Learning Uncut Episode 159
2024 End of Year Review – Chemène Sinson
Hosted by Michelle Ockers

Michelle Ockers:
Listeners, welcome to the final episode of Learning Uncut for 2024. In the spirit of reconciliation, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and their connection to land, sea and community and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. We're going to be doing a bit of a look back over the year for both learning and development and more specifically for the Learning Uncut podcast and look at perhaps what it reflects about this moment in time in learning and development. And to do this, I am joined very generously by the wonderful Chemène Simpson. Welcome, Chemène.

Chemène Sinson:
Hi, Michelle. It's great to be here.

Michelle Ockers:
Thank you for coming back. This is your second episode this year. You joined me for the end of conference wrap for the AITD, the Australian Institute of Training and Development Conference. Thank you for so generously agreeing to join me, Chemène.

Chemène Sinson:
Oh, it's an absolute pleasure. I love conversations like this because it helps me bring together and maybe clarify a few thoughts, not only about this past year, but also about 2025. So it's really great to be here having this kind of a conversation.

Michelle Ockers:
And Chemène, you were asking me when we were doing some prep for this episode, you notice there's two different types of episodes we've been publishing this year, the regular Learning Uncut case study conversations, and then another type of episode called Elevate. I just wanted to set the scene around what the Elevate episodes, I was going to say are about, but really were about. And I had to pause them because they were taking a lot of extra work when I needed to carve out some time for a special project that I've been working on. But of course, the heartbeat of Learning Uncut for the last six and a half years since we launched in June 2018 has been the case study episodes, real projects, real solutions that have been implemented in organizations. Every now and then, I do something a little bit different as a series. COVID, of course, I had a couple of series to help explore what was happening in the moment with COVID and how we could emerge stronger as a result of what we were learning and trying out in COVID. So that was the disruption series and the emergent series, and they're all still available on the website. But then I got to a point where I thought, you know, sometimes I want to talk about something that I don't have a case study for, I want the ability to, if I come across someone interesting who I think has some ideas or some things they're playing around with that's worth sharing, or there's a report or something topical. So I created this Elevate series. The idea or the name being about elevating our practice and impact at one topic or one skill at a time. So I may bring that back into the future, Chemène. For the moment, it's on pause because I'm elevating my own practice with a special project, which I might share a little about with the listeners later in the year. But of course the case study episodes, the total for the main series, we're now at, this is episode 159, so 246 episodes in total, including all those other series. Across the last six and a half years, we've been downloaded 250,000 times, unique downloads across 120 different countries. of course, Australia, which is where the podcast started, 35% of the downloads from Australia, 32% from the US, 10% from the UK, 6% from Canada, which is where you hail from Chemène.

Chemène Sinson:
I do. Go the Canucks.

Michelle Ockers:
And 5% from New Zealand and then a scattering from all around the world.

Chemène Sinson:
Well, and I have to say, Michelle, that's what I love about this podcast as well, is that it's useful for any of us. And it doesn't matter what aspect of adult education we work in, whether it's organizational learning and development, as many of your case studies come from, or whether it's university sector, or whether here in Australia, it's the vocational training RTO type sector. These case studies are real examples showing people not only what's possible, but how it's possible.

Michelle Ockers:
Well, thank you to the guests, because the guests are what really make it and their willingness. We're in a great profession, aren't we, where people are so willing to talk about their work and to support each other, to uplift everybody's practice. I love that aspect of learning and development. So, Chemène, I wanted to touch briefly on some of the professional highlights for each of us this year. And the reason I do this in these end of year wrap episodes is because I think our individual lenses and what we're paying attention and what we're involved in can shape what we see. in a body of work like this podcast series. If I was having a conversation with someone different who'd had different experiences during the year, then maybe different things would be jumping out at them. So tell me, what are some of your professional highlights being in 2024?

Chemène Sinson:
Well, I've got to say, it has been a fun, rewarding year. And it was in direct contrast for me to 2023, when I spent most of it sitting at home, you know, washing and getting out of my pyjamas was a reasonably rare event, because I had to spend most of that year writing. I guess what I do for a living really it's anything you're willing to pay me to do but I love hanging out in learning and performance circles but I write materials where I teach how to teach in those materials and it's for a national qualification here in Australia and the government in late 2022 like December updated that qualification which meant 2023 I had to sit at home and write. What that also meant was that in 2024, I was so ready to come back out and play, and I was also ready for a change. So your question about highlights of 2024, I made 2024 a real year of exploration and it's taken me on some absolutely marvellous adventures with learning. And of course, I have to pay some bills. So what I tried to do, I kept the day job, the regular income of teaching, being in a classroom, which I do a fair amount of, and that's online or in person. But I also then tried to prioritise new work opportunities that also gave me that chance to meet people, learn from them, learn through them. So some of the highlights that really came from there, because this was really a year of conversations, which was fantastic. You mentioned one thing I did this year that I loved and I hope to do more of is emceeing conferences or being a speaker at conferences and I realized that it's that we all know the value of a community of practice. And for those of us who work for ourselves, going to conferences really gave a beautiful community of practice. And as emcee, I got a chance to speak with anyone, federal, state politicians, industry leaders in different educational sectors, individuals and organizations that are doing amazing things in L&D. And for me, a personal highlight of all of that was speaking with the students. So the story of Madison Sims as a student really stood out and I think that's especially timely because you and I, Michelle, are recording this podcast on the International Day of People with Disability. Madison has autism as well as a mild intellectual disability and what inspired

me about her story, she was hired in 2019 by Kirstie, and I'm going to name names because I think they deserve a lot of kudos, by Kirstie Wisehart at the Starfish Store here in Australia. Starfish, after employing her, also went on to partner with their local community college to give Madison the support that she needed to complete her Certificate II in Retail Services as well as to thrive on the job. So it was that whole partnership that really worked for Madison. Five years later, Kirstie describes Madison as among her most reliable and capable employees and to see Madison speak today about what the workplace did for her in partnership with her community and her community education provider and how she has in turn become such a reliable and capable employee of the organisation. It was just a really great example of what's possible when organisations really put their heads together and do something wonderful. So where do I summarise highlights of the year? It was just a year of learning, of getting great ideas, but really being able to see that things that probably intimidate many of us, you know, how to leverage AI, some of those other things, that feel a bit frightening, we can see little inroads being made now. And I think just it's all those little things coming together to have been, I think, having me end 2024 quite reassured that if we just keep learning, we're going to be all right. So that's the kind of thing I'd love to talk about in the rest of this episode, how did all of that come together?

Michelle Ockers:
Such variety in the conversations you've been having, the people you've been meeting, the places you've been traveling. And I love that story about Maddy, in part because when I speak with learning and development professionals in all sorts of different contexts, one of the things that always comes out is kind of two threads, what gets us out of bed in the morning? And one of those key threads is we get the chance to help other people and make a difference in their lives. The other one is around the organizational impact, but at the heart of it, for so many in learning and development, I think that kind of personal impact on the lives of others is what really attracts us to the job and gives us that incredible sense of meaning out of the work we do, Chemène. One of the things that comes out when we get to talk about the themes and the threads from this year's podcast conversations, yes, we're very focused on tech at the moment and AI is driving a lot of that. But there's also this thread of humanity and what it means to be human and how we marry those two up in our approach to learning in our contemporary setting. So, Chemène, if 2023 was all about writing for you, 2024 has largely been about writing for me. I haven't spent too many days in my pyjamas, though. So I am co-writing a book with the lovely Laura Overton, which will be released sometime next year. And that's about all I'm allowed to say about it. But one of the things in the book or one of the things we're playing with is this idea of continuous change. And what does that mean for us in learning and development? So when I look around me at the moment, because that's the lens I'm bringing, I see change all around me. I've been working a lot with learning strategy. Of course, that's central to the work that I do through Learning Uncut. So this year I've helped organizations in health, financial services and interestingly, an indigenous land council, to work on their learning strategy. So multiple sectors. So tackling some of those bigger picture questions about impact and value through the work that we do in learning and development. So let's talk about L&D in 2024. So if you had to sum up L&D in 2024 in a word or phrase, what would it be and why?

Chemène Sinson:
Oh, I had to work on this one because as you've already said, there have been two or three key themes. So the phrase I came up with that attempts to tie together what I've noticed is bringing everyone along as we take the classics into the future.

Michelle Ockers:
Oh, you did work on that.

Chemène Sinson:
I know, it's not exactly a quick slogan though, is it? It's more of a slightly long mantra. Well, bringing everyone along speaks to what you've already mentioned, Michelle, is there's a lovely theme of inclusivity and community and collaboration and things that making sure that that everyone's included that we, I think at least I have, seen little bits of around the edges but there seems to be front and center this year and that really leaves me feeling good. You know, in my day job when I'm not talking to people or emceeing conferences I'm often working, I work with trainers and educators and facilitators and you know the goal is to help them get better at what they do whether we're talking about the organization getting better or whether we're talking about individuals and their facilitation skills or things like that or designing skills but it's all about helping learning work better. And I've always sort of tried to say, okay, but will that work for everybody? Will that work for them? And what's wonderful is that this year we've seen so many themes that are putting that sort of a question at the front of everything as well, as opposed to what you might expect, the AI, the tech and all of that. So that's the future part of that. The reason I mentioned the classics, so bringing everyone along refers to universality and inclusion. The future as we take the classics into the future refers to all the things we expected to see, you know, AI other forms of technology and how we can use that to genuinely support learning which expectedly there was a lot about that. what reassured me from going and listening to all of these podcast episodes, but also just having other conversations in the wider learning world is that we're not forgetting the classics. So as an example, you've got some of, well, doing the fieldwork. So Nigel Paine, your Elevate episode 36, where he talks about you really have to be clear on what it is you need. And now that's a classic, right? We've known that for a long, long time. And he says, you have to go back and do the fieldwork. You got to go and visit the workers where they are and really find out what's going on. Don't rely on someone else's word for what's needed before you start developing things together. So that's what I mean about the classics. And I really liked that. It wasn't about just throwing out everything we ever knew about learning now that AI is here. So I loved that sort of a theme that I started seeing coming through.
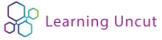
Michelle Ockers:
I think the fact that AI is here and it's opening up new possibilities makes it even more important to ground our thinking about AI and how we leverage it in what we know to be true, you know, from learning science, from behavioural science, you know, from good practice from the past, from what has worked and thinking about how we lean into that and double down in particular on evidence based practice.

Chemène Sinson:
Exactly.

Michelle Ockers:
You've been a lot more elaborate than me. My phrase was continuous changing. And I think there is no doubt that that's one of the key challenges we're now grappling with is it's just ongoing and it will be so for a long time into the future. I had a conversation this year, not a Learning Uncut podcast conversation, but with that conversation with Trish Uhl, who has been on Learning Uncut in a past year. And she's very much at the forefront of technology in learning and development. And in particular this year, she's doubled down on AI. And she introduced me to a phrase called jerk, technological jerk, where the pace of change is so great that it's just so disconcerting that we feel like we just can't keep up with it. And I think we have that going on all around us as does our workforce. But in terms of how I see that playing out, obviously AI is transforming learning and development. And we have an opportunity. It's not just that it is creating change, but there is an opportunity to lean into it and use it smartly and wisely to help us to support a workforce that is also facing continuous change and moving beyond the obvious, which is improving content generation, which, you

know, it's kind of what it was made for in terms of generative AI, but also looking at how do we personalize learning? How do we become more efficient using AI? How do we double down to your point on classics, double down with the way we use evidence and analyse data using AI? So how can we use it as a force for good and a force to help us keep up to date and help our workforce keep up to date with change and our organizations to lean into change on an ongoing basis? The other place I see this playing out is the ongoing emphasis on skills-based approaches to talent management. And one of the things we see as a result of the pace of change is that skills are continuously shifting and the need to reskill whilst at the heart of our work, skills development has been a key element of what we're here to do for many, many years. But it's the pace at which skills need to shift that has made the ability to more rapidly equip our workforce with skills to reskill for internal mobility, to take on new challenges that the organization or opportunities the organization wants to take on. So I'm seeing that as another key thing that we're still talking about and grappling with in learning and development this year. And of course, the persistent challenges about how do we stretch the resource we've got? How do we align with business goals? How do we make the most of what's available to us to help everybody through this period of ongoing change? So that's sort of some of the themes I see. And of course, some of that plays out in the Learning Uncut episodes this year. So I think there are some overlays with some of what's going on around us with learning and development. One thing to note about the podcast episodes is they sometimes lag behind where our attention is going because each episode is a case study about something that's actually been implemented in an organization. So last year, I had very few episodes that talked much about AI. But this year, of course, AI was a key theme in our Learning Uncut episode. No doubt that stood out to you as well.

Chemène Sinson:
Oh, it absolutely did. Yeah. And what was nice was that there was a nice mix. So there were some really broad topics around AI, but then there were some specific examples as well. And when I say broad topics within one episode, you know, they would talk about the strategy of using AI, but then a few examples of how to do it all as well. A few of those that stood out for me, David Kelly, chairman of the eLearning Guild, he was in one of your Elevate episodes 39, but he was all about making sense of trends and how we could sort of try to understand where we might fit. And one reason his stood out for me was because he made me feel a whole lot better because he had some good strategies for how individuals like us could manage that, almost that overwhelm that I think you were alluding to there, Michelle, of how do we ever keep up? And so some of the things that he's talked about were first of all, in terms of understanding AI and how technology should change how we learn, he talked about having to look not at education and training in isolation, but looking more broadly at the way that we live in general, because that then sets expectations around the normalcy of digital interactions that will then need to inform and shape the future of how we bring these technologies into our education and training. So, I like that idea, we'll start with what people do and how they use AI, and then you can start to think about how you might be able to bring that into your training. And what I really liked was his tip on, well, when he acknowledged even as chairman of the eLearning Guild, you can't stay on top of everything. I felt much better listening to that and his strategy that he suggested of figuring out who are the experts in different aspects of technology, there's AI, there's still AR, VR, all those other things, deciding who to follow, you know, who would be your top few people in those worlds to follow. And then if they recommend something to go into detail on, you go into detail on that, so they do some of the curation for you. And I liked that. That was one of my favourite episodes just because it gave some nice tips to manage some of that overwhelm and take it one tool at a time.

Michelle Ockers:
Yeah, that's true. I found in a similar vein that the episode with Brad Hodge, which was episode…

Chemène Sinson:
Latrobe University episode 155. And I can tell you that because later when you say what was your favourite episode, I'm going to name his.

Michelle Ockers:
Well, let's talk about that. Why was Brad's episode one of your favourite episodes?

Chemène Sinson:
Well, for me, first, I just loved it. I mean, you could just hear enthusiasm and excitement oozing out of his voice. So, he was somebody where, you know, if you're listening to this episode, or if you're reading the transcript, he is someone I think you have to listen to. The transcript didn't do him justice I don't think, because part of what I got was great enthusiasm. But I come back to my theme of bringing the classics together. So the first thing he talked about was, when we talk about using AI, first, let's wrap in all the classics that we know. You need to know what you're trying to achieve. So he really emphasized having a purpose. And he used his example of the three boxes to really show the ineffectiveness of just pumping people with knowledge versus the much more effective option of really helping people think about who they want to be or how they want to be was the term that he used. And again, I brought that back to the domains of learning, knowledge, skills, attitudes, but he looked at attitudes as far as being. And I know you're welcome to, I can explain it or you can explain it, but I liked that. So that was the grounding in the classics. But then what I liked was the step-by-step process. And you took him back and you said, all right, so how do we say of using AI to set up an avatar.

Michelle Ockers:
Well, it was actually not an avatar. It was a conversational bot. And in the case, we talked about doing it using Gen AI. And one of the reasons I enjoyed that episode so much was that it'd been something I'd been wanting to do for a long time. And I had actually set up a private bot using ChatGPT. But in terms of training it, I couldn't get it to do what I really wanted it to do very well. And he talked about how he has set up a chat bot to support students going through one of his courses in rural health innovation at La Trobe University. And I was able to take that and leverage it and apply it straight away for my own use case, which I thought was particularly useful. But, you know, one of the key reasons I invited Brad Hodge to be a guest was the fact that he is thinking differently about AI in education. And in this case, he's in the higher ed sector. Instead of pushing back and saying, well, students shouldn't be using AI, it's cheating. He's embracing it and saying our students are going to be in a workforce, in a workplace, in organizations where AI is available to them. What's a useful way of making AI available to them in the context of their education? And in particular, in this case, he's talking about innovation. And I think that's maybe why he got away with being so progressive that he's been given a little bit of leeway by his institution to experiment with AI to support his students in a way that addresses the issues of ethics and privacy. And I think I'd love more educators in our in our universities to be listening to that episode and thinking about how to stop pushing back on the use of AI and embrace it in a way that supports learning rather than degrades learning.

Chemène Sinson:
Well, and that brings me back again to David Kelly saying look at what people are really doing in the real world with AI, because you've got to bring that into your education and training in a couple of ways into how they might use AI to learn, but also then into ultimately

how they might use AI to ultimately do what it is they're being taught to do. And as you know, Michelle, I work a lot with the Australian vocational education and training sector. And I've recently stepped on to a learning and teaching committee with a higher ed sector as well. And we're looking at all of that. And where I see all of this, you know, we talk a lot about assessment, which I know in the L&D world isn't as, but it's all part of the same theme, where at the moment, educators are thinking about what's bad about it and how to stop cheating with it and things like that. The next step will be to start redesigning how we're measuring whether people learn what they need to learn and we redesign it to incorporate the use of AI as would be expected in the real world. And what I loved about Brad Hodges was he said, I've taken away for those people who have been previously using AI to cheat, I've just taken away the power of that, because now I've given it to the good students as well, and said go for your life, have fun. And I agree with you. The other thing I liked about his session was that his quote, "try to break it". But the whole idea that where he kept saying, none of us knows how this should work, or where this is going to take us. And I think sometimes, as we learn all of us to get comfortable with the discomfort of continuous learning and continuous change that you alluded to the idea that, you know, even the experts don't know what's going to happen, it's okay to get out there and start experimenting. And critically for us educators or trainers or facilitators, L&D people, is to know that it's going to be impossible to know everything. So that will be okay to work collaboratively with the people we train as well as with others around us who are professionals and leverage the relative expertise of people around us. So it comes back to the classics. storytelling came up in a lot of your presentation in your episodes. Conversations, tinkering, making mistakes, and knowing those will accelerate learning. And I think Brad, just because his episode was a bit more recent as well. He made all of that it was to me, he gave me permission to do all of that. So that's why I liked his episode.

Michelle Ockers:
Yeah. And of course, another episode, which really laid into experimentation and community with AI was episode 152 with Peter Sheppard and Pauline Robourgeon from Ericsson, who have taken a community based approach to experiment with emerging tech, including various AI applications. They have an enterprise wide community called Learning Next, which includes not just learning and development people, but business people who are interested in exploring some of this emerging tech and how it might be used for learning and development. And I think their approach is a fabulous example of experimenting through community. They have a very structured process and a very interesting kind of decision they make about whether to build, buy or wait, in terms of the specific use cases they're experimenting with for artificial intelligence. So if anyone is thinking about where do we get started at an enterprise level with AI and really figuring out what does it mean for us, I'd recommend that episode. And of course, I discovered that episode out of episode 146, which is with Donald H. Taylor and Egle Vinauskaite discussing their report on AI and L&D from talk to action, where they were starting to highlight some of the use cases that had emerged. And one of their strong recommendations was experimentation through community and collaboration and how important that was going to be as a key to unlocking the potential and power of AI in organizations.

Chemène Sinson:
Yeah. And I really enjoyed that session as well. And I'm so glad you were the one who had to pronounce Egle's last name, Michelle, because I was looking at it thinking, oh, do I bring it up?

Michelle Ockers:
I'm not sure if I've done it properly or even poorly.

Chemène Sinson:

Oh, I think you did it well. No, but that was a fascinating session as well and I liked her continuum that she shared at one point in there but basically it was talking about where we're at with AI that, you know, reasonably easy to on the one, and the easy end is to help us with admin. Next was to help us with content creation and it does naturally lend itself to that. And then she said, and then there are other things that mean more interaction with other departments. And again, that's the whole point of when we're thinking about leveraging AI, I think we have to think more broadly about how AI is used out there in the real world, and it doesn't become just an L&D thing anymore. We have to work with the business. And so many of your episodes talked about, you know, getting that seat at the table with the C-suite, but to be working with the business. But I thought her continuum was a good one, that we're sort of on a little journey with AI, and we're getting more comfortable with admin. we're getting more comfortable using it for content creation. Now it's time to start thinking about those steps into more sophisticated uses of AI that will take it throughout the whole organization. So I liked their episode as well.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. I think learning personalization and providing just-in-time support to employees is another use case where we're starting to see some good examples emerge. And it's not just gen AI, but conversational AI. And if you want to understand the difference and a good example of that, episode 149 with Dan Redman, where he talked about HSBC's use of an AI coaching tool in their contact centres in the UK. That's a fabulous real world example of that application. But there's also this overlap between AI and a second big theme that came out in a number of the podcast episodes, and that is the skills-based approaches. So AI is making possible some of the largest scale skills-based approaches where skills are being used as a fundamental organizational block, moving from job-centric models to more fluid and dynamic models based around skills and what skills are needed for the work to be done. And where do we find those skills in our workforce? And of course, there's a lot of if you approach this, there's a couple of large scale examples from the case studies this year. Episode 147, which is also from Ericsson, Putting Skills to Work with Peter Shepard. And in episode 156, Cameron Hedrick from Citi talked about exploring what he calls skills portfolio management. And this is all around internal, facilitating internal mobility, more rapidly responding to skills as they develop and better matching skills to needs in the organization. And of course, AI helps when you're talking about doing that at scale to infer skills, to identify what skills are needed, as well as what skills you have in the organization. So I don't know if some of those examples caught your attention as well, Chemène.

Chemène Sinson:

They did. Well, Cameron, so you're mentioning that one at Citi. And again, that was what started me thinking again about it's the classics, because when he built those skills portfolios, he was combining knowledge, skills, and attributes ability. So again, it comes back to Bloom's taxonomy. And I think this is certainly what the vocational sector is doing more of at the moment as well and looking at what's transferable with all of this because one way I was seeing that he was talking about was to say all right we need someone to be able to do this new type of job now and maybe if we look at their skills portfolio they already have much of the knowledge, skills and attributes needed. What do we need to add to help them just adapt to that one job so that you're leveraging what's already there? And I really liked his use of, you know, it's using the AI to identify what skills, knowledge, attributes people maybe have. But then that's a really nice data bank to use then to think, how do we then help people just enhance those skills, knowledge, attributes to adapt to new ways of doing things? So I really liked his. And of course, Nick Petch, the most downloaded episode of the whole year, which aired on the 30th of April in Elevate episode 33. And he was talking about what was it called a skill sprint? And so that was really interesting to me as well as setting

those small little goals to say, don't try to do a huge thing, you know, just a little bit at a time. And then over time, it all adds up into a bit of a skills portfolio.

Michelle Ockers:
It's interesting. I almost feel there's a couple of different ways you can come at skills in your organization in the contemporary setting. One is this kind of big enterprise wide approach, even if you're focusing on a specific limited number of skills at an enterprise wide level. When you listen to the episode from Ericsson and from Citi, there's a lot of heavy lifting involved, right? A lot of thinking about not just competency frameworks, but skills ontology. So skills mapped to job roles, mapped to, you know, to work tasks and to past experience and so on in a very fluid way, as well as the technology infrastructure needed thinking about Do we need to change the way we define job roles? Do we need to change our recruitment process? It's like this is heavy lifting, right? And this takes many years. And interestingly, if you follow the LinkedIn Workplace Learning Report series, What the last couple of reports have shown is that a lot of these really large-scale skills-based approaches are stagnating. They're faltering because they require such heavy lifting at an enterprise-wide level and such deep connection across the employee lifecycle. Counterbalance that with this more nimble skills sprint approach that Nick Petch talked about, where you're really looking at using your other ways of making sense of what is the organization needs. So rather than using a lot of IT and heavy data to surface, where should we focus? It's through good old-fashioned performance consulting conversations, doing your field work, talking to business leaders. What have we got coming up? What skills do we need? Where are the gaps? What do we need to be working on? And then really focusing on integrating learning with real world job tasks, create an uplift around critical skills without any of that big, heavy infrastructure work required to support it. I've got another episode, which I'll be recording shortly with McKinsey about something they call the skills accelerator approach. And there's a really good paper for anybody who is interested in looking at alternative approaches to skills based in their organization from a group called the CLO Lift. Have you heard of them at all, Chemène? CLO Lift?

Chemène Sinson:
I have not. I'm busy writing it down as you tell me.

Michelle Ockers:
I will pop a link in the show notes. They've released a paper on this skills accelerator approach. It's a group of 20 CLOs from some very big organizations, predominantly in the US and the UK, who have gotten together and said, you know, there are issues that we just keep grappling with in learning and development. But if we get together and collectively look at what have we done, what's worked, what might be the answers moving forward to unlocking value in our organizations on some of these issues, let's put out from the practitioner's perspective what works and the approaches we're using. So the skills accelerator approach is something that I came across through their CLO lift paper. So if anyone's interested in an alternative approach and is sitting there thinking, I can't invest in that kind of infrastructure, or we're not big enough, it sounds like too much, like overkill for our organization these skills sprint or skills accelerator approaches are, I think, a really nice alternative. I did actually do an episode with Luke Warwick, episode 62. So that was some time ago in 2020, about an approach they were taking to digital skills uplift, which was very much along the lines of this sort of sprint or accelerator approach, I think is super useful. You had another observation, didn't you, on Nick's episode, Chemène?

Chemène Sinson:
Well, I did. And it's just my perspective, because so far, we've been speaking about organizations. And just towards the end of that last sort of comment you were making, you

started alluding to the smaller organizations that may find, you know, doing a lot of the heavy lifting themselves a bit hard. You know, I'm an individual, so I am my organization. In fact, I received an email this morning that said, "to the team", that'd be me. But something that I found that whole idea of skill sprints really useful for as well was just to set little things for myself that are achievable and actionable. So I have a couple of little things that they've been on my list, a couple of digital skills that I think would help me to sort of get to do my job even more effectively. And I thought, yeah, I'll make it like a little mini skill sprint and I'll decide, all right, what do I need to be able to do? Who can help me with that? Or how am I going to do it? And just measure my success when I've achieved that little thing. And then see if I put together the right sequence of little things. Maybe it will add up to something that's incredibly useful. So I found that useful as an individual self-employed person. It's not just for people who are working in larger L&D departments. I can't let this episode finish, I don't think, because I know we're getting a little bit closer to the end, but to look at some other themes that really emerged strongly that restored my faith in all of us, which was, it's always been there, but I love the amplification it's getting on things like psychological safety Sonali D'Silva in episode 38 who spoke about that to Tom Tobin in episode 154 talking about universal design for learning, and I especially loved his emphasis on how, you know, we can do simple things to incorporate principles of universal design for everybody. It's not just about the one individual who comes into the organization who needs significant adaptations. You know, little things that we do. One thing that stood out for me was him just saying, yeah, just do it your way. And I can't tell you the number of times I found myself saying exactly that to other people when I'm training and assessing now as well. So, you know, to storytelling, to community, I've really appreciated, you know, DFATS, they've done a couple of episodes with you, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. And you had Mehri Doyle speaking about their small private online courses that are held together with communities of practice. And later on, you had in episode 157, Adam Leneves and Adrian Manning, who also spoke about, you know, capability building across what for them is a large organization.
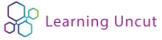
Michelle Ockers:
It's the whole of the Australian Public Service, right?

Chemène Sinson:
Exactly. And the importance of those local those communities of practice there as well to glue it all together. So I really left 2024 just feeling great about the humanity of teaching and learning sitting side by side with these amazing tools that we can leverage to do incredible things.

Michelle Ockers:
And I think that weaving of community storytelling and tech as an enabler to address some of our biggest challenges, for instance, the pace of change and skills development, I think that's a nice kind of winding or integration of those two key themes. I had a lot more I wanted to talk about as well, Chemène, so I've decided I'm going to do a blog post to talk about some of the other themes as well and bring out a bit more about the community and social learning. I also think there was an interesting thread around something that is fundamental, again, to what we do. And it's not just about skills, but it's also about behaviour change, and enabling people to make shifts in behaviour. So we had several episodes that really stood out in that regard. Episode 139, which is from multiplex in the construction industry and appropriate workplace behaviour in that industry. Episode 140, which is about safety leadership and a really strong approach that Fletcher Building used with leader led learning. And one of my favourites, I am going to talk just a little bit about this one, episode 144 with James Woodman, which is called Shaping Behaviours in Moments that Matter, which is about compliance training, which we've all got to love a little bit more, I think, because it's a

recurring touchpoint with our workforce. Michelle Parry Slater joined me in Elevate 35 to talk about compliance learning, but we followed up with an episode with James Woodman, which he talked about a campaign-based approach to code of conduct at Channel 4 in the UK and driving behavioural change related to code of conduct in a way that was really, really strong cultural fit for that organization and getting people to anchor on a simple yet really powerful question. Is it OK?

Chemène Sinson:
And interesting because when I can look at combining skills, knowledge and attributes or being, to me those add up to behaviours and it's all about behaviours. So I think you've sort of highlighted the perfect thing to start to draw this to a close, Michelle, as all of this has to add up to somehow people doing their jobs better, differently, more capably, whatever it is, but it has to lead to behaviour. And I agree, I thought the simplicity of such a powerful question was really, really, is that OK? And I can see them down the pub at Channel 4, you know, just asking that question. I thought that was terrific.

Michelle Ockers:
Yeah, absolutely. You know, that's 10 years old, that piece of work. Would you believe that? It's so fresh and spot on in terms of that kind of shift to campaign based approaches for behaviour change. I was surprised when I learned it was 10 years old.

Chemène Sinson:
Well, it's the classics, isn't it?

Michelle Ockers:
It is. The classics taking us forward into the future, Chemène Exactly. And bringing everyone with you. So speaking of the future, are there any topics or types of stories you'd like to see on Learning Uncut next year in 2025?

Chemène Sinson:
Wow. Well, I'm interested because I know for myself what listening to this year's podcast have sparked in me is I'm going to look at little skill sprints for my own professional development. So I'd love to hear some more case studies around skill sprints, I think would be absolutely great. I'd also like to hear more relatable case studies, like I want to hear Brad Hodge, the sequel, you know, how he's going, what other what else he's experimenting with, and it doesn't have to be him. But again, what I liked was, I felt like the individual that I could go away and follow the step by step process of doing what he did, knowing we don't know how it's going to turn out, but that's okay, do it anyway. So I'd love more of those experiments and experimenters and hearing about their experiences. And I know that that will inspire me and I'm sure others listening today to just get out there and try things and see what happens.

Michelle Ockers:
The note I've made for myself around 2025, the intention I'm setting, I'm putting that out there now is around this leaning into messiness and experiments, literally what I've written down, more about things in progress, things people are trying and maybe they're stuck in that messy middle and they haven't worked out. So we're not sharing, you know, we're doing not necessarily just doing the victory lap on our case studies, which I probably have been a little bit guilty of, you know, not sharing a little bit more about the messy middle on the podcast. The most recent episode 158 with Matthew Murray and Sydney Cannon from Bain and Company. I loved what they did. They approached me and said, we are about to try something. Are you interested in following the experiment we're about to run as a podcast conversation? So we recorded the first half of it before they did this self-directed learning

experiment. And I said to them, I'm willing to do this, but only if you come back, no matter what happens, even if it doesn't work the way you want it to work. So I will leave listeners to go and have a listen to that one as to what happened. But that's more, you know, they're in the messy middle of a shift. They're not at the perfect worked out end. And I think we need to share more of our messy middles and what are we trying and what's working and what's not working. So I'm going to lean a little more into the messy middle next year.

Chemène Sinson:
I think that sounds great. So let us see the messy middle and let us help work things out and experience that. And we see that it's because that's good learning, isn't it? Trying, testing, tinkering, failing, trying again. And I think for the overwhelmed people out there thinking I'm supposed to have my act together with this AI thing, I think recognizing we're all part of the experiment and it's okay, is a really healthy thing.

Michelle Ockers:
Yeah, maybe, maybe I can resurrect elevate more around the stuff that people are trying and follow some skills sprints, perhaps that people are doing both at an individual and, you know, team based level, or some experiments they try, maybe that's the space for the messy middle is elevate. I'll have a think about that.

Chemène Sinson:
All right. Do make sure you find time to sleep in 2025 as well, won't you, Michelle?

Michelle Ockers:
I have to finish this book off first. You talk about learning, writing a book, man, what a learning experience that is.

Chemène Sinson:
Yes, writing is a huge, huge, I love writing. And I'm now revisiting, you know, my world of writing. Now the AI is here, of course, approaching it differently as well. So it's all a wonderful experiment. And yeah, we just need to keep learning on into 2025.

Michelle Ockers:
Yeah, so I would encourage listeners to go on to LinkedIn, look on my profile or the Learning Uncut profile, the company page, find the post about this episode 159 and add your own reflections on the year. What is going on in your world? What have your favourite episodes been and why? And what might you want to hear more about in podcast conversations next year? Feel free to approach me not only about perfect work case studies, but about something that you're trying and might be willing to share with others. So thank you so much to all of our 2024 guests. You are the people who make the podcast what it is and help us all to get better collectively. And thank you, Chemène, for joining me for this conversation. I always enjoy it.
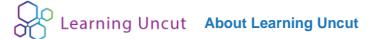
Chemène Sinson:
It has been an absolute honour to be your final conversation for 2024, Michelle. Thank you for having me.

Michelle Ockers:
Thank you. And thank you to all of the listeners for continuing to tune in and make it worthwhile. Every now and then someone drops me a message to say, hey, I got so much out of this episode or that episode, or I really appreciate the podcast. That is always lovely. I'm always open to getting those kind of messages and hearing what people are finding resonates. So if you have found Learning Uncut valuable in 2024 listeners, please share it

with others. Tell a colleague about it, post about it on LinkedIn, rate it on your favourite platform, because that does help to get it into the ears of other people and give us more opportunity to learn from the work of our podcast guests. Thank you.

 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