Michelle Ockers:
Welcome to another episode of Learning Uncut. I'd like to kick
off by acknowledging the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and culture. I pay respect to elders past, present and emerging, including those of the Brynja Yuin nation on whose lands I sit today and extend that to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who are listening to this podcast. And from another country altogether, you're sitting in Germany, Dinye Hernanda. Welcome to Learning Uncut.

Dinye Hernanda:
Thank you for having me.

Michelle Ockers:
It's a pleasure. Welcome back, I should say, because you did appear alongside Catherine Tibbs for one of our Emergent Series episodes to talk about your experience with the Emerging Stronger Masterclass. And it feels to me when I look at the way you work, And I don't know whether you brought this kind of experimental, curious, open mindset to Emerging Stronger or whether the Emerging Stronger Masterclass helped shape that. I feel with you, there's this constant interplay of kind of these innate characteristics around curiosity and openness and then continuously learning. How do you see yourself when it comes to the mindset and approaches you bring to L&D?

Dinye Hernanda:
I think it mainly was driven by the fact that I didn't come in right away, like many other L&D professionals, right? Like they come from some other areas and then they come to L&D. In my story, I came from innovation management, product development, that was how I spent my first few years in my career. When I came to L&D, I wasn't even sure what L&D is. I just know that at that time the company has this project. They wanted to upscale their employees due to digitalization, the change of demographic, and all this kind of future trends that the company is facing. So they need people to help them upskill their employees. And I said, yeah, that sounds like something that I would love to do. And because I was developing the innovation, the new products for the company, it's just a natural development from my point of view at that time to like I developed the new processes, like the digital processes. I developed the new digital product. So it's only right that I also help the people to come to terms with this new processes and product. And apparently it's called future skills. So there we go.

Michelle Ockers:
We like to put a label on everything, right?

Dinye Hernanda:
Yes. So I was like, okay, here we go. Then I bring, you know, what I know from innovation management and product development, methodologies like agile design thinking, working in a scrum team, those kinds of flavors into L&D and how I approach L&D.

Michelle Ockers:
And I think that's going to become very evident today as we talk through our topic, which is about L&D in a startup or scale up environment. When you were working in a purely in innovation and then started working on what you came to understand was future skills development, that was in a larger organization, wasn't it, Dinye?

Dinye Hernanda:
Yes, so I started in corporate and that's also how I spent my first two and a half years of L&D, how I learned about L&D and then at some point I'm like, you know what, like I'm really curious about the world of startup at that time. It was six, seven years ago so it wasn't as thriving here at least in Germany and I thought I'll try that out.

Michelle Ockers:
Right. So you've had around about six years working in startups and scale-ups since that time, Dinye. You know, not everyone here will have worked in the startup or scale-up space, although there are plenty of stories out in the world for us to build some assumptions about what it's like to work in a startup or scale-up. But can you tell us firsthand, what are the typical characteristics of startups and scale-ups? You know, what, what makes them different to working in a corporate?

Dinye Hernanda:
Usually a startup or a scale-up will start hiring a learning and development manager or an HR who has a responsibility. That's also how they usually frame it. Like, oh we need a HR person who takes care of the development of our employees. They usually start doing that once they hit series A, series B. So that's where they finally confirmed that, okay, there is a market for our product and we want to expand, which means then they are going into this hiring spree, they've onboarded so many people, they have new managers coming into the organization. So right around like 100-ish, 80-ish people, or even for some organization, they do it later when they're around 300, employees. So they start hiring someone mostly because of this, oh, we are onboarding so many people, we need structure, we need to make sure that people actually learn and not just like, here you go, here's your laptop, please do your job, which is usually the case in a very early startup stage. And so that's their starting point. So it's not a corporate yet, they don't have processes, they don't have even in some cases clarity about okay what do we actually need to do and the decision to hire an L&D manager can either come from the leadership themselves so the business leaders who may not have you know an understanding of what L&D is what they know is that We need to make sure that our people learn from each other. And the imperative of learning is different than in corporate. In corporate, it's about meeting future demands, future skill, upskilling. Whereas in startup, we need to make sure that our people learn as fast as possible from the market, from customers' feedback. so we can immediately adjust. We can immediately tailor our product according to the market needs. So there is this urgency and immediacy of why you were hired and then also there is a clear business goal of why you are there. In some cases it's also if you have a visionary CHRO or an HR leader who says, oh, you know, now I have recruiting and we need someone who's dedicated to onboarding leadership development.

Michelle Ockers:
So there's a couple of different kinds of scenarios that you're walking into in terms of being the L&D person as to how much leeway and openness there is to approaches versus being told we need training. Is that right? You've walked into some different kinds of expectations when you first had first started in organizations. Would that be fair to say, Dinye?

Dinye Hernanda:
Yes. So there are different expectations, again, depending on who made that decision to hire you. In startup, it's more straightforward than in corporate. It's not like, oh, we have an opening in L&D and we used to have five people and now that's why we need to, and one person is going, that's why we need another one. So it's not just filling the gap. It's usually there is a very clear business need for that or someone has this idea of, oh, we need training

because the onboarding was a mess. That's usually the cause. They just, you know, rapid hire so many people. And then they, at some point down the line, they realize that oh, some people are very great at their job, some people are not. Or they realize the leadership has different skills level because in startup, you naturally have a lot of untrained, unskilled managers who are new and coming in their role and they grew together as the startup grows, but they haven't gone through a proper development process and you just start noticing the gaps.

Michelle Ockers:
Right. So you've already mentioned a couple of specific examples of challenges or opportunities that you might face moving into L&D in a startup or scale up. You've talked about the onboarding challenge because of the rate of rapid growth. You've talked about managers being put into positions of leadership where they don't have the skills or training for that. You talked also about the lack of process, how would you describe, are they sort of typical or key challenges of being the first L&D person in a startup environment, or are there other key challenges and opportunities that you think you would expect if you were to move into another startup?

Dinye Hernanda:
Those are the typical challenges. Now I've, you know, I've gone through three different startups and I entered them in different stages of maturity. So those like onboarding, leadership, is another one. That's usually the typical problem because as you say there is no process in the organization. What a lot of startups do, they wanted to offer as much freedom as possible to the people by giving them a stipend. It's a typical benefit that you will see in the startup world where they put on the career page, you will get from us 500 euro per year or even 1000 euro per year. And you can spend it for anything your heart desires, basically. Which is great, you know, like if we're talking about learning autonomy and making sure that people have the resources and the freedom to learn whatever they need. In reality, what I've seen, the usage of this stipend is quite low because you know, startup, it's a very fast-paced environment. People don't really have the headspace to think about, oh yeah, how am I going to spend a thousand euro that I got this year? They didn't have the time. They need guidance and they need process because in the middle of those process, usually a manager will be like, oh, I am not sure who needs to say yes to this request or can I just say yes? Can I just say yes to any request? and making sure that learning activities are aligned to business goals.

Michelle Ockers:
So I can see that alignment issue is a real challenge, right? So if you're talking about an organization, say of 300 people where everyone's given a thousand euros, there's a lot you could do if you could get a budget of 300,000 euros to do development work in a startup, right? As opposed to everybody being given their own 1000 euros. Let's take a closer look then, maybe if you want to pick based on your experience, one of these examples of a key challenge that you would walk into and let's talk through how you've gone about addressing that challenge.

Dinye Hernanda:
Onboarding is always a topic, unlike in big corporates where you have like, oh, this is our onboarding process and then we're going to test it for a year. In startup, you iterate your onboarding process every three months, just like per quarter. So it's always an ongoing project. I'll say let's go with the onboarding perhaps.

Michelle Ockers:
Okay. So you're coming into a startup. What state is onboarding typically in when you've joined a startup?

Dinye Hernanda:
So that depends again on the maturity level of this startup. What I've seen, let's say I've seen it in three different stages. The first one is where it's very early, it's around 70-80 employee counts. And so far what they've done is they will have the technical onboarding, let's say, where HR will make sure you are on the payroll, that you get the technical requirements that you need on your laptop, etc. But through to startup spirit, it's like, here you go, here's your laptop, please onboard yourself. That's pretty much how it's done. And then for me, I quite enjoy that at the beginning. I am a self-directed learner, so it gives me a lot of freedom.

Michelle Ockers:
So at that stage, it's really build it yourself onboarding. There's not too many silos. It's not too hard to go and find someone to help you understand something you want to understand. But it relies very heavily on the goal setting interests and self-directed learning skills of the individual, right?

Dinye Hernanda:
That's why it can still work if you are still a small team like 70. You will still know every face in the company. It's not as overwhelming because people will also not have immediately 10 people every month that they need to onboard. But once you get into 150 like in the middle of this rapid hiring that you do and you start noticing oh you have 10-20 people every month that you have to onboard, the HR usually already starts to put certain kind of expectation so they will have like a checklist, a very simple one that says, hey, these are the things that like from technical point of view, from an admin point of view that you need to do. And then they will start briefing the managers to give like, hey, these are what I expect from you as a manager, how you onboard your people. So there is somewhat of a structure. It's still very loose. Every team can tailor it according to their way of working and their culture. But that's also where it gets tricky because then it'll depend a lot on the managers. So, you know, in the first stage, it depends a lot on you as learners. On the second stage, it depends a lot on the managers themselves. And as I've mentioned at the beginning, some startup has very young leadership in the organization, and then they will start hiring more mature leaders. And then you start seeing the gap. And so that's also usually where it starts to get really painful. And then they will start saying we need a learning development manager who can take care of onboarding. I know in some cases people don't even call it learning and development managers. They just say we need an onboarding manager.

Michelle Ockers:
Right. Because that's sometimes the entry point for learning and development is we need an onboarding manager. And then once onboarding is taken care of, it kind of grows from there, does it?

Dinye Hernanda:
Yes.

Michelle Ockers:
That's interesting. So you've got this point, I think you said there were kind of three scenarios, that early stage where it's largely dependent on you as the employee, it's very self-directed. This next stage where it's dependent on managers and we're starting to recruit maybe some more experienced managers and there's inconsistency in the experience and

the time to productivity and to function effectively as a team member, depending on the quality of the job the manager is doing, using maybe some checklists that someone from the HR team has put together. Where's the next kind of increment? What happens then?

Dinye Hernanda:
So that's usually where they already have, maybe not specifically an onboarding manager, but there will be someone in HR who is already doing a thousand other jobs, who will dedicate some time to put a structure into onboarding and that's usually when they develop it together with business leaders and they've said, hey, this is our expectation for onboarding. So there will be, let's say courses, there will be some kind of a journey that they put together, but it's very rudimentary. So there will be videos, there will be an onboarding day where everyone comes together and then you learn all the basics together with the other newcomers. And then, you know, your manager is better trained or like better informed about why they should align their onboarding processes across the company. There is some basic structure that every team leads or every manager will already adopt. But then you will still see this is not a learning journey as a learning and development manager will understand it. It's just ticking boxes. But we don't really see a result, you know, because now the problem is the design is not optimized yet for proper learning. And that's also where they say, we need a professional to look at this, who are not doing this as a side on top of their thousand jobs in a startup. It will start feeling a little bit like corporate, like when you enter that stage, because, there is already a legacy, they have usually already bought some kind of a solution because tech implementation in startup is easy. So they're usually just like, okay, let's get that platform easily and then cover it up. And then you notice that, oh, they didn't buy that platform with a lot of consideration about what the platform can do. It's not tested. It's not reviewed by an L&D professional who will know this is how you choose a platform.

Michelle Ockers:
Have you walked into an organization at that point before with someone else that maybe got to that point?

Dinye Hernanda:
Yes

Michelle Ockers:
All right. So let's drill into that a little bit. So you've got this kind of history and you did talk about it being something that you would have to iterate every few months things shift because the company's growing so quickly and there's this realization that we have to level up onboarding and it keeps happening. Then they realize at a certain point, you know, we've got some rudimentary stuff in place, but it's not getting us the outcome we're looking for. We need a professional to look at that. Can you tell us about a time when you went into an organization and you're at that point, how did you go about developing something, designing and developing something that was going to work in the startup environment that suited that environment? Talk to us about that.

Dinye Hernanda:
So the way I work, they will tell me, Dinye, we need new onboarding, we need new leadership, et cetera. But I don't go directly like, okay, then let's have an onboarding project. I usually spend around a month where I'm just kind of floating around in the organization.

Michelle Ockers:
Just when you first start getting a feel for the organization.

Dinye Hernanda:
Yes. So just like reading all the documents, reading all the metrics that I can find, talking to people. shadowing people, interviewing leaders, etc. Because, you know, once you've done it several times, you quickly identify, okay, onboarding is the issue. And for me, then I would do some kind of an audit of a current learning culture, I call it. So I use the word learning culture loosely with the leadership, just so that they know I'm not just seeing at the tangible things like processes, etc. But I also want to see the intangible ones like how do people perceive learning in this organization? How do the leaders like are they being a role model or not? So then I will say, oh, you know, I will do a learning culture audit just so that I could tell where is the pain points, like where are the biggest areas to work on.

Michelle Ockers:
So how do you do that audit? Is that something you fill in based on your observations? Is that something where you survey or interview people specifically? Do you have a list of criteria? Tell me a bit more about what that looks like.

Dinye Hernanda:
So basically I analyze the existing processes along the employee development journey. So how do people plan their development? How do they get information about their development needs? How do they experiment, test things out, learn on the job? How do they evaluate? So just really tangible processes that the company already has. So this is then where I will start seeing, oh, they already have a development dialogue that happens every year. Very, very basic, but they have that. They already have onboarding processes to a certain degree. That's where I see, okay, these are the actual procedures that are already put in place. And then I will start interviewing the leaders. Not necessarily asking the questions, sometimes it's more like observing how do they react to my various questions that don't mention anything about learning. I will look at the data. If you know where to look, it's fun to be an L&D professional in startup because you just find all kind of numbers that you can put together and then analyze and see a bigger picture. And yeah, and I'll shadow. I go to meetings where I feel like, okay, that's actually a learning. experience. They just don't call it like that, but I'll go with it.

Michelle Ockers:
Yeah. So you're really getting into the DNA of the organization with the perspective of real learning. So how do you then, you're sort of coming back to the onboarding challenge, you've spent your months floating around the organization observing and absorbing, figuring out what makes this organization tick. You've done your current learning culture audit. How do you use those observations and your audit to figure out What's the approach to onboarding? How are we going to do this?

Dinye Hernanda:
Yeah. So you usually quickly see that, okay, onboarding is one of the biggest problems because you usually see it in different numbers. Like if you see the ramp up time or like how long does it take for a salesperson to start making money for the organization? If you see very different numbers in each team, then you know that there is an onboarding problem. So I will start looking at how would you visualize our onboarding process? So I will go through this whole thing. What actually already takes place? What are the tools that you use? How do you make sure that each thing happens? Because what usually also happens is that they will set up a process. They will say, these are our expectations. They launch it once. But because there is no one who is responsible in the quality control or like making sure that it actually happens. So I will come and then I'll ask, okay, how do you, how does the onboarding process look like? And then they will say, yeah, and then, you know, we have this feedback process that happens after a month, after three months and after six months.

And then I was like, okay, and where are the data for this? Like, do you actually note it down? Do you collect it? Saying, yeah, no, that's like all, like the managers take care of that. So I go to the managers and then I say, so how do you know, like, how do you take notes of what needs to be improved, what are already doing well of this newcomer? So I go through this just knowing, what actually happens, what was planned but probably did not happen because there was no one checking if that actually happens. What are the biggest pain points? I will do feedback round with the newcomers from the last six months just to ask how was your experience? What would you do if you start again? from the beginning, what would you like to know in the first few days, etc. And then I break down the elements of that process. So let's say onboarding, what are the necessary elements that you need to get it right in order for it to be a good big picture for everyone. So it could start with, oh, do we have a checklist? Do we have a clear expectation goals? do we have a clear plan for the first day, a clear plan for the first week, first month, et cetera. So, you know, from technical point of view, from admin point of view, from the social aspect point of view. So that's also where you start introducing maybe like a buddy program or a mentoring program. So I just break down the elements, start evaluating each of these elements and then start fixing those little elements. So I don't usually like call out a big onboarding project where we tackle everything.

Michelle Ockers:
So you work very iteratively based on the pain points?

Dinye Hernanda:
Yeah. So you usually have three months, right? Like in startup, Because if you talk to L&D professionals in startup, we all talk in Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4. Because I look at it as a product development process. Like you will have a long product backlog, all the features that you want to have in a product. because we work in quarter mindset, we will say, this is the plan for this quarter. We'll start fixing this because these are the biggest pain points. Once we are done, we are not sure if we are going to do it again in Q2 or in the second quarter. And it is very possible that based on our observations, based on our solution that we implemented in the first quarter, that the priorities for second quarter shifted to a totally different project.

Michelle Ockers:
So it feels like that very much mimics kind of the working rhythm, the operating rhythm of the organizations that you're working in, right?

Dinye Hernanda:
Yes because that's also you know, startup world like it can change really fast because every startup is very sensitive to the market, to the investors, to the customers and they adjust they pivot very quickly so it doesn't make sense to make a long plan about L&D

Michelle Ockers:
It's more rapid. You're having to act now, focus on a quarter. If you're looking at doing something that's going to take six months to develop, it might run out of steam. Things might shift around you too quickly. So it's very much kind of an act now orientation in terms of time scale. Dinye, would that be fair to say?

Dinye Hernanda:
Yes, but I also make sure, because it could easily lead into this, a German word for it is actionismus, but it basically means that you just action, action, action, action, and it will feel random. If you look back in a year and you're like, what have we done? So that's also how I see myself like the last few years. I swing from act now to plan for later spectrum here and there. And I used to be in this act now. And then I was so much in this act now, I moved to

like, let's plan for the future. Now I know the balance of how I plan my quarter. Usually we will have, let's say 70% of this very immediate L&D projects. It could go from, we'll have a small onboarding project, a small leadership development project, a small coaching mentoring project. And then there will be 30% of the project where I know it won't show like the numbers that our leadership will want. but it's groundwork that we need to do. So it's usually like this year, for example, the focus is we want to increase our employees' ability to learn. So there is a theme around this year, which is this, like whatever project we do, it will be about making sure people know how to make sure that their learning activities is aligned to our business goals, that they know where to find resources, So there is this 30% of long-term planning that will not make my direct stakeholders happy because they will be like, but I need your 100% to just solve our immediate problem.

Michelle Ockers:
They'll thank you for it in 12 to 24 months, right? When they see what you've built and how much more effective learning is as a result. So you're trying to balance those two out. So Dinye, you spoke there about this 30% versus 70% and the importance of building self-directed learning skills and the team learning skills in the organization, in a startup. Can you give us an example of an initiative where you've taken the approach that you want to not only address a business problem, but also build some of those more self-directed learning skills?

Dinye Hernanda:
Yes. When I did my first learning audit, there's something that I realized it was an organization that already has a lot of instruments in places when it comes to learning. And they were like, yeah, we have this catalog and this, this, and this, but the usage is low. Why are people not using it? And what I learned there is through the conversation, through the data analysis, etc. It's mostly coming from people not knowing how to do their learning effectively, how to create a goal, how to find the right resources, how to do learning in the daily life. like not doing learning in the way that they imagined in their head, which is sitting in a course and then doing training. So there is that need of making sure that our employees learn effectively because we don't have a lot of time in startup. Everyone's busy. So you need to make sure that if you're learning, you're learning it effectively. meaning you learn, you apply it, you tested it, you fail, you share it with others, etc. Which is, in our world, as an L&D, it was like, yeah, that's self-directed learning skills. For me, it was immediately clear. There is also a business need that they always, especially if it's a scale-up, there is this need of business expansion. For them, Dinye, we need to be closing. Closing all day, cash every day.

Michelle Ockers:
So closing, meaning closing sales, right?

Dinye Hernanda:
Closing sales, yes. And in their mind, it's like, how do we close this closing gap? We need people to close more. It's by inviting experts to talk about closing techniques, by having a training program, how to close, you know, the traditional act now. Because for them, it's immediate. like oh if you bring in an expert and talk about some techniques people can apply it immediately and then they will be able to improve their sales. But the problem at that point is we already did that the year before. And apparently, we still have the closing problem. My mistake at that time was, because I immediately saw, oh, it's a self-directed learning problem. I sold it to them and then I said, you know, there is something that I learned in my audit that people need to know how to learn. So that's why for my 30% project, which is not the act now project, is to do a self-directed learning journey. They just look at me blank.

Michelle Ockers:
Yes, you're talking about self-directed learning and journeys and they're just scratching their head.

Dinye Hernanda:
It's the jargon. What are you talking about? But we need closing. We need closing every day and we need cash. That's what we need. Then I put my head together with my manager. I was like, we need to find a better narrative for this. Because my goal is still answering the business problem. So he changed the narrative and then I pitched it again in this steering committee. And then I said, the project is now called Closing, with a subtitle, self-directed learning. But this subtitle is for me and my team, not for them. We just call it closing with the whole company. But this time I'm going to approach it differently. I'm not going to do training, experts, blah, blah, blah. I showed them some numbers that showed that it did work, how much money we've already spent, how much return we don't get, and then convinced them that we're going to try a different approach now. We're going to make sure we're going to have, first of all, a learning experience with the managers. So I started with the managers with a series of workshops together with them, where my goal was to reframe their role in learning, reinforce how do I play a role into my employees learning because so far maybe what they know about helping their employees in their learning is by sending them into trainings and that's all. Or maybe like guide them here and there. So in the first quarter, I was just focusing on the managers first, making sure that they understand what self-directed learning is. We don't need to mention that because I package it in a way, how to help your employee close faster and easier. And what I told them is like, oh, you know, so you need to help them be clear about their goal. Like what is exact, how much do they need to close and what are the skills or the thing that they're missing so that they can close this. And then you go into the resources you need to help them by giving feedback and reflection. And then, so, you know, everything that a manager needs to do to help their employees in self-directed learning. But I don't mention that.

Michelle Ockers:
You just put it very much in the context of helping them to close sales.

Dinye Hernanda:
Yes. Helping them to close sales and what you need to do. So we finished the manager part in the first quarter. We started with the employee part in the second quarter. So it was a year-long project. So it's part of this 30% of we're not going to see immediate results, but it needs to be done to address a deeper problem in the organization. And the second quarter, then it's about this campaigning of new approach of learning. And we invited them to a series of workshop again with the employees. And then we invited experts and sales leaders, but not to give them tips about how to close. We asked them to tell people how they learn about closing. So we, as the business leaders, the experts, not to just give them like tips. So this is how I do, but to portray the learning journey that they need to go through in order to hit that.

Michelle Ockers:
So this is how I got better at making these more complex sales.

Dinye Hernanda:
Exactly. Like how do I find the resources? How do I ask for help? How do I make sure that I improve every day by getting feedback from others? So they're not learning how to close per say in this training. But they got inspired because then after this talk, then we will ask them, now you learned today how to get the right resources for you to learn how to close. Now go find your resources and put it together with your team and have a resource box. So we don't

give them the resources, they look for the resources and gather it themselves in a database that we created for them. And it's, you know, that one week will be about like gathering resources. The other week will be about reflection and getting feedback. So we ask the managers to again share, how do you ask for feedback? What kind of feedback has helped you a lot? So, you know, we are teaching them self-directed learning, but in a closing the deal context. And we just repeat it again in the third quarter where we make it really about this social learning. We put them into groups. These are people with similar closing goals. So let's say, oh, these are the group of people who need to close deals with big organizations. These are the people who need to close deals with really small organizations that has a very short sales cycle. So they have similar closing goals, not learning goals, closing goals. And then they experimented, they share their experiment with each other. So we asked them to, okay, if this is what you've done so far, maybe try something different. We give them framework about how to plan an experiment, how to share with others, how to structure it. It's another quarter of them trying it out themselves now. So instead of just being told about the story, learning how to tools, they now implemented themselves like self-directed learning. It was great because then the result of this learning project was an actual business numbers. Because then they say, oh yeah you know at the beginning of this quarter I was supposed to close this 2 million euro deal and I wasn't sure about that and I experimented here and there and then I closed it through the experiments. You know for us as an L&D team, usually you have this, oh, how do we demonstrate our value and impact for the organizations? And then you try to kind of derive the happy smile sheet to the actual numbers of the sales or any of the numbers that you need to hit. In our case, it's not even us who is demonstrating the value and impact. It was the people themselves who are part of this experiment of this journey. And that was you know, very helpful for everyone in the organization. Because the final presentation, we did it in front of all the business leaders so they all see how it was done, what needs to be done further or improved. And we gamified it a little bit so people who want the best presentation of their learning or their experiments can go to a conference together so that they learn again together. But they're happy about it because it was a conference, it was out of an office of experience.

Michelle Ockers:
So by the end of the second quarter, were you seeing any shift in closing or not yet? Or was it just a lower shift than the business was looking for? No change?

Dinye Hernanda:
No change. So we are presenting the results of our projects every end of the quarter. So we have this steering committee meeting every beginning where we pitch our project and this is what we are going to do. And at the end where we presented the business results. For every project that we have, we always have business result as the North Star. So let's say if at that time is to increase the number of marketing leads, then that's what we are going to see in the end. That's what I'm going to present in the steering committee meeting. It's not about how many people come into the training, blah, blah, blah. It's very much the business results. And for this closing skills, of course we have the closing rate as the star. And in the second quarter, I just had to stand there and say, yes, we failed. Because according to the business goal, we were supposed to hit this closing rate. But in startup environment, you just have to be transparent. If you're not hitting number, which is the most important metric in a startup that's trying to survive the market, then for you to have credibility is to say that, yes, my team did that last quarter. We put a lot of resources in that, but it didn't show in a business value.

Michelle Ockers:
How did you still retain the confidence of the senior leadership team for you to continue on with the next quarter, which was your social learning, your experimenting, sharing back the

experiments? How did, you know, how did the confidence get retained to just press on with that rather than them saying, well, that's it, Dinye, that's enough. Go and get that expert and run a training session.

Dinye Hernanda:
And at the time, I was already more than a year in the organization. So I already built, like my team already built credibility. They know how we work, et cetera, et cetera. When we were preparing this presentation for the steering committee, we were like, are we sure that we put fail in that slide. We say failure. And I was like, are we sure about this? Why don't we soften it a little bit? But for us at that time, it's important to maintain this credibility that we are here to do business. So when from the business point of view it fails, then we need to say it fails. So we presented it. with like, so here's the numbers, as you see, the numbers didn't move, this number also didn't move, and this, and this, and this, and this, and this. So to summarize, the project failed to move any business numbers. And then they started defending us. The business results didn't move, but I do get feedback from my team members that they really enjoyed this shift of this and this and this. So they started seeing, oh yeah, this is a future planning kind of project. We're not going to start seeing results, but I think this is a move to the right direction. So we were hopeful that they will not just cut it, So that's why we were very surprised when it was them who was like, no, no, no, let's double it down. Next quarter, let's double it down. We feel like the reason why it failed, because it didn't get as much attention and budget as it needs to be. But I think this is going to the right direction. So we actually doubled it down in the third quarter. Right.

Michelle Ockers:
And then what happened, like when you came back at the end of the third quarter, what were you reporting in terms of sales closing?

Dinye Hernanda:
Well, they presented it. So it was the third quarter was when they had the experiment and they were the one who presented. These are the deals that I closed due to this project, which is not a learning project. It was a closing project of how to improve my closing rate. At that time, it was good for us. When we did the steering committee meeting at the end of the quarter, it was like, well, you saw the presentation, guys. That was it. We did it to a certain degree. You know, there is a talk about, oh, let's, let's do it again. Maybe make this into like a routine thing where like every six months or so we put people into cross-functional group where they experiment how to do their work differently. And they're asking us to repeat the self-directed learning journey that we created for the people.

Michelle Ockers:
So what might L&D professionals in more established organizations learn from the scale up and startup environment?

Dinye Hernanda:
So I think for me what shifted immediately after I moved from corporate to startup was looking at L&D in a very entrepreneurial mindset. Meaning here that I look at my L&D processes, trainings, experience, whatever you need to develop in your L&D team as a product. because I came from product development so I adopted that mindset and you are only building a product that actually solves your people's problem that is not just like oh yeah I do that because that's a project that I receive but I always started with like okay we are building a product now so we need to make sure that there is a market for this product. That we understand what the people need in this market so that our product is actually answering the right problem. So I think you know like this approach of really making sure that whatever you are building is actually solving the actual problem. It's not only something that you do in

a startup. Maybe in startup it's a more straightforward process because you could immediately just ask the people, you can talk to the leadership, you can gather all the data because startup is just naturally hungry of data. So you have these resources to do that more maybe in a startup. But I don't see what's stopping you from doing it in a corporate. And then I also see the business leaders as my investors. And what do your investors care about? It's their return on investment. They don't care about how you make the money or how you sell the product. All they care about is that the numbers that you're supposed to hit is hit. They will need to be convinced. They need your credibility. They need you to be transparent and have this regular alignment with them. I don't see what's stopping the L&D team in corporate to have a steering committee like what we have in startup. Maybe it will be easier because the leaders are busier in corporate. I don't think so. But then it's also about making sure… I think in startup, there is this understanding that learning is super important because that's how we would be able to survive. We need to be learning as fast as possible every day in all possible cases. But I think in corporate now with the rise of AI, with how fast-paced everything is, how interconnected and global. And I think a lot of people in corporate already knows that, yeah, learning is also imperative for us. We are going to lose the market. We're not going to be established player anymore if we don't learn as fast as these young people in startups. And I think maybe L&D in corporate will need to do a bit more work to highlight this urgency of why it is important and why we need your business attention to make decisions. But it's a two-way street. What I also hear a lot about from my friends, my ex-colleagues in corporate, is that they would complain like, yeah, you know, our stakeholders don't know anything else. They just come to us with training requests. And then I asked them, but did you showcase that you could deliver more than training and programs? Because if you don't, why are you complaining? It's a two-way street. If you are not showcasing that you can do much more than your feedback sheets and your trainer satisfaction and your program attendance, then of course they will only know you about this.

Michelle Ockers:
I like going back to a phrase you used earlier, changing the narrative. You know, here's another example where you need to change the narrative. So there's lots about being entrepreneurial and thinking in an entrepreneurial way that's relevant in, you know, this more rapid change environment that we find ourselves living and working in today, Dinye. So some fantastic insights there and some great examples of what it's like to work in L&D in a startup and the kind of approaches you take to shaping solutions. What's next for you, Dinye? You're between, or I don't know if you're between startups, but at the moment you've recently finished with one startup. So what are your future plans for yourself in the L&D world?

Dinye Hernanda:
I've learned a lot. I feel like building L&D and startup is like an acceleration school. where you just learn, like, I remember I had an interview, I was interviewed by a recruiter around a year ago where they asked me, like, you know, walk me through your CV. And then I told them about what I did in a year in startup. And this lady was just not convinced that I did all that because in her world, like in her corporate world, it was a big corporate here in Germany. it's just not possible to do all that in a year and I said but I did that like yes maybe it's in a smaller scale than what you would do in corporate but the experience in startup is just intense, you just have to do a lot of things at once you have to adopt a lot of roles, so right now I'm very much eager into just maybe writing it all down for myself, for my own learning, what did I learn in this very rollercoaster world of a startup. You know in startup you experience the extremes, I've seen three layoffs, four maybe at this point, I've seen businesses closing up, bankruptcy, I've seen also people becoming like the next unicorn etc. So I've seen the extreme from a business point of view but also as an L&D professional in this flux of change that is just so rapid. So I'm thinking about just, okay, let me digest all this

experience and see what can crystallize out of it. What I've also received requests several times now is from bigger organizations who are looking for new ways of approaching L&D and they were just curious about like how did you approach L&D in startup? How did you build it? And apparently the way I work, the way I think, the way I approach my projects and my work in L&D is something that corporate are really keen to have in their own team as well. So I got invited sometimes in corporate to share my experience, do a workshop together with their team to infuse this energy and this mindset of doing L&D for their contacts. Or I also got some corporate who asked me, can you look at our L&D process and see how we can make it better? Right now they hired their consultant, they hired their typical go-to person when it comes to revamping L&D. but they quite enjoy me just asking bold questions or like, okay, why does this lady think this way? They sometimes don't understand why I approach things, but they find it refreshing.

Michelle Ockers:
Bringing your entrepreneurial mindset to that, the new world of organizations and helping them to adapt to more complexity and rapid change by the sounds of it, Dinye. So, Dinye, we're going to put a link to your LinkedIn profile in the show notes for anyone who wants to get in touch with you to learn more, to perhaps talk about bringing your entrepreneurial mindset to their organization as well. Thank you so much for sharing your insights and experiences with us today. It's been really fascinating and greatly appreciated.

Dinye Hernanda:
Thank you so much for the opportunity. I really enjoyed the conversation.

About Learning Uncut

Learning Uncut are learning and development consultants that help Learning and Development leaders and their teams become a strategic enabler so that their businesses can thrive. We work in evidence-informed ways to drive tangible outcomes and business impact and are strong believers in the power of collaboration and community. We specialise in helping to build or refresh organisational learning strategy, update their L&D Operating Model, enable skills development, and conduct learning evaluation. We also offer workshops to shift learning mindset and practices for both L&D teams and the broader workforce – as well as speaking at public and internal events.

Learn more about us at our website.

About your host, Michelle Ockers

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

Michelle received the following prestigious industry awards in 2019:

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

Find Michelle on LinkedIn