensitive in this area." And that's something you can only get by hearing somebody tell their story. So I want to hear the story but I also, just chose people who are going to show us what it is like to succeed in our field. That's what I want.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. I think the best stories, for me, the ones I share on Learning Uncut, are where people are willing to tell it how it was and to talk about the tough stuff as well. And there's something about the language people use and the way they talk about their work. The way they talk about the people they're there to serve that tells us a lot about what they bring to the table. Not just in terms of skills but in terms of mindset and what they value and what makes them tick. And I think that's got a lot to do with why certain people are able to do things that the rest of us look at and think, "How do I do that? Where does that courage come from?"

Donald H Taylor:

And I think when you are in a position, as you are, and as myself looking at case studies. You stand back and you look at these things. There's a superficial continuity between them and things that combine them. But there's also a rather deeper continuity or common factor across them which is the people. So for me, that's what's fascinating is if you listen to enough Learning Uncut you get to understand that the people who carry these programs out are not uniquely different but they have certain characteristics. And those are worth developing in ourselves.

Michelle Ockers:

I think I need to do some more work on that Don. Thank you so much for starting your working week this week because it is Monday morning your time as we're recording this, with a great conversation about the survey. I will put a link to your LinkedIn profile on the show notes.

Donald H Taylor:

Thank you.

Michelle Ockers:

If anyone would like to contact you and I encourage everyone to take a look at the Global Sentiment Survey and have a think about their own work. Talk to your colleagues about it

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and see what you think. Thanks so much Don for sharing your work and insights with us today.

Donald H Taylor:

Always a pleasure, Michelle. Always

Michelle Ockers:

Cheers.



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About Michelle Ockers

Michelle works with business and learning leaders to realise the untapped potential of learning in organisations. She is an organisational learning strategist and modern workplace learning practitioner. She works with organisations to develop and implement transformative learning strategy, and to build the capability of the learning team. She delivers keynotes, workshops and webinars for learning and broader professional or workforce groups at public and in-house events. Michelle also mentors learning professionals at all career stages on career planning and professional development.

Michelle received the following prestigious industry awards in 2019:

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

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