

**Michelle Ockers:**

Welcome to another episode of Learning Uncut. In the spirit of reconciliation, I'd like to acknowledge traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community, and to pay my respects to elders past, present, and emerging. Today, we're speaking with Lisa Christensen from McKinsey. Welcome, Lisa.

**Lisa Christensen:**

Hi, nice to be here. Thank you for having me.

**Michelle Ockers:**

It's our absolute pleasure. And where are you joining from?

**Lisa Christensen:**

I live in Southern California in the United States.

**Michelle Ockers:**

Nice. And listeners, you may have noticed I said our conversation. We've got Laura Overton, who sometimes joins me as a co-host on Learning Uncut, joining today for this conversation as well. Welcome, Laura.

**Laura Overton:**

Oh, thanks for having me back, Michelle. I'm really excited about this one. Thank you.

**Michelle Ockers:**

Me too. So McKinsey, of course, is a well-known name in the business world, but it's always nice just to do a little bit of positioning, Lisa. So can you briefly introduce us to the organisation McKinsey and what the organisation does and perhaps a little bit about the workforce, particularly in the context of the conversation today at the Receive to Grow initiative?

**Lisa Christensen:**

So McKinsey is a global management consulting firm doing work across the world in all different sectors and functions. We have colleagues who are solving kind of every sticky problem that you can imagine for an organisation. So they're doing everything from doing leadership development work in a number of different organisations and everything in between. And so I work internally in our learning function, thinking about how to support our pre-partner and partner colleagues as they develop the skills that they need to do that kind of deep problem solving in such ambiguous contexts.

**Michelle Ockers:**

Well, and in ambiguous, complex, rapidly changing times as well, Lisa.

**Lisa Christensen:**

For sure. Yeah, that is definitely true.

**Laura Overton:**

I'm particularly interested, Lisa, in the kind of skills that you are looking to introduce as a result of this program, because, you know, those of us who know McKinsey, we know how much you invest internally with your people and how skills are so vital for the service that

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you provide for others. What about this project and program that is so relevant today in this ambiguous world?

#### **Lisa Christensen:**

So the Receive to Grow pilot is one small slice of a bigger surge that we are doing on feedback skills. Coming out of COVID, our context changed quite a bit. So we had previously had teams who almost exclusively worked together, co-located in person, whether in our offices or at client sites, you know, there was a lot of variability in that, but we were really a largely in-person co-located kind of working model. And coming out of COVID, we see a number of things that have happened inside our organisation as a result of changing that working model so drastically in such a short amount of time. And we've been working for the last several years to think about how do we improve our apprenticeship capabilities in this new structure, people working together in new ways, and how do we improve our feedback capabilities when people are working together in new ways? Because a lot of the old kind of shorthand's that they used to be dependent on, right? Riding together to the airport after a client meeting or you know, walking back to the team room. Those are great opportunities that are just, that feel kind of magical to have these professional and leadership moments. But when we lost that, we had to really figure out like, what are we going to do? How do we bring that back? And so the Receive to Grow pilot is one piece of our feedback effort. And one of the things that I think that we uncovered is that because we lost some of that kind of moment to moment feedback, our folks were, especially our most junior colleagues, were not very practiced at receiving feedback, right? We work in a very high achieving organisation. These are folks who've accomplished a lot in their educational pursuits, and they come to us with sometimes really great professional backgrounds already, and they might not be used to even hearing a lot of feedback. And so when we lost those in-person moments, And when we saw folks kind of needing to feedback surge, we really tried to lean into that.

#### **Laura Overton:**

So I'd really love to pick up, Lisa, on a couple of things that you said there about this kind of change in practice. How did you notice that this new need was surfacing? How did it appear? Was it apparent to leaders, to managers, How did you kind of tune in and prioritise that particular need at this point in time versus a range of other types of requirements?

#### **Lisa Christensen:**

We are a very data-driven organisation. There are lots of feedback opportunities. We do a lot of internal surveying work. We have a lot of evaluative opportunities for colleagues to get feedback on their skills and their skills progress. And so there were a number of signals that suggested to us that feedback was something we needed to lean into. Our leaders noticed it, right, in some of our populations. We saw differing feedback scores on some of our engagement feedback kind of moments. We saw folks, some of these things being flagged on people's evaluations. So there were lots of kind of data signals across the organisation that suggested feedback was something we needed to look into. And when we did, we then started to diagnose, how are we developing this skill? How are people practicing it? What are we teaching really well? Where are their strengths? Because there were a lot of feedback strengths. And where are some of the soft spots? And one of the things that we realized as we looked at our curriculum and some of the ways that we develop feedback skills in the organisation, we were not teaching the skill of receiving feedback really at all. And so that felt like a really great opportunity to lean into a little bit as part of this bigger effort.

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#### **Laura Overton:**

Yeah, I love the fact that you're actually talking there about helping people to receive ongoing input into the way that they learn, they grow, they adapt. Was it something that actually was recognized across all of the stakeholders from the individuals managers, as well as the leaders as well? Is this something that people are going, oh, actually, this is something I need to survive in this new world of work, let alone to survive in the new world of McKinsey?

#### **Lisa Christensen:**

I'm not sure it was universally understood that this is an important skill that you can build, actually. I think it feels, it felt to a lot of folks in the early stages of this part of the work, that this is something you're either good at or you're not. You either have the emotional capability to hear feedback well, or you don't. And so our challenging that idea, I think, was really interesting for folks. And we tried to do it in a way that really gave them a lot of practice, that gave them a lot of repeat exposure to practicing this new skill that we had not previously been teaching them and that gave them lots of little quick wins to believe us that in fact you can build this skill, it is a capability you can practice and get better at, and you can think about how to do it very intentionally. And so I think people have become more convinced that it's really important and that you can actually practice it. I'm not sure they started there.

#### **Laura Overton:**

Absolutely.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

That's the beauty of what you've done there, right? Recognising that you need to start small, take little steps to build people's, you know, we use the term self-efficacy sometimes, their belief that this was something that could be changed and their motivation to want to put the effort in to change it and to see the value in it. So what did you notice? Like, how did you pick up that that was shifting?

#### **Lisa Christensen:**

I think we're still looking for evidences of that. We've had a lot of really successful pilots of this program, and we've rolled it out globally across the firm. And we're starting to see, I think we see the feedback of this intervention itself is very positive. And people talk a lot about how they didn't realize that this was something that they could work on or that they needed to work on. Some of the specific skills or frameworks that we teach them have really been pretty transformative. The feedback suggests that it's been pretty transformative for people. I think what we're now looking in our data to understand is, are people seeking feedback more often now that they know that this is something that they can work on? We're looking for evidences in our data to understand if feedback conversations are happening more frequently. Are they happening across more tenures than they had been before? So we are kind of watching our data to understand if our efforts in this very kind of small slice of the feedback surge have resulted in outcomes that we are hoping to see. And there's some really nice evidences that that's happening in pockets, and there's places where we still need to lean in a little more. But I think one of the things that we're finding across our full feedback effort, not just the Receive to Grow pilot, is we want to make an intervention, we want to do something, and then we want to watch the data and see what impact that thing is having.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

Ok, Lisa, you've mentioned the word surge a couple of times and talked about this being one piece in a bigger feedback surge. That's not a term we hear very often in learning and development. We might have an intuitive understanding of what a surge might mean.

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Explain a little bit more what you mean by the word surge here and what this bigger initiative is that Receive to Grow is a part of.

#### **Lisa Christensen:**

I think this is really where I hope learning as an industry and a function is going, which is there are so many problems inside organisations that are not isolated learning problems, right? This feedback example is one where it isn't that people don't know how to give feedback. Maybe there's some atrophy in their ability to receive it, but feedback is a known skill. It's something we're developing all the time. And yet we see some places where there is softness in our outcomes. We're not seeing as many feedback conversations as we'd like, or people's feedback skills are not ranked as high on their evaluations as we would like. And so we want to work on that. And as we do, we realize that's not just throw more learning at them. That is take a talent-wide view of this challenge and try to approach it from a number of different angles. And so we have been working as a larger cross-functional team, a broad talent team with representatives from our learning function, from our professional development function, from our talent function, from our analytics function. We've got this big cross-functional team who's been working together for the last couple of years to try to solve this some of these challenges from a very holistic perspective. And so how's our technology supporting this issue? How is our learning supporting this issue? What analytics are we looking at? How are we measuring impact and improvement? And so our surge, this idea of surging is, can we pull all of these different cross-functional people together and can we attack a big challenge altogether across the full talent life cycle?

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

So the term I note has also been used in a paper, which is where I first came across it, published by the CLO Lift Group. And McKinsey is part of that group. And I don't know whether this is chicken and egg, whether organisations like yourselves have brought this idea to the group or whether you've extracted it from others in the group, but maybe a little bit more context around who CLO Lift is and how this, you know, how you've kind of coalesced around this idea of a skills surge or skills accelerator, I think is the other language that's used.

#### **Lisa Christensen:**

So CLO Lift is a group of CLOs from across a number of different organisations that's convened by the Learning Forum. And we have been working together for the last couple of years. That group of CLOs identified 10 major challenges that we felt like were generational problems in learning, things that we keep trying to solve. And we feel like we're just sort of grinding and grinding on. And can we work together because, these are not necessarily proprietary problems. The idea of how do I effectively build skills rapidly in an organisation? That's a problem we have as a learning industry. And so what do we all know about that? What successes are we each seeing? And how might we work together to develop a perspective on what is the best way to tackle a skills challenge. And so we had already been doing a lot of work in the feedback space. You know, we'd already kind of been piloting this idea of surging skills. And when we came together with a bunch of other CLOs in the CLO lift, we saw a lot of similarities in what they were doing. And so that paper really tries to distil the experiences of a number of different groups into a bit of a strategy for how you might surge a skill successfully in an organisation and lays out some of the things that we have found independently really work well in our various organisations.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

Great. Thanks, Lisa. And for the listeners, I'll pop a link to the paper from the CLO Lift Group on the Skills Accelerator Approach into the show notes. Let's get a bit more granular then and look at the Receive to Grow program. In particular, what's the participant experience? If

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I'm someone working in McKinsey, one of these people who's there solving these big, tough, sticky problems for our clients. What's my experience of Receive to Grow look like?

#### **Lisa Christensen:**

Yeah, so Receive to Grow is a deceptively simple little essentially email campaign, right, that we built in partnership with our comms team. If I opt into this program, and there are a number of different ways that I can opt into the program, I get essentially a small bite of learning through my email and a challenge that I need to do. And that challenge is very practical, very actionable. And I'm essentially taking a framework or a piece of learning that I get in my email that week, and I'm going out and immediately applying it. And I'm trying to apply it two, three, four, as many times as I can during the week. And then the next week, I'm getting something new that builds on that a little bit that kind of extends my capability in this idea of receiving feedback. And our hope is that over the course of, it's really only about four weeks, I have had multiple opportunities to hear feedback, and I've initiated a number of those. And one of the things that we're seeing is that my initiation of those things over the course of this little pilot program really reduces the concern I feel about asking for feedback. Even just in that very short amount of time, it really lowers the bar and makes it feel much less scary to go out and ask my colleagues for feedback. And so we've just piloted this very simple set of techniques to help you know how to do something in a more skillful way, and then get a number of repetitions in over the course of a week. And then we build on that just a little bit. And we continue to do that over the course of about four weeks. And then that program led into all different kinds of initiatives. We did a Values Day across the entire firm this last year on the topic of feedback. And so a number of our offices did the Receive to Grow pilot as the pre-work for Values Day. Sometimes it's led to other learning programs that you might be coming to. Sometimes it's led to big practice meetings. So it's always a lead-in to something else, but it's really reducing the risk that you feel is associated with asking for feedback.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

And there is a level of risk on many fronts with asking for feedback. What are you going to do with the feedback if it's not what you want to hear? Are you really open to it? You talked a little bit about this idea of building the confidence that this is something that could be learned. What elements of the approach you used really helped to motivate people and engage them in actually firstly paying any attention to the emails whatsoever, but then to actually doing some of the practice activities? How did you tap into motivation?

#### **Lisa Christensen:**

I think one of the things that we see in our organisation is that opting in is a real differentiator. If I am choosing to participate, we don't have much mandatory learning in our organisation at all, some of our compliance learning. But otherwise, I get to choose what I want to do and what I want to participate in. So one of the things that we know works for our colleagues, they are very motivated, they want to learn, they want to develop skills. A large part of the reason that many people come to work at the firm is because they know that it will accelerate their skill set in a very short amount of time. And feedback is a really important part of that. So when we give them opportunities like this, they do tend to take them. We also find that it works really well when this when the opportunity is presented to you from somebody that you know and respect. And so we don't do many things in the firm that feel deeply centralized. Even if this effort was planned and designed from a central function, we don't run it from the central function. We run it through your office, or through your practice, or through a partner that you know very well might sponsor something and a group of people that that partner is really committed to. He or she might invite them to participate. So while we might plan and design a lot of things centrally, we are able to tap into people's motivation by giving them connection to folks they respect and care about. And when somebody tells



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you that this is really important, and you respect them already, you tend to listen and opt into that opportunity. And so we've tried to position this as something that will really benefit you, that's coming from somebody you really respect and admire and care about, and that you get to choose whether or not you want to do it or not. And that really helps in our environment to kind of unlock some motivations.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

So it's almost sort of locally sponsored or locally advocated through leaders in a particular area that are connected to the group that you're inviting to make the choice to take part in this. Is the content the same in the emails or is there something that shifted depending on who it's coming from, what part of the business it's in, what part of the globe it's in?

#### **Lisa Christensen:**

Yeah, in this case, the content has largely been the same.

#### **Laura Overton:**

I'm really fascinated, Lisa, as to how you made the choices about taking this part of the program to be, on the surface, quite a simple four-step email campaign. But what was it about? Was it behavioural science that informed you? Was it learning science that informed you? Was it experience from the past? How did you get to make this choice about this program to attack it in this way?

#### **Lisa Christensen:**

So we do a lot of research ahead of anything we design or build in our learning function. And we really try to pull from the best science available. There is a really great, I would consider kind of flagship book on the topic of receiving feedback. And that became a really core part of our research. And so one of the things that we worked really hard to do is both understand the needs of our population. Where are they struggling? Why are they struggling with that thing? It's, as you both, I'm sure, really deeply understand, it's really easy to figure out what people are having a hard time with. It's much more difficult to figure out why they are having that hard time. An idea of distress intolerance really emerged as we were doing the needs analysis work on this and the research on this piece. How are we going to help people just feel more comfortable? And because one of the whys appeared to be the fear associated with asking for feedback, the discomfort that I feel when I hear things about myself that are difficult or that I may not agree with. Those were big whys. And because those were big whys, we said, I don't think what we need here is a ton of content. I don't think what we have here is a big problem that people don't understand that they should ask for feedback. It's just not very comfortable, and they don't really want to do it. And so how might we structure something that gives them a lot of practice doing the part that's the hardest, right? And so this idea of very simple content, very simple frameworks, I don't need you to understand deeply all of the science behind this, but there is good science behind it. I just need to build something reliable that gets at the why you are struggling with this.

#### **Laura Overton:**

And I'm really intrigued as well, the fact that you're making it simple for people to be able to get to the heart of that why, aren't you? You're using simple technologies. There are all kinds of different tools and technologies you could have thrown at this in the practice and role play, and there's a whole range of different things, but you're kind of really embedding it into the flow of the work that people are actually doing on a day-to-day basis. I just wondered what kind of, you know, if you're not giving away too many trade secrets, what kind of little hints were you giving to people in the email campaign to make them feel safe to ask for feedback? Can you give us an example of how you're actually enabling that learning in that real world in the way you've just described?

**Lisa Christensen:**

The things that we thought a lot about in this campaign was the idea of helping people recognise their own agency and trying to really move them to an agentic place. I think one of the things that we feel like we heard in some of our needs analysis work is like, well, feedback is something that happens to you. And you're like, no, feedback's not something that happens to you, you get to decide what you do with it. And so one of the things that we try to teach in this program is giving people an opportunity to go out and to ask for feedback and then sit with it and decide what feels true, what is surprising, and what am I going to do with that, right? What resonates with me? What do I not agree with? And so we came up with a very simple little tool to help them sit with and make sense of the feedback to put them in this very agentic frame. I am an agent. I get to choose. I get to decide what I'm going to do with this. And that feels really simple. But the more you practice doing that, the more that starts to become second nature. And then when somebody is giving me feedback about something, I don't have to go like, oh, I am terrible. And I knew I was struggling with this, and I'll never figure it out. And I'll never be good. I go, ok, that does feel true? This part doesn't. That part does. What am I going to do with it? We are really trying to, if we can, take some of the emotion out and put you back in a place where you realize that you are making choices with what to do with this.

**Laura Overton:**

And what's that tool, just those three questions, you just asked them to use those three questions, or did you give them like little takeaways or something that they can pin to their desk? How did that, how did you merge them?

**Lisa Christensen:**

Yeah, I mean, these are just great little infographic kind of visual emails that lay out exactly what you need to think about. And so they're very visual and that thing becomes both the assignment and the performance support and the thing that if you wanted to pin it or save it or, you know, grab a picture of it and put it on your desktop, it's sort of an all-encompassed thing, right? My personal design aesthetic is just to really push us towards simplicity, right? I don't need two things when one will do. And so I think that the team who built this did a really great job creating something and then iterating it down into a very refined and simple strategy that doesn't make me click through, that doesn't make me open 50 things, that I don't have to remember where something is. I just pop it open, I see it, the visual treatment is very strong, and I get to just action straight off of that email.

**Laura Overton:**

I'm loving that, I'm loving it. I'd love to pick up on the point that you mentioned before about the kind of the culture of the organisation. Because what I've known and read about McKinsey in the past is the fact that, and you referred to it earlier, you know, those conversations in the airport, you know, that kind of opportunity to learn from each other, to challenge each other effectively as part of the culture. Did the culture make a difference to how you approached this particular project.

**Lisa Christensen:**

We're in an interesting place in the firm, and I suspect we're not the only organisation, I know we're not the only organisation that's dealing with this challenge, that the pandemic really changed our operating model in a significant way. With those changes come unexpected outcomes. We didn't know X would happen, but here we are. And so I think one of the things that really feels different is that the culture of the firm is very fast-paced, right? A very strong development orientation. You're here to learn, you're here to get better. It feels a little different when you're not with a person all the time face-to-face. And I think what

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we're finding is we can still have a great development culture in these different kind of working models, in these hybrid working models or remote working models. You just have to teach people how to do it. And so I think one of the things that has been a bit of an unlock in our broader feedback surge, not just our Receive to Grow pilot, but on our big feedback work, is we just need to teach people how to do this in their new operating environment. Because the culture of the firm wants this. We want to be operating this way. That's why so many people are here. We just need to give them a little bit of nudge or reorientation to say, now that you are operating in this new way, pivot this strategy, right? Save five minutes after every call to quickly call up one person and give them some quick feedback based on that, how they showed up in that meeting or because you're not walking back to the team room anymore, right? So give yourself that little bit of time. So I think I don't feel like we're fighting a cultural battle on giving feedback. I think we are trying to reorient people to how to do it well in a new context.

#### **Laura Overton:**

I'm just thinking that actually there are lots of people involved with this process. It's not just a person receiving the email and asking for the feedback. But you know, that maybe their leaders, the managers, as you mentioned, having access to people that they might not normally had access to, you know, how did you get them on board with this process? Did you do anything specific to equip the leadership team, the management team, the other people who are influencing the success of this program? What kind of practical things were you doing to get them on board?

#### **Lisa Christensen:**

So I think this is where some of the work of the bigger feedback effort comes into play, right? We did not try to go back to managers or partners or people in the organisation and say, we're running this receive to grow pilot and here's what you need to know and how you can make it effective. We are sort of tackling the barriers and challenges and opportunities across the organisation in lots of different ways. So there were, in parallel with this Receive to Grow pilot, all sorts of things happening, right? We are redefining our feedback tools right now. And we've just completed the analogue pilots of our new feedback tools and are getting ready to roll out new digital versions of these feedback tools at the beginning of next year. We did Values Day across the entire firm, and everybody got to hear about feedback and the importance of feedback and what they can be doing. And there were lots of different ways that different offices handled Values Day and the experience they gave folks, but everybody got to hear about feedback. There were tons of McKinsey News articles and stories and things happening all the time that were about feedback. At our partner meetings, we were talking about feedback and showing outcomes. We have a new feedback dashboard that we've been playing back to people in our region, some of the regional leaders. So there have been so many things going on related to feedback, and I think that's an important part of, for us, what surging the skill looks like. It's not just going out and taking a new learning program to people. It is really tackling the skill from every angle, thinking about all the reasons why it's going well, and how do we accelerate what's going well, and where do we have opportunities, and how do we fill in some of those gaps? And that very holistic view of our feedback surge, I think, kind of speaks to what your question is getting at, right? Which is like, how do you engage everybody to make this successful? And I think that you do that in a variety of ways, and not all those are learning program ways.

#### **Laura Overton:**

Absolutely. And it really, I mean, when you mentioned this earlier in the conversation about the search process, about people all working together, it just reminded me, Lisa, of how in my own research there's often a very siloed view on, I'm doing talent, and I'm doing performance management, and I'm doing marketing or internal communications, and it's



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almost like a power struggle. And it's amazing to hear you coming together. Have you got any tips our listeners on how you can make that kind of cross silo collaboration work within an organisation because I know a lot of people want to be able to get where you're at and would love to know anything practical that you can share with us.

#### **Lisa Christensen:**

Yeah, I'm happy to. I think this has been a really fun group to be a part of. And I don't know if we all knew at the beginning that we were going to go after this big thing together. I'm not sure. I don't remember how planned and intentional that really felt. I know that our leader, we have a chief learning officer who looks after talent and development and all of our internal teaming practices. We call it way we work inside the firm. And I believe that this was her grand plan. But I'm not sure we all knew that when she convened us all together. And so it started for us as kind of a group of people who all cared about feedback. We all care about feedback. And we're all doing some little thing to touch feedback. And we started convening monthly calls and sharing what we were working on. And she would give us really great nudges. Lisa, why don't you partner with so-and-so? And when we come back next month, can you tell us a little bit about how you've moved this forward together? Why don't we convene two months from now a big workshop and we'll all come to the workshop? I think we've worked our way there and realised that there is so much overlap in what we each care about. And we've been able to get a lot of things done by convening all of these interested people, rolling in folks from our teams, right? And saying like, we're going to create these little subgroups and they're going to go off and do something and then come back. But we've kind of had a core cadence and a core group who's been aligned to feedback over the last couple of years. And that's been pretty transformative for how we partner together.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

And it's interesting that, you know, the term surge could make one think that, well, this is about doing something quickly and then moving on to the next thing. But it's actually been quite a sustained effort. And the surge is kind of more about the different people who are involved with the employee sort of experience end-to-end getting involved and coming together around a shared goal, right? That's how it feels like when we're thinking about surge, it's not kind of just this short-term thing. You've had to stay with it for the long-term, right?

#### **Lisa Christensen:**

I have a yes, and answer to that, which is yes, it has turned into some more sustained work, but it will have an end point, right? There will be a point where we say, we feel good about where we're at, and we need to move on to something new. And in some ways, we've already moved on to some new things, right? Like we're not all that core group from the beginning is not all still engaged in feedback. We've delegated a lot of that out to other teams. And so I think that it continues to move. There are some things that have a tremendous amount of urgency in an organisation. And there were some things about feedback that had a lot of urgency. And it was like, we have to get this project done quickly. But this project lives in service of a bigger goal. And that bigger goal may not be achieved quickly. And so we want to make progress towards that bigger goal. And if I think about it, I made a list coming into today, and there are something like 20 or 25 projects that have been part of this effort. Some of those have had a lot of urgency associated with them, and we've needed to move on them really quickly. And others have had the luxury of being a little bit more sustained. I think I would just challenge the belief that it has to be one thing, right? I don't think it has to be one thing. I think different aspects of the work can have different urgencies. And some things we got done very, very quickly. And actually, that catalysed us staying together for a while and really working on this because we were able to get some quick wins. So I think it's a yes and. Yes, there is some stuff that needs to get done really

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fast, because it really matters and we've got to upskill really quickly. And there's other things that we want to move the organisation culturally, and that will take time, and we want to stay with it and do a good job.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

It feels like there was a level of responsiveness and adaptability in what you were doing right across the group. You've talked a little bit about dashboards. You mentioned earlier that over the course of Receive to Grow, you were seeing that people were becoming less concerned about asking for feedback. So I'm really interested in how you monitored what was happening and the progress that you were making. And maybe if we can just start with the kind of coming back to the Receive to Grow initiative, how did you monitor what was happening as a result of the program?

#### **Lisa Christensen:**

In kind of two big ways. I think when you think about a learning program, you always think about understanding the health of that thing by how are people engaging with it? Are they completing it? What's the click-through rate? Are people opening the emails? So just some basic hygiene on the health of the offering itself. So we're looking at all of those. Then there is also embedded in those a weekly little survey question that basically says, did you do this last week and how did it go? And so we're getting a lot of interesting data from people responding to that every week. Yes, I did it. I thought this thing was really hard. This worked better than I thought it would. I had an unexpected conversation. I made sense of this. something somebody's been saying to me a lot because I reflected on it more. We saw lots of interesting feedback in that little simple survey. And so we kind of get to monitor the ongoing receptiveness of learners to the content that we're giving them. And then we get to look at outcomes in those populations. We have lots of other tools that are looking at how many feedback conversations are happening What's the quality? What's people's self-reported quality of those feedback conversations? We've got tools that tell us some of those things. And so then I get to look at these populations that I've been upscaling through this program and compare their outcomes with populations that aren't going through that program and seeing how the practical business outcomes are being affected by this program that I'm putting people through. Now, we all know you can never say A caused B, but if we're seeing a consistent uptick in the number of feedback conversations happening in populations that are also doing this program, I think there's a nice correlation there that one is helping drive the other.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

It's directional, right? It gives you a sense of, are we moving in the right direction? And of course, the other thing that's happening here is you've got other initiatives. This isn't the only thing going on around feedback. And sometimes I think we let some of this stuff be a barrier to actually monitoring progress, to trying to figure out if we can't pin it exactly to this initiative or that initiative, what's the point? But there's a lot of point to see directionally. Are you moving towards what you're wanting to see? Was there anything you saw which was a little bit of a surprise or any challenges you came across either in developing or rolling out the initiative that you had to address?

#### **Lisa Christensen:**

I don't feel like I've had any big surprises, but there have been lots of interesting things that have come up in the broader initiatives. It's been interesting to see different whys and different parts of the firm, right? Not everybody is challenged in an organisation for the same reasons, right? And so if our surge and our approach had all been about, well, we just need to teach literally everybody in the firm how to receive feedback, and then we'll crack this problem. Well, no, that doesn't make sense. And so I think one of the things that's been

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really surprising is understanding different people's whys, different groups and populations and regions and practices, understanding their whys, and trying to come up with solutions that are more targeted in those different places. And that not everybody needs the same thing. And one thing doesn't work for everyone. And so creating some flexibility in how we go after things, I think has been a really important part of what we've learned through this process.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

So to what extent then over time have you adapted, particularly the Receive to Grow initiative? You said it's been used in a number of different ways over time. Have you refined it? Have you shifted what's in those emails, the way you share them out, anything along those lines?

#### **Lisa Christensen:**

Yeah, we're still using the program pretty true to how we designed it after I mean we went through several iterations but where it landed, we're still using in a way that's pretty true to how we were. We also really treated it as kind of a moment in time and knew that at some point what we learned from it would, that the usage of that thing would kind of plateau and we would want to spin the learnings into other interventions. And so one of the things we've done is to say, we don't want to be too precious about feeling like, well, we have to keep people going through this Receive to Grow pilot, it is critical. It's not critical. We've learned a lot. It's okay if that thing starts to just get used in much smaller pockets. We've taken a lot of that skill building, we've validated that those concepts resonate, those tools resonate, they are working for people, and we've started to weave a lot of that content into our other learning programs. So maybe now at some of our newer, our more junior tenured populations, you see this content being embedded into their learning programs, where we are running a lot of simulations around any topic that might kind of tangentially touch feedback. We've pulled in a lot of this content. Don't forget to XYZ, take a moment and reflect on this conversation before you move to the next stage of the simulation. So once we had validated that content, and we knew that it was resonating and we knew that it was working, we started looking for ways not to change the program, but to take what we knew about what was working and proliferate it out into other places.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

That makes perfect sense, and it's a great way to take what you're learning, what people are building, and then to continue to weave it in other places. The whole approach sounds very fluid, very dynamic. You're sensing, you're responding, you're moving as a community to what's next. You talked about a feedback dashboard earlier. It may not be the only mechanism, but curious about the dashboard and also more broadly about how the results and success stories from this body of work have been shared across McKinsey to help build momentum.

#### **Lisa Christensen:**

We want to be able to monitor the health of our feedback culture and respond to challenges or opportunities in ways that feel tailored to what's happening in a certain population. And so we have created a dashboard that essentially synthesizes a number of our different data sources. Data is coming from all over the firm and lots of mechanisms and lots of tools. And what we want to do is pull all of those data points, the relevant data points, together into one place so that we can understand the health of our feedback culture. And so we look on this dashboard at attitudes, at environment, and at outcomes. And those feedback points come from lots of different places, but they get aggregated into this dashboard. And we then can cut the data by region, or by practice, or by office. Or we can look at it firm-wide, or we can cut it by population. And it can sort of tell us what are the attitudes like. What's the

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environment like? And what kind of outcomes are being achieved based on however we've cut this data? And we have not dictated to folks what they need to do, right? We haven't dictated to leaders to say, oh, you must be at 80% feedback efficacy in your region. They've decided what is important to them and what they want to go after. And all we're doing is enabling their goals with data, right? So again, in an organisation like ours that is so entrepreneurial, that is led by really amazing partners who deeply care about the firm and all value different things and really want it to be successful. We really want to empower those leaders to set the goals that matter for them and give them the information they need to help kind of move and drive towards those goals.

#### **Laura Overton:**

I am loving the whole of this story. and particularly because an organisation as large as McKinsey, you're adapting to the complexity and change that's been going on in your own internal organisation. You've got the Receive2Go project, the fluidity of people working together and connecting together, and there's a lot of change and learning and adapting going on that you're facilitating in the organisation. But I would love to know the extent to which you as a learning team also had to be fluid, adapt. You know, this is a very open approach to really help navigate a complex environment. But have you had to change the way you think about how learning is supported in the organisation?

#### **Lisa Christensen:**

I mean, I think learning as a profession is evolving. And so I think we all have to be doing this, right? The days of building a program and talking about its shelf life are behind us. That is not the world that I believe we live in anymore. And so, you know, we could talk at length about our learning strategy that sort of has core and periphery and how the periphery moves and how we constantly update the core etc but yes I think the learning organisation has to evolve and there have to be people in the organisation who are skilled in different capabilities. And some of those people have to be innovators. And some of those people have to be like really driving toward what is the next thing? How do we not get locked into old ways of operating and doing things? How do we free up capacity? How do we think about bigger scale? So I think one of the journeys that we've been on is to build a consultative muscle in all of our learning professionals. We want them all to be consultative thought partners. We've been talking as an industry for 20 years about not being order takers anymore, right? I really hope we stop needing to have that conversation soon. But we really have been pushing our organisation towards a much more consultative place and really trying to get them to think about how do you anchor to impact measurement that is about performance. We care about the health of our learning programs because that tells us how our product is doing. But nobody else cares about that. They want to know how it is influencing performance, how it is moving skills forward. And so I think if there are two things we're really trying to shift inside our learning function, it's number one, getting every person to have a much more consultative mindset and not just say, you want three days of communication training? Oh, we can do that for you. We're trying to move them towards a place of consultation. And we are trying to really, really evolve our capabilities in talking about the impact of our work in performance-based ways.

#### **Laura Overton:**

Love that. It's like having a business-first approach in everything that you do, a business-first mindset. Are there any other kind of mindsets or worldviews you think that your learning organisation is shifting as well in order, you know, if you've got your North Star, of that performance in the organisation. Are there any other shifts that you're seeing in the team in terms of their mindsets?

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#### **Lisa Christensen:**

Yeah, this thing that we've been alluding to the whole time about a de-siloed function I think is really, really critical. So much of what I think learning is going to become responsible for in an organisation is just development at large. And some of that development will happen in programs, but a lot of that development will happen on the job in situated ways, in the evaluation process, as we as we understand performance management and move that over time in our tools, in the kind of interaction that people have with our development tools. If you're gonna care for development, if you have stewardship for development in an organisation, you cannot do that by yourself. You will not be successful in isolation. And so I think the other thing that we really as learning professionals have to start to embrace is we are experts in moving and how people develop. And we need to start applying that expertise in broader contexts beyond just, I build this learning intervention. That is not enough. And so this idea of a de-siloed people strategy, where we all work together in very fluid ways, where we build cross-functional teams that look at interesting things and people kind of roll in and out based on their expertise. I think that is the, I hope that is the path that we are going down as a profession.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

That's a wonderful note to finish this conversation on. Thank you so much, Lisa, for joining us and talking about Receive to Grow and this broader approach you're taking as a connected group of talent professionals to supporting people in the area of feedback. Thank you, Laura, for joining me today. For listeners, we'll pop a link to Lisa's LinkedIn profile in the show notes, as well as some additional resources. So you can find Lisa and reach out if you've got more questions about this fabulous body of work. Thanks so much, Lisa.

#### **Lisa Christensen:**

My pleasure. Thank you for having me.



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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 experienced, pragmatic organisational learning strategist, L&D capability builder and modern workplace learning practitioner. She also delivers keynotes, workshops and webinars for learning and broader professional or workforce groups at both public and in-house events.

Michelle received the following prestigious industry awards in 2019:

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



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