

Michelle Ockers:

Welcome to another Learning Uncut episode. Listeners, I'd like to kick off by acknowledging the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We've been having some beautiful sunny weather here in the Brinya Yuin nation of late. I'd like to pay respect to elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who are listening to this podcast. So, we're joined today by two people from a different land all together, joining us from the UK to talk about their recent research report, AI in L&D from Talk to Action. Very excited about this topic and our guests today. Firstly, return guest, Donald H. Taylor. Welcome, Don. For anyone who is unfamiliar with you, which I don't know how you could be if you're a Uncut listener, I think you hold the record for most number of appearances. Would you like to briefly introduce yourself?

Donald H Taylor:

Well, I'm honoured to have that record, Michelle. I'm sure that younger, more interesting people will jump up and take it at some point. I'm Don Taylor. I chair the Learning Technologies Conference in London. I have been involved in learning and technology since the mid-1980s. I also do speaking and research into what's happening with learning and development, and particularly where learning and development meets technology. And that's what we're talking about today.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. And we're joined today by our first time guest, Egle Vinauskaite, who is also a second researcher on today's report. It's lovely to have you joining us, Egle. Would you like to introduce yourself to our guests, our listeners, actually?

Egle Vinauskaite:

Thanks for having me, Michelle. I'm a learning technology advisor, and I work with organizations on using AI for learning, meaning AI and L&D programs and processes, and as well as on upskilling people to support AI's adoption in organizations.

Michelle Ockers:

Fantastic. So the two of you joined forces to do some research around AI in action, and it built on a previous publication, Don, which you had brought out just, I think, five months previously, AI and L&D, the state of play. Is that right? There was a five month gap between the two?

Donald H Taylor:

Well, what happened was Egle and I wanted to try to work out what was actually happening in 2023. There was so much noise around AI. We just wanted to find out what's the state of play, what's actually happening. We knew a lot of people weren't actually using AI in L&D, some were. So we went out, we surveyed people, we had a couple of conversations with people, more than a couple. And then we ended up publishing our report on the anniversary of the launch of ChatGPT. And that was what had precipitated people's interest in the first place in AI. But the difference between the November report and the April report, those five months, is pretty staggering in terms of the rate of uptake and how people moved from talk to action.

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Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. And that's clear in the report. And then, Egle, you talked about being a learning technologist focused on AI. How long or what is sort of your background with learning technology? This has been an interest of yours pre AI, I assume. So, you know, how did you kind of move into being interested in AI and kind of what's different about AI from other technologies that you've explored in the past?

Egle Vinauskaite:

Yeah, so I've worked in the field of learning and technology specifically for the last probably eight years. And I feel like I've gone through all of them, all of the hype cycles that we've had in the last eight years. So starting from mixed reality to micro learning and gamification. And I even had a Metaverse project back in the day, what was it? 2021, a big summer for Metaverse. So that's been my focus. And obviously, AI would sort of drop in and out over time. But for the first probably six years up until 2022, AI wasn't at a state where, for example, vendors could use it reliably and actually sell some AI power solution to their clients when it comes to, say, a learning experience, because it could not recognize and pick up voice, it could not do an analysis reliably, and so on. So when AI came about in late 2022, obviously that became a focus for the industry, but also it became a focus for my clients as well. And I work both on the vendor and product side. So how do you create a product that uses technology for learning in a meaningful way? And also on the internal L&D side, how do we stitch these things together to create scalable upskilling programs? Both sides started really looking into AI. And naturally, somehow that evolution happened for me into AI as well. And in terms of how it's different, I think unlike other technologies, AI is a, I'll say universal technology, because if you're using something like mixed reality, there are quite clear use cases of how you can use it, very specific constraints that you face in terms of how you can use the headset and so on. But with AI, it pretty much can do what you tell it to do. It's going to run in any direction. So it is very much about, I think, Don, it was your comparison with electricity. And the way I look at AI in comparison to other technologies, I think it's unfair to say that, okay, so how does the hype with AI compare with the hype of VR? The thing is that I would then compare AI for something with VR rather than just AI as a thing, because it can be, anything. So that's the way I look at it. And that's where the power and the disruption of it comes from as well.

Michelle Ockers:

That kind of universality of this technology is what makes it at once so attractive and potentially useful and also a little bit daunting, right? It's like, where do you start with it? And of course, when the possibilities are almost limitless, we start with what we know and we bridge from there, which is, I think something that comes out very much in what your report shows about where we've actually started and where we're actually getting traction in learning and development with AI, which of course is the obvious place, which is content creation, right?

Egle Vinauskaite:

Yeah, definitely. And I would add that this is, there is a lot of narrative out there on LinkedIn everywhere that using AI for content creation is bad, but it's actually a natural use case. Generative AI is a content creation machine. And if you look at the process of L&D, where are the most resources in terms of time and where they're going, they are in content creation. So it's kind of natural.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, it is. And it creates a lot of efficiency and I'm resisting the urge to delve into the, where does that narrative come from? So I'm not going to do that right now. I've certainly for my own business and my own work, definitely an efficiency boost. What about the perspective

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of how is AI being used in ways that actually improve content creation rather than make it more efficient? And is indeed improving content creation or giving us more content, which is a lower quality or no better than what we've already created? Don's got his hand up here. Go for it, Don.

Donald H Taylor:

I'll just do, the reason I put my hand up is I know Egle's got a lot to say on this and it's very coherent and I'm probably less coherent. So we'll get my bit out of the way first. For me, I think there is lots of evidence that AI is being used to produce indifferent content. It may not be poor content, but it may not be very good. And my concern is this will have an effect rather like the idea of putting slides onto a screen with a click next button on. It's easy to produce content that anyone can create. And it may be not just L&D, but actually people throughout the organisation are creating stuff. that isn't terribly good. Doesn't mean that you can't use it to create good content, but you have to know what you're doing. And at that point, I'll hand this over to Egle to just say, well, Egle, how do we create content that is actually good using AI as a tool?

Egle Vinauskaite:

Yeah, so the problem with AI for content creation comes from when we try to automate our processes rather than enhance our workflows. So problem is when what automation looks like in this case is probably seen these one click course creation buttons or software where you just input a topic input a few learning outcomes. And here you are, here's a 20 minute course on it with images and text that you realistically just have to both QA and rewrite most likely. And another problem comes from using content where we shouldn't be using content to support the outcome. So for example, if I am trying to improve someone's feedback giving skills, there is some content about foundational knowledge, what does good feedback look like. However, it is not through reading a lot about it that someone would learn to give feedback. There is this practice element. So it's using, again, content not to just create a lot of stuff around the topic, but using it in a more strategic way. And that brings me to workflow enhancement. So if we look at some of the now popular use cases of AI for content creation, It would be something that helps people work with AI iteratively and produce a better final product. So one of these examples would be to create a high-level learning program outline. So I don't have to start thinking from a blank page. I can immediately start the sort of interaction with AI about what do we do with this. Another example that's being commonly used is creating a learning activities, so it's either. I want to illustrate a point and I asked the AI. What kind of real life use case studies like business case studies, for example, I can use to illustrate those because it would take. days, perhaps, to find them yourself. Or I have this activity, or I have this goal that I want to do in the classroom, when I illustrate a point, what kind of activity can I do to make that happen? Or what kind of scenario I can use for people to roleplay? So these kind of discrete use cases of AI within the larger workflow of, say, learning design is where the power of it is.

Michelle Ockers:

Now, and of course, you still need to understand what makes for good learning, what the evidence informed principles and practices are that need to be applied. You've still got your expertise working with a support tool in effect, which I guess is one of the reasons why I struggle to understand the counter case for we shouldn't be using it for instructional design. It definitely has a place. I understand, however, that between the two of you and having read the report, you believe that the biggest opportunities for AI in L&D lie beyond content creation. And I'd like to spend some time exploring this. One of the things you've got in the report is this complexity scale where you've kind of mapped out here's some of the key uses that have come up in your research. Can you talk to us about that range of uses that you're

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seeing at the moment, even if it's just like a little inkling or promise or experiment going on and this idea of the complexity scale that you've mapped out?

Egle Vinauskaite:

Yeah. So the complexity of scale is, for your listeners, if you can imagine a scale from left to right on the left, you have some easier use cases of AI in L&D. And then on the right, on the far right, you have the more sophisticated use cases. And we mapped out some of the main pillars of AI and L&D across that scale. And what we ended up having is that on the left, we start from administrative tasks. We then go into learning design and content creation. And at that point, there is definitely undeniably cluster of activity in there across L&D. And then it kind of starts dissipating a bit. And the reason it's happening is that for the easier use cases in L&D, administrative tasks, content creation, L&D does not have to interact with the rest of the business. It can just do it by itself in its own silo. But when you start going towards the right of the scale, so then you start having instances such as skills bots, the performance support, data analysis, personalization, up to skills management, that's when you actually have to start interacting with the business because you need either additional skills to make these things happen, or technologies that you need to partner with the business to either acquire or that they are somewhere else in the business, such as the co-pilot, where it's not L&D that actually usually makes the decision to start using them, and actually relationships as well. And this is one of the key things that came out of our research, that the most sophisticated use cases and the most holistic and strategic use cases of AI and L&D have pretty much, without a fail, they required integration and strategic thinking along with the business.

Donald H Taylor:

And they do require something else as well, which is they require data. AI works off data. And the data that's important isn't the data in your learning management system, it's the data in the business systems. That data will be jealously guarded by the people who own it. It might be salespeople, it might be operational people. Typically, they don't give that up easily. So in order to start working with that data, you need the relationship where you can go to somebody and ask the question, hey, we think we could do something useful with this. Can we have a look, please? That is easy to say, we know that you might get no data, you might get a part of it, you might get on a short term basis, whatever. You've got to have the relationship which enables you to get access there. If you don't have that, you don't have anything. And the more I think about the spectrum, which is Egle's spectrum at scale, and it's really, it helps an awful lot of people really get a handle on this. I kind of feel there almost needs to be a break between the stuff you do in L&D and the rest of it, because the divide is so large between the people who are comfortable sitting in L&D doing stuff with AI, and then walking out the door, doing stuff for the rest of the organisation, it's actually quite a big step that needs to be taken. But it is fundamental if you want to use AI to its full extent.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. So it's all the normal strategic skills, the business first thinking, the engagement that we've been talking about for years as being the key to really making the most impact in organizations working with others, right? None of that goes away just because we've got this incredible new technology at our fingertips. Surprise, surprise. So Let's kind of wind a couple of these ideas together in terms of some of the bigger opportunities that the two of you are seeing and examples of where people are working in collaboration with others, building relationships, rolling their sleeves up and working together. And you've got some great case studies in the research report. So that sort of feels like an obvious place to start. Do either of you have a favorite that kind of really demonstrates an organization that's going for one of these bigger opportunities beyond content creation and where the learning and development team is working well in collaboration with others in the organization?

Donald H Taylor:

I do have a favourite, but it's because this is one of mine, Egle did more than I did, but one of my ones is Ericsson. And we know Ericsson from having heard a lot of the stuff they've been talking about in terms of skills. And indeed, we'll be doing a follow-up report at some point later on this year, where we talk about skills and what Ericsson are doing there. But this threw me slightly because I wasn't aware that they were doing this. And when I sat down and I talked to the person there, Pauline Roubert-Jean about what she was doing. I was so impressed that they'd taken an approach and scaled it up to make it valuable. So what I'm talking about here is not actually a direct use of AI, but rather it's a sort of meta case study. It's a way of approaching AI to understand how you can use it. And in fact, all technologies. So they have a community inside Ericsson Learning Next when Pauline joined the organisation, it was just about 20 or 30 people, and it was just L&D people. She's expanded over the course of a few years to be something like 300 to 400 people across Ericsson. Most of them aren't L&D, the vast majority aren't L&D, but they use it as a testing ground for all technologies. They start off with, there are some work streams where we want to analyse stuff. They go out to this community and say, hey, in groups of maybe six to 10 people, Here's an idea, experiment with this. Tell us, does it work for you or not? They get the expertise of these people who are interested in learning, but who are outside L&D. Maybe they're marketers. They're probably engineers. There's a lot of engineers in Ericsson. All that expertise comes in. They experiment with it. They're allowed to fail. And then at the end of it, they come back to a decision-making process. We found something. Maybe it's useful, maybe not. If it's useful, what do we do? There are three options. We can buy it, we can build it and then the third option is something I hadn't come across before, but it makes perfect sense, we can wait. So that is such an important thing to think about in the world of AI because things are moving fast. And very often they consciously decide, well, we're just going to hold fire on this one for the moment. And I said to her a couple of weeks after we'd done this interview, I said, Pauline, hey, I just discovered this tool, it's really good, what do you think about it? She said, yeah, yeah, we've looked at it already. They were clearly well on top of what they're doing and exploring lots of avenues, using the freedom of the network. But with that, two points at either end, the work streams at the beginning. Here's what we want to look at. And then at the end, this decision making process. And I think it's a really good example of how you don't have to do everything inside the department. You can spread it and get the expertise of the organization involved in discovering where AI will work for you.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. I love that community driven approach and the idea of doing experiments, but doing them in a structured way of sorts and then having this methodology around the decision making. It's a really great model for others to emulate. And you don't need to be as big as an Ericsson in order to take this kind of approach, right?

Donald H Taylor:

Arguably, the smaller you are, the more important it is to get more people in the organisation involved and to leverage their expertise, because you try to do it by yourself, you'll probably end up running out of time.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. Do you have another example you'd like to share with the listeners, Egle?

Egle Vinauskaite:

I do. I don't want to pick favorites. I'm not going to, in this case, that would perhaps showcase the strategic thinking that is required in actually creating quite simple but powerful

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use cases of AI. So here in this case, I want to talk about a consulting company here in the UK, although it is an international consulting company. And they worked with the business to establish that, okay, so what is the business strategy? What is the business goal for the year? And in that particular case that I'm talking about, they needed to increase their client retention. And what they ended up doing and how they ended up using AI is really quite nifty. So first of all, they looked at all of their client facing calls. and used AI to analyze, looked at the highest performers and analyzed what the highest performers are doing differently to create sort of a playbook, best practice manual. And one interesting thing about the organization is that they use coaching as their main method of L&D delivery. That's a bit of a nasty word. But most of their activity in L&D is based on one on one skills coaching. So what they did is that they use that best practice that they had created And they coached their consultants on that best practice. And then what they did, they started using AI, trying to see how that framework was trickling down into the actual conversations and eventually into client outcomes. So I think this was such a powerful way of using AI, first of all, to support the business, then going outside of L&D, collaborating with the sales team, and actually, because none of this would have been possible if they just did that in L&D. They needed to collaborate with the sales team to make a case that this is how we're going to be supporting you now. And even though historically, coaching has been a very expensive, yet very opaque method of support, they managed to pretty much pinpoint the ROI and to see how it's working both in the process so that we can tweak things and what the what the outcome of it is and show that this is what we did. And this is how the business benefited. And by the way, just to add cherry on top, it was actually using not a generic API, such as chatgpt, they were using Salesforce AI. So it was one of these examples of L&D going outside of their natural tech stack and being able to take advantage of what's elsewhere in the organization.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. Going to where the people are and the tools they're using is such a good strategy. Don, I know it's just been playing on my mind as we've been working through this. You wrote a book several years ago about implementing learning technologies. I'm desperately looking on my shelf here to try to get the title right.

Donald H Taylor:

Learning technologies in the workplace.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes. And in terms of the approach to implementation, would you change anything as a result of AI?

Donald H Taylor:

Not really. In fact, what I found in that book, to my surprise, I looked through an awful lot of case studies because I drew on 15 years of case studies of successful implementations from Learning Technologies Conference. So that was like something like 100 case studies. And I picked a handful to actually interview and then feature in the book. The extraordinary thing that I found was common across all the successful implementations was not technical expertise, but guess what? Networks and relationships. The people who are the best at doing implementations were the people who had the best networks, or they'd come into an organization and quite deliberately set up networks as one of the first things they did and joined the organization. And yeah, I have this six step programme, which is nothing exceptional or unusual, but it is amazing how often it is ignored. And the things that get ignored are, well, let's forget the discovery bit at the beginning, and let's not get engaged with people. Let's jump straight into assessing where we can plan how we can implement this thing. And if you start planning implementation without the knowledge of what you're trying to do with it, then you're destined to fail. And what inspired me to write the book was

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so many years of people come up to me at Learning Technologies and saying, Don, I can't get people to get involved with my learning program. What can I do about the marketing? I just want to tear my hair out and say it's too late. You needed to start doing this right two years ago, and then you wouldn't have to worry about the marketing of the program. But anyway, there's nothing new under the sun. AI implementations are the same as every other implementation. but bigger because it affects everybody and particularly because trust is such an issue. We've seen, if you put the word AI into Google and ask it to generate an image for you, it is very likely to come out with an image of a robot with a hand and very often it will come out with a picture of the Terminator or something like it. And so this personification of AI as evil, plus many of the stories which are scary about it, lead people to be naturally wary. And so even more than anything else L&D does, we have to build trust and that means we have to get good relationships with people.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. And there's just this enduring thread I'm seeing through this conversation that we're having around, Don, you said there's nothing new under the sun. Well, of course, there is some new stuff around the tech, but in terms of how we make the most of the tools that we have available to solve business problems and improve performance. And Egle, you've talked there about you know, principles and practices that were important before we were able to utilize AI so readily and continue to be of significant importance in terms of starting with understanding the business need, the business problem, crafting effective solutions. people where they're at with their workplace tools and so on. So I think we need to remember that and anchor ourselves in good principles and practice when we're looking at utilizing AI. That certainly is the subtext for me from the report.

Donald H Taylor:

And it comes out in the case studies. There's the quote from Dan Redmond from HSBC. And the pull quote we have from him is, the key thing we learned was to answer the question, what are the right things to use AI for? And that's just, it's obvious when you think about it. But of course, despite the fact of being obvious, so many people ignore it and jump in with a tool, trying to find something to use it for rather than finding what the problem is that is best suited, solving with AI.

Michelle Ockers:

Egle, is AI, Don's talking there about the right things and what are the right things to use it from? And one dimension there that I hear is, what are the business problems we need to solve? Are there other dimensions that we should be thinking about when we think about, well, what are the right things to be using AI for, particularly if we haven't done a lot yet? If I'm sitting in an L&D team and we haven't actually started, kind of feeling our way with AI, but we can see from others and some of the great examples you've shared in the book that there's real potential here. You know, what are the right things or the right way to get started?

Egle Vinauskaite:

Right now, at this point in time, it's quite difficult to make a strong claim saying that these are the right things to use AI for, because the reality is that we may think that they are the right things and they seem to be based on everything we know about learning about organizational context about the tool and what is how it works best, but the reality is we have very few results yet a lot of organizations that have been using them in various contexts they are right now. in the pilot stage, or just after the pilot, and it's going to take months to see whether anything trickled down to to any business impact. So I wouldn't make a claim that these are the things to use AI for, although hopefully, perhaps in a year, I would be able to use these kind of terms. But if we think about what L&D has historically been preoccupied

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with, it's not just sort of conceptually thinking, it is about supporting performance or upskilling people. So supporting the business and making sure that it has the skills and it can develop and grow at the rate that it wants to. And if we think about how historically we've been supporting performance or upskilling, we used to use that content, meaning here are some text, image, video, on a page, you go through it. And if we make it shorter, if we make it micro learning, then that's going to be some sort of performance support proxy, which is not how it's quite works. Because for performance support, it is about timeliness, it's about flow of work, it's about getting something immediate and contextual. And on the other side of the spectrum, you have using content to develop skills, which would usually end up as branching scenarios, which we all know that it's not transferable in a real life situation. The fact that I can talk with an avatar and have a difficult conversation, that doesn't give me confidence that I'll be able to do that in the real world. So how I personally see the promise of AI looking at the bread and butter of L&D is that on one hand, we have performance support and we can use AI potentially to, we can plug it into the company's knowledge base and we can start looking into fulfilling the real promise of performance support at the point of need, meaning I ask a question, I don't have to go to another platform, I just get a contextual answer, tells me what to do, I can move on with my task. And on the skill side, instead of using a proxy for skill development, we can actually do actual skill development, actual deliberate practice. Here is the bot, you can increase the difficulty of the conversation, you can use your own voice, your own a way of expressing yourself, your own accent, all the cultural norms around it, and get feedback, which is super personalized on what you just said, and then keep doing it again and again and again until you're like, okay, I've done a solid number of those, now I can I can talk to my reporter, I can talk to a client, and so on. So it is using AI to actually fulfill both ends of the spectrum, rather than doing sort of a half, a mid-job at either, not really fulfilling either.

Michelle Ockers:

It's almost like when I hear you talk about some of these things, it's like they're things that we've possibilities that we've dreamt of or aspired to be able to achieve for so long. But they've just been just that little bit out of our grasp. It sounds like there are some real longer term aspirations we've been chasing that are very close to being within our grasp, if not already within our grasp. Don, what are your thoughts on that?

Donald H Taylor:

We're talking here about what we could possibly be doing with AI and learning in the future. How long have we got? Because I could crack open a beer, sit back, it's not even morning yet in the UK, but I can absolutely kick back and we could be all morning talking about this. I'll try to restrict myself. So I have this big thing, Michelle, about how difficult it is to envisage the future, how initially you just do the same thing a bit bigger. Then you do the same thing, but you do it in a slightly different way. Then you do a new thing in a new way. And eventually it becomes revolutionary, but it takes time. I would also point out that in the 1970s, when I was sitting listening to transistor radio in my shorts, my scabby knees at primary school, I would never have imagined the iPod, let alone social media and all these things that were possible. And yet there's nothing inevitable about them. You get them by process of experimentation and things happening and some things work, other things pop up and you weren't expecting them. So I think what I'm going to do is I'm going to talk about what's possible right now and then extrapolate beyond that. I'll try to keep it tight. So what's happening right now, which is already exciting, is the use of AI in coaching. And not in a silly way, but using, for example, if you're on a data center, you've got thousands upon thousands of recorded conversations. You can make transcripts from those. You can work out what a good call is, what a bad call is. You can train people when they first join on a good call. You can then give them remedial training when they're not quite up to speed, and bonus training and of course, when people are on a call, you can monitor the call and the

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coach, the AI coach can tell you during the call, how you're doing, give you feedback at the end, if necessary, give you some material to support yourself. Two years ago, that would have been probably the stuff of science fiction. Now it's just happening. And that's developed quite rapidly. It's developed because we've got this combination of things, which AI, we sort of use as a loose term, but AI is what enables us to deal with a combination of big data sets, the cheap storage of data, cheap processing power, and powerful algorithms. Now, all of those things together have led to this culmination of AI now being as powerful as it is when five years ago, it wouldn't have been. But if you think about those things, where else in the organization have we got big sets of data, which will enable us to do learning better? That's a very different way to think about learning the way we normally think about. But one of those is, well, in everybody's head, there's an awful lot of stuff that they know, which we don't surface and use. Wouldn't it be great if we could share those things? And of course, famously, Lou Platt said, if only HP knew what HP knows, we'd be three times more productive. So this surfacing of that tacit information, I think it's one of the areas in the future, which is going to be super important. And I bracket that in a sort of group of things around community that I think is where we can get tremendous power from AI in the future in ways that we can't anticipate fully yet. But just one example, suppose you had AI monitoring your Slack channels, monitoring what people are saying elsewhere. The initial thing would be, okay, somebody asks a problem, sorry, raises a problem. Can we provide automatically something which will support them in that? Some content, can we point them towards an expert, which will help them without them prompting the system. But then beyond that, let's look through all of the content we've produced in-house. Let's work out where the knowledge is and let's make that more available. But then let's also do an organizational network analysis to find the key nodes of information, make sure that those people are more available to share points, and so on. And once you've got that data, then it's a question, well, how do we make that available to people to learn from either through content or through contact or through some other way? I just wish that I was 25 again, because this for me is the ramping off point, the taking off point of L&D for the future. It's gonna be fabulous. There are issues for sure, but I think the promise of what we can do with it if we let our imaginations go is just immense.

Michelle Ockers:

That's very inspiring, isn't it? So you said there are issues. Egle, what do you see as some of the biggest issues or challenges to L&D actually being able to push the boundaries and explore what is possible?

Egle Vinauskaite:

So there are a few things that are technology related, which is like there are some quirks to work out. For example, with performance support, how do you make sure that the accuracy is there. And that relates to trust as well, and trust that the information is secure. Because if you're giving AI access to all of that, even Slack channels, personal conversations, as well as business information and business data, that is a huge technical challenge to make sure that it does not, the technology does not fail in this case so the stakes are higher there. And it's not just for L&D to work this out, obviously, that's out of scope. But this is something that has slowed down the adoption of these more sophisticated use cases as well. But generally speaking, the other week, because we had the GPT 4.0 launched last week, and I was participating at an event and the Q&A, someone asked me, what does that mean for L&D? How is going to revolutionize L&D? And the reality is that even with GPT 4, even before GPT 4.0, which is right now the more advanced, the most advanced model at the at this moment in time, Even GPT-4 was already very, very powerful. And we are still it's been a year and a half more than that. And we still haven't got mass adoption of it. So it's not just about what the technology might be able to do. It is about how L&D prepares itself and sort of leans into that technology, both in terms of internally as a business function, leans into the business

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and what the business is doing and starts thinking about it more strategically to get the mandate, to get the resources, to get the buy-in to start experimenting with AI and runs the sorts of experiments and communities that Don talked about earlier. But also as individuals, I think for L&D professionals, it's very important to understand Well, three things, because AI and L&D is not just knowing AI and knowing L&D. It is, first of all, understanding AI as a technology, what it can do, so you can start imagining the possibilities. The second one is learning and understanding how AI works in learning, because this is one of these things where, because AI makes everything seem so easy, unless you really understand how the learning process works at the individual level, it's very difficult for you to make a call whether this vendor that says that they're doing AI driven learning, whether it's any good, or whether it's just an add on, that's really redundant. So understanding how learning works, so that you can start imagining how AI can support that process of learning at the individual level. And then the final one is business context, the organizational context, understanding how your organization works, how AI can support organizational learning, not as individual learning, and what your business goals are, and how the organization is structured to actually make any impact with various AI technologies. Because in some cases, there might be institutional blockers of like, there's just no way that we would be able to use this piece of AI, just because of the nature of the company. and the perhaps the conservative culture in the company, there are some things that we won't be able to do. So I think for L&D to realize the promise of AI, there is a lot of both upskilling, but also, I guess, mindset change and being realistic about your context. That's that needs to be done.

Michelle Ockers:

So understanding your context and being able to operate effectively in your business context and culture and understanding learning are things that we've needed to be good at doing for some time to have impact. The bit that maybe is new in terms of the skillset is around this specific technology. If there are L&D people listening to this who are, and I know there will be, who are keen to improve their skills so that they're more confident and they actually understand the technology. How best do they do that? Are we all kind of on our own floating around trying to run experiments or are there places we can go to learn? Are there courses available? Are there networks and communities we could be leaning into? What do you recommend? I might start with you again, Egle on that one.

Egle Vinauskaite:

There are three main feelings, emotions that people feel around AI. So it's either excitement, oh my god, this is so cool, this is going to change my work and make it better, or I just like tinkering with it. The other one is fear. Either I fear the technology, because I'm not comfortable with technology, or I fear what it's going to do to my job. And the final one is indifference, which is I don't think this is relevant right now, or I don't think it's relevant to my work. So I'm just not going to participate in this discourse at all. And I think whether you're an individual or a team that's trying to take your team members on this journey, you need to identify where you are. Because if it's excitement, it's much easier to just go ahead and create this experimental culture. Because the reality is that even in big organizations, AI adoption in L&D has so far been, a grassroots approach was the one that they have taken, which is give people the skills to use AI. So they get the wow moment, there's this cool moment, and they kind of want to tinker, give them a community to share their experiments, give some sort of channel so that these experiments can amount to something where they can be assessed. So this is the general framework. Now, if you're dealing with people who are feeling either fear or indifference, then you need to start with, with an earlier stuff, which is how to overcome that and meet people where they are. And there are various things you can do there to, to address these things. But I think this is the approach is, in that case, you cannot just start with, okay, so here's a sandbox, we're going to be experimenting with AI now.

Michelle Ockers:

OK, so Don, can we pick up on that group that are excited and obviously experimenting, rolling your sleeves up, having some experiences, trying things out is one way we build our skills. Are there any other options? You know, this is something that potentially we're talking about being an absolute novice in. And if someone's a novice in something in our organisations, you know, we look for ways to scaffold and accelerate their learning to at least get them up to speed with some basic skills that they can continue to build upon. Is there anything available to help us there or are we literally left to experiment?

Donald H Taylor:

There are actually plenty of things out there. There are both things which are geared towards L&D in particular and things which are general courses. I'm not going to recommend any general courses because there are so many of them out there. But I do think it's a good idea to get a grounding in what AI means. But I mean, Google, IBM, Amazon, I'm pretty sure all offer free courses on AI at different levels of complexity. What I would steer against and warn against there is the idea that, and this is something which L&D is very prone to, the idea that you have to know everything before you start. Well, you can't know everything before you start, so don't try. I would rather feed voraciously as much as you can on as many of these courses as possible, but always be working on experiments probably at the same time. So don't regard them as a precursor, but regard them as something which you do at the same time. Ross Stevenson in the UK does a very good job of saying, look, to get a handle on what you can do with this, choose a handful of tools and one problem, try to solve the problem with the tools and then move on. And he says to do this for like six weeks or so. And it's terribly basic as a piece of advice, but actually I'm pretty sure it works because by restricting your choices, you force yourself to really focus on what's possible. And you may find that you can't do something. There's something else as well in the experimentation phase, which is important to do, which is to absolutely be in touch with other people who are doing the same and similar things in L&D. And it might be locally, or it might be via LinkedIn. There's a tremendously rich conversation going on at LinkedIn amongst L&D people about what's happening. So don't suffer in silence, just say to the world, look, on a scale of one to 10, I'm a two. I need help getting to a three. What are you doing? Let's get together and talk about it. And people are nice. They'll support you. And there are also courses available. What I'll do, actually, Michelle, is I'm going to go off and just get some data on this, which we can put in the show notes, if that's all right, some specific courses for L&D people looking at how you can use AI.

Michelle Ockers:

Right. And I think it would be also good for us just to pull together a little list of in addition to the two of yourselves who potentially to follow. So we've got Ross Stevenson. I know, you know, I saw you mentioning Ethan Mollick and his fabulous newsletter. You know, there's some people who's who are putting out stuff that's really approachable and useful around AI as well, not just within L&D. So perhaps we'll just pull together a list of some of those people between us and pop that up in the show notes as well. OK, so is there anything you haven't had the opportunity to talk about yet that, you know, as we start to wrap up the episode, you'd like to mention?

Donald H Taylor:

I want to mention one thing because it's happened this morning in the UK. We've woken up to it. It's 21st of May. We woke up to learn that Scarlett Johansson's voice had been copied, appropriated or whatever by OpenAI to be the voice of Sky. Well, has it? Hasn't it? They deny it. Nonetheless, they've taken her voice or what sounds like her voice down as being the voice used to articulate OpenAI 4.0 as the interface. And this was despite the fact that

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they'd approached her twice and twice she'd said no. And the last time they'd approached was a couple of days before the launch, which took place on the 14th. So we have to ask ourselves, now is an AI powerful? It is. Now can it do extraordinary things? It can. But how are we using it? Are we using it responsibly? And I think that it's easy to point fingers at other people. And certainly I don't think Open AI have covered themselves in glory with this one. They haven't. They've made a tremendous mistake, both in terms of trust in their own brand, but also in terms of reputation of AI. But for all of us, I think it's really important to think about, this is a powerful tool. There has never been in all my time in learning and development, all my time in technology, as powerful a tool for making things happen at scale. You do something at scale, there is the risk you create a disaster at scale. And we need to think about how do we use that well? So that's a slightly pessimistic note to end on, Michelle, but I still think it's a really important one for people to remember.

Michelle Ockers:

I think it's very grounding. Is there anything you'd like to add, Egle?

Egle Vinauskaite:

I would only reiterate something that we've said in different ways throughout this conversation, is that if you're starting out with AI and L&D, first of all, know that you're not alone. A lot of organizations are just at the starting stages of it. But also that I would encourage you not to think in a way that puts AI first and thinking, okay, so we have AI, what do we do with it? But think about just like you've always done, what are you trying to achieve? And how can AI help you achieve that? So it is, again, very simple advice, but this is something where if that's not how we approach it, what I've seen is that that's where the overwhelm happens. And this is where people lose faith in AI, because if you're not, if you don't have a clear goal in mind, it's not going to produce the results that you wanted, but didn't quite know how to ask for them. I'll leave the listeners with that.

Michelle Ockers:

I think that's a fantastic point to land the conversation on. Thank you so much Egle and Don for joining us and sharing your insights, your research with us today, and some great advice to learning and development professionals, and hopefully some inspiration for us to keep moving forward with this amazing technology that is AI to solve problems and find better ways to meet people's skill development and learning needs. So thank you both.

Donald H Taylor:

Thanks, Michelle.

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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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