

Michelle Ockers:

Welcome to another episode of Learning Uncut. As always, I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and the connection to land, sea, and community. Today is an interesting and slightly unusual episode in that I've got two small business owners who are doing a fabulous job at addressing the structural engineering skills shortage in Australia to talk about the work they are doing, why it matters, and how they're going about it. So welcome, Moly Ashtari to Learning Uncut.

Moly Ashtari:

Thank you, Michelle.

Michelle Ockers:

And Alex Jovanovski. Welcome.

Alex Jovanovski:

Thank you for having us.

Michelle Ockers:

You sound like a tennis player, Alex, with a name like that.

Alex Jovanovski:

Used to when I was a young kid, but not anymore.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah.

Alex Jovanovski:

Well, you're doing it a bit hard at 46.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. Well, as you well know, as adults, it's never too late to learn something new. You both have interesting backgrounds. I want to sort of work the background and let people know who you are as part of talking a little bit more about Learnpedia and the problem you were trying to solve when you started Learnpedia. I believe it's linked to another business you were already running, though. So maybe, Alex, if you can tell us a little bit about your structural engineering business, which is an important part of the story.

Alex Jovanovski:

That's right. Okay. So once again, Michelle, we're thrilled to be here and excited to introduce both Learnpedia and ANZ engineers to you. ANZ Engineering is a main company, if you like, that we actually provide structural engineering services to mum and dads, to builders, to architects and anybody in the field. We look after services

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within the residential space, industrial space, commercial space, anything from renovation extensions to new designs and so on. So that's what ANZ Engineers does. And Learnpedia was an offshoot of ANZ Engineers.

Michelle Ockers:

So what's your role in the business, Alex?

Alex Jovanovski:

I'm one of the directors, both myself and Moly are the two directors of both ANZ Engineers and Learnpedia.

Michelle Ockers:

And Moly, tell us a little bit about your background and what your role is with ANZ Engineers and Learnpedia.

Moly Ashtari:

Yeah, so I'm a structural engineer by trade. I did my studies in the structural engineering field and yeah, came to Australia to start a new life and here I am. I'm the director of ANZ Engineers and Learnpedia working alongside with Alex.

Michelle Ockers:

So what country did you do your original studies in, Moly?

Moly Ashtari:

I did my studies in Iran.

Michelle Ockers:

And tell me a little bit about the story of how you came to be in Australia then.

Moly Ashtari:

Oh, quite an interesting story. So I came to Australia which I've never planned really, having an academic life was always something I wanted and I planned for. But you know, just life took its twist turn and I ended up where I am now and I'm so glad that I did anyway. So yeah, I came to Australia to start a new life and enter the industry and started my life as obviously, you know, an employee, worked in the field. As I worked in the field, I came across some challenges, some, you know, problems. I could see them and I could see that, you know, it should be addressed and it's not, you know, something that we should continue the way we're going. It should not be really the standard way of doing things. So yeah, and ANZ engineers and Learnpedia were created from that, you know, sort of perspective and experience that I had.

Michelle Ockers:

So when did you come to Australia, Moly? What year was it?

Moly Ashtari:

Yeah, in 2018.

Michelle Ockers:

So only six years ago, seven years ago as we're recording this. So what was that experience like? Did you know anyone when you came to Australia? What was it like settling into Australia as a recently arrived migrant with qualifications and skills?

Moly Ashtari:

And I didn't know anybody in Australia. I still remember when I was on the plane, that sort of feeling that, you know, you're leaving everything behind and you're on a plane. And when you arrive, there's nobody waiting for you at the airport to just welcome you and say, okay, let me just run you through how life is here. And these are, you know, at least you've got a house to go to and you've got a network of people to support you. I didn't have any of that at the very beginning, but then Alex came in my life and his family, so like that later on. But from the beginning, it was just, yeah, quite challenging.

Michelle Ockers:

It can be really difficult for migrants coming to Australia to use their skills for all sorts of reasons. We have a lot of migrants in this country and the number of times you've jumped into a taxi or Uber and you start a conversation with the driver and it turns out they're highly skilled and Australia, for whatever reason, is not using their skills. Were you able to get employment fairly readily that used your engineering skills, Moly, or was that a bit of a struggle as well?

Moly Ashtari:

Well, it was quite challenging to me. I was just knocking on doors. I was just, you know, just trying, trying, trying. And you don't have any connection. So you really have to get out there and just put yourself in front of the people out there and just ask them to give me a chance. I'm here. I'm happy to do free work and just show you how committed motivated I am to really start my career here and also contribute to your team. So that was definitely challenging and I was also part of a community and you start to find other migrant engineers out there and then you see that everybody was sort of going through the same struggles. as you don't have local experience. It's so hard to find a job because, you know, the business owners and the employers, the recruitment agencies or hiring managers, they ask for that local experience. It was quite challenging to find that first job with that local experience. But what I did was, instead of I sat down and I was like, these are the skills that I have. I need to find a company that I can be an asset to this company. How can I do that? So I started studying companies and then putting the projects that they're working on one side and how my skills can contribute to sort of the type of projects they're working on that. And I started one company specifically and yeah, I was really persistent to get an interview and they initially wanted one applicant and they told me that they hired that one applicant and it's all done. And I just persisted and persisted. And I said, I did my studies on this company. Let me just, you know, have an interview with the company. So that job was through a recruiter. So it's just really pushing the recruiter to give me a chance to have an interview. And yeah, I did get that chance. I went for an interview, presented my ideas, all the notes I put on my notebook, the studies that, you know, I did around the sort of the projects that the

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company was working on at the time. And they were quite impressed and they ended up hiring the second person as well. So that's how I got my first job.

Michelle Ockers:

It feels like you're a very hard person to say no to, Moly. You sound very persuasive. What do you think, Alex?

Alex Jovanovski:

Definitely, definitely. When she puts her mind to something, especially a goal, she'll do whatever it takes to achieve that, which is great and hence why we're here.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. So, at that time that you created Learnpedia, you already had ANZ Engineering as a functioning structural engineering company providing services to clients. Moly had had this personal experience coming in as a migrant with skills and having to work pretty hard to get a break and land that first job. And then, Moly, your experiences and contrasting those, your experience overseas with things like the practical aspects of as an engineer, actually it being normal practice to go and spend some time on site to build your skills and some of the kind of supervisory or quality assurance processes being a bit different. Tell me a little bit more about your challenges in ANZ engineering from a business perspective. So we've got kind of Moly's personal experience coming into this, but I understand you were also facing some challenge from a business perspective with getting the right skills into your structural engineering business and holding on to those skills. So Alex, maybe if you want to tell us a little bit more about that aspect.

Alex Jovanovski:

Yeah. So the biggest challenge was, and you're correct when you say that, I suppose that the challenge of ANZ engineers was, you know, growing the company. So we were a young company around 2017, 2018, we were growing the company. As we were growing the company, we needed to get stuff. We needed to get engineers on board. So what we found was that we would hire engineers such as migrant engineers, graduate engineers, and then we would train these engineers. So we would invest time in training these engineers for the first at least six to seven to eight months. But then what we found was that they were using us as a step stone to some degree because that once we've trained them, now they've got the confidence and the knowledge. So we were losing these candidates for all sorts of reasons. Some wanted to work in a bigger company maybe, or whatever the reason might have been. So what we found was that first, a lack of knowledge, them coming out of real life experience, they're coming out of university and migrating here. So we realized there's a big, big gap there, because while we were training these guys, they were asking us, hey, I've got a friend that I graduated with or a friend that also migrated as well. Can you please help him as well on the side? Do you think you can train this person just like you're training me because I'm learning so much? And then shortly after we realised there's big demand and this was in 2018, going on to 2019. So, way before Engineers Australia in 2023, when they did that research and studies realized that there's over 60% of migrant engineers working in unrelated fields. Like I said before, Uber driving, petrol station attendants, and so on. And again, an honest

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dollar is an honest dollar, so there's no problem with working in any field, but you've got skilled workers that have gone through university for a minimum of four to five years. They've paid the time, they've paid the money, paid the time, and now they're working in a non-related field, not because they want to, but only because they don't have the right local experience and this is where we came in. And this is how Learnpedia was formed, through our pain of training these engineers, and then for them to leave for all sorts of reasons.

Michelle Ockers:

I think we've touched on some of the challenges through Moly's personal story that migrant workers are facing when they come to Australia and they're trying to land roles with their structural engineering skills. I want to circle back for a moment, Alex, to graduate engineers. They're coming out of university. Aren't they coming out of university ready for the real world of work? What's going on there? What is your experience been with graduates coming out of university with their engineering qualifications?

Alex Jovanovski:

Well, you're in the game, so you know what it's like when it comes to education and training. They're trained to some degree in education, the education background takes them to a certain stage, but then they really need the real-life experience, the real-life exposure coming from people in the field, not people in the academic field. So this is people in the field, for example, such as Moly, somebody that has actually dealt with builders, dealt with architects, done all sorts of projects and worked on all sorts of projects and has come across all sorts of real life challenges. And to be able to pass this on to these guys is huge. And that's what's missing within the academic background. Yes, it's academic. And again, it's necessary and needed, but then there's so much more to learn once you get into the field. And as our principal engineer says, once they graduate, it's just a license for them to say, here's my certificate or here's my license, I'm ready to start learning. Because once you roll up your sleeves and you get into the field, that's really where the juicy stuff is, if you feel like. That's really where you really learn hands-on.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. So it's one thing to know something in theory or maybe to even to do a few projects as part of university, but it's quite another to come out into the real world of work, right, and apply skills?

Alex Jovanovski:

That's right. So what we basically do is we tie theory with practice.

Michelle Ockers:

Let's switch to Moly to maybe talk to us a little bit more about that. And Learnpedia is known for its practical project-based approach. And I just want to cut to the listeners to say the thing that most impressed me and one of the key reasons I've invited Moly and Alex to talk to us today is the project-based approach that they take to building skills for the structural engineers. So, Moly, Learnpedia is known for its practical

project-based approach. Can you talk about, you know, what makes your approach so valuable?

Moly Ashtari:

During uni, like when someone goes to uni, they learn about, you know, the engineering principles, right? So the theory is there, the formulas, it's all there. You've got the reality and the real projects waiting for you, where you need to implement what you've learned in real world. Now, that's the missing link. That's the part that, you know, the transition of how to implement that academic knowledge now in solving this real world problem. And then we've got the industry standards. We've got, you know, the standard way of construction here, the construction methods. And, you know, there's a lot of practical knowledge that comes involved as to, you've got to have that practical knowledge to be able to tie that practical knowledge with the theory to provide a buildable and doable design. So theory is perfect, you need it. But on its own, you can't really tackle real life projects. And I've experienced that as an employee myself, when I started working in Australia, and then as an employer, when I started checking the designs of the and engineers working for us. So, I could see the need as to I needed to get out there to see things. So, to address that as an employee when I was working for other companies, I used to go out on site after hours. So, you know, let's say by the time I get home, it will be eight o'clock. Asking Alex, can we just drive to the construction sites near the house, near the area, just put the car in the driveway, put the lights on the structure so I can see the building so I can visualise it, so I can understand how this whole thing is put together. So tomorrow, the next day, if I receive a call from a builder and he's like, hey, Moly, I can't connect this to that. I can visualise that. Because we keep saying, oh, you know, you've got to provide a buildable design and cost effective. But then my question is, how, when someone has never visualised a structure to really work around the challenges and then provide a buildable design. So I could see that as an employee and then later on as an employer. So I could see that when I was talking to the engineers, you know, talking about, okay, well, this is how a beam is going to be connected to a column. And I could see that sort of face as to how, like, I can't really see it. And I was like, okay, let me share the photos with you. This is how. So that's sort of a mixture of both the experience as an employee and the experience as an employer to be able to deliver a buildable and cost-effective design.

Michelle Ockers:

There's a saying that I hear used in the world of learning and development, which is about it's go to Gemba, go to where the work is done. Gemba is literally Japanese for where the work is done, rather than relying on kind of your own mental interpretation of what things might look like, unless you actually go to where the work is done, you can't see. properly and understand properly what things look like on the ground, which I think is what you're saying here for the migrant workers. I understand for the graduate workers, we've unpacked a little bit about what that practical skill gap is, where we've got migrant workers coming into Australia. They've worked overseas potentially, so they're bringing experience with them. What are the biggest things that they need to learn about from a practical perspective to work in the Australian environment?

Moly Ashtari:

I would say it's just the way of construction here, construction methods are different here in residential field, in industrial field, in commercial field. So once again, because they have that theoretical background as they've done their studies, they're good with the engineering principles and they've been implementing the engineering principles in the field, but following a different construction methodology, they really need to first start with gaining that practical knowledge and tie that with the experience they have overseas.

Alex Jovanovski:

I was going to say, back to your question is, they're almost on the same path as the graduate engineers here. They have to learn the local construction methods, construction materials, construction techniques, terminologies is very important, but especially material, because it's very different from where they come overseas. For example, a lot of other countries, they build mainly with steel and concrete. Here, it's mainly timber frame houses, as you know. So they're almost pretty much the same, starting from the very basics, the fundamentals of engineering and working their way up. Yes, it's great, some of them have overseas experience, so that helps them. But again, it's nowhere near enough for them to be able to break into the industry.

Michelle Ockers:

So, Moly, can you walk us through the typical learner journey? Someone comes to you and I understand it's mostly individuals who enroll with Learnpedia to learn through Learnpedia rather than other businesses sponsoring people. That's right, isn't it? It's individuals. Or is it a mix?

Alex Jovanovski:

It's a mix. Our target market, if you like, is undergraduates in the final year, most of them, because part of the graduation, especially here in Australia when doing the bachelor's, they need to do work integrated learning, so minimum of three months, which is exactly what we provide, a traineeship program. So that counts. And so not only does this traineeship program really train them and be ready for when they graduate and get into the field, but also helps them with their certification or with completing their learning. We also look after graduate engineers coming out of university. We look after migrant engineers. We look after engineers in the field, sometimes on behalf of the individual or sometimes on behalf of the company where they want to upskill one or two or more of their members. For example, let's say an engineering company has a couple of drafts people or site engineers, and then they want to get them into the design field. That's exactly what we do. But yeah, predominantly it's migrant engineers, undergraduates and graduates looking to get into the field.

Michelle Ockers:

Great. So Moly, walk us through what I would expect if I was one of these people joining Learnpedia and seeking to improve my skills.

Moly Ashtari:

Yeah, well, Michelle, as you mentioned, we've got a project based learning approach. So you will learn how to design and draft a project from the start to the end. And for you to be able to do that first thing first, you need to know how the whole thing is put together, how the whole thing is going to be constructed. So, the first module of our training program or traineeship program is, you know, focused solely focused on the construction methods, construction materials, terminology used in the field, how the whole thing is put together, who are the stakeholders involved in a project, What are the responsibilities of a building surveyor? Should you contact the building surveyor or the geotechnical engineer when you come across this specific challenge? So they understand how the whole, you know, industry works in the residential field and then what is expected of them as a structural engineer. Then we go down to, okay, you know the theory, you learned the theory at uni, let's tie the theory to the Australian standards as to, okay, how these two go hand in hand, right? How are the engineering principles implemented in the Australian standards? So now let's work on the projects as we talk about these two. Okay, so you're tying the theory to the real-life projects, implementing the Australian standards and codes while working on the projects step by step. So imagine, Michelle, I'm sitting and just explaining every single step of the design and speaking my mind, you know, and just telling them, ok, yeah, as I'm just moving my mouse around, I'm like, ok, here I'm clicking here and I'm entering this number because. because this addresses that part of the code and addresses this part of the theory that you need to also include. And also, considering the construction challenges, guys, keep in mind when you know, the builder goes outside and they want to install this frame, you got to consider how they're going to lift this element, how they're going to bring the element to the back of the house. It's an extension project, you're going to have limited access, so you need to put your builder's hat on at the same time and just look at the way that you're proposing something But if it's not doable, then it's not buildable. And then again, if they don't have that visual understanding of the process and that construction knowledge, they will never be able to, or they will really struggle to comprehend that, you know, like it has that got to do with, you know, buildability. But that's why in module one, first we cover all the terminology, materials, and all that. And then you go technical.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, so you're literally, you've made videos of different projects and you are literally sitting there. They can see your screen and you are talking them through. This is what I'm doing. This is the decision I'm trying to make here. This is all the things I'm thinking about. You know, you're literally we kind of call that working out loud. You're literally working out loud and sharing your thought process, taking this tacit knowledge, all the stuff you know, and putting it into words to explain it to them, stuff that is just really hard to capture in like a process or a step-by-step instruction, right, Moly? They're getting to work with like, it's almost like the master and the apprentice here, right?

Moly Ashtari:

Yes, correct.

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Michelle Ockers:

So the videos actually take them out onto construction site as well and show them things on construction site, Moly?

Moly Ashtari:

Yeah, yes.

Michelle Ockers:

Are they working alongside you, like as you're working through this, are they also trying to replicate the project for themselves, so getting hands on at the same time?

Moly Ashtari:

Yeah, they will be pretty much shadowing me. So whatever I do, they will do the same thing step by step.

Michelle Ockers:

And how many projects will they go through as part of their traineeship?

Moly Ashtari:

They've got two projects that I explained throughout the videos and there's a third project which is a collaborative project. So I get them involved and they all work on that project together. So it's a group project. They all assign that as in life. They all bring that project to our weekly Q&A sessions. And yeah, I'll just go through the project, ask them questions, challenge them. Sometimes I just play the role of a builder and sometimes I just raise a question. I'm like, okay, well then you specified that sort of element here, how's that going to work? I can't get the boys to put that up there, you know? And they're like, oh, okay. Well, I didn't think about that. So I do challenge them from different angles, trying to, you know, get them to think outside the box and trying to get them as to implement that, the knowledge that they've gained just recently and just consolidate that knowledge by challenging them further.

Alex Jovanovski:

Yeah. And part of that is we put them in a team environment for that reason, but also for the reason for them to work it, to be able to work as a team, to be able to communicate, because besides the technical aspect, it's very important to also have the communication skills to be able to, as Moly said, to be able to communicate and talk to stakeholders, builders, building surveyors, architects, land surveyors, arborists, whoever they need to within the professional industry, within the design aspect of it. but also be able to work with their own colleagues, managers, to be able to come to a conclusion or provide a solution or provide a buildable, cost-effective design. So we teach them not only the soft skills and communication skills, I suppose, but also at the same time, the technical, which is very important because especially within engineering, a small miscommunication or misunderstanding can cost a company pens, if not hundreds of thousands of dollars. So it's very important.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. Now, you said along the way, you've got like all different types of people doing this, people with different languages, for instance. You've got those who kind

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of graduates without any real world experience, those who've had real world experience overseas, who are bringing that into the mix. You talked about having created these videos. What did you learn as you went? Like if we had to compare the process of like the first video you shot and tried to put together to the last one, what would we say that's different? What did you learn along the way? How did you improve the videos to make them more effective and your own technique? What did you learn out of that?

Moly Ashtari:

I would say, more conversational approach rather than, you know, the very sort of formal sitting there, you know, hi, we are going through module one. So that sort of tone is not going to work. You just have to be happy and you know having that sort of conversational “okay are you following?” so every now and then asking a question so “you're following me?” or “you're listening?” is good, you know, just asking that sort of question to just get their attention and just continue the video so that's that that's a big lesson I would say that I've learned throughout this journey that the tone, the sort of questions you raise to get their attention and also, the duration of the videos, we kept that in mind anyway throughout the process to make sure that we don't go really, you know, make the videos long to make them bored or tired and make sure that the videos, you know, will have the attention throughout the video. And once the video is finished, they're due for a break. So, we did consider that in the recording

Alex Jovanovski:

I was going to say, which was very important, as you said, because we have people coming from all walks of life. So the videos are explained and, you know, we sort of have these internal discussions from time to time, how some of our trainers, because we do surveys at the end of every module and at the end of every course or at the end of the traineeship program. And where the trainees or students would rate both the instructor and also the videos. And some people, depending on what the background is, they're like, oh, you know, you've explained it so well for me to understand. It was so, it was slow and clear. And to the point where you even have people going like, hey, were you physically able to sit there for 120 hours? I'm like, it wasn't 120, it was like 300. We've brought it down to 120, you know, to explain this to me so well as a migrant engineer with, you know, with English being my second language and so on. But then we also had the locals as well where, domestic graduates or, you know, Aussie engineers already in the field, they have to speed up sometimes the audio, I suppose, for them to get through it. So we've got people slowing it down, some speeding it up. And that was probably one of, again, the challenges, but that was also a blessing through COVID, where we went 100% online. So now we deliver our traineeship program in a full course Australia-wide. And it is 100% online, so they can still be in uni, they can still be working, they can still be generating income in the field or out of the field either way and still upskilling to enhance their career. So yeah, I suppose COVID was really a blessing for us in some ways that forced us to go online, but that was a challenge again now. You know, you've got weekly live sessions from about six weekly live sessions with Moly, and now you've got to put all these weekly live sessions into a pre-recorded video. And yeah, so that was a challenge, but it's been a blessing again at the same time.

Michelle Ockers:

I think it gave lots of organisations a nudge to try some different approaches and sometimes it was surprising how well it worked compared to everything having to be face-to-face. You've got the weekly sessions where people can join to get additional guidance to clarify anything that maybe they're not quite sure of and so on. Are there additional support options available for people if someone's struggling with something in the video and maybe they can't make the weekly session, something like that? How do they reach out for additional support?

Alex Jovanovski:

So, yes, we do. So besides the weekly live sessions, we also have two other channels. One channel is internal and it is based on our LMS, on our learning management system, which is where all the modules and resources are. So specifically for people that are currently active and also the instructor as well for them to be able to discuss and ask questions amongst each other and to each other and also to the instructor as well. But we also created a private Facebook group chat for all our past, current and any future trainees going through our program where they're going to have this group chat that is private and for Learnpedia, again, current, past and future trainees for them to be able to have this supported network to help each other out because it's not about just getting into the industry. But then you've got to survive the industry. And of course, you want to, you know, you're going to come across challenges, whether it's internal challenges with your management or challenges within the builders or challenges with different designs. You're going to have a group, you know, network or circle of people there to help you out and help each other out for life. So we give them access to this group chat forever at no cost for them to be able to again, support each other. Maybe they just want to network. Maybe they just want to, they've just migrated from Australia and so from overseas to Australia and they didn't have that mentorship or that help or the support in one way or another, or something as simple as how to open up a bank card, for example, as Moly said, you know, so, and a lot of them come from the same walk of life. So they understand each other. So we have three different channels for them to be able to get full support.

Michelle Ockers:

Great. There's a lot about the journey you've just described, the learning journey, the way it's scaffolded, the way you've shared your knowledge, they shadow you in effect, and then eventually they build up to working more independently with feedback. There's a lot about this that is extraordinarily sound from a learning science perspective. Neither of you has a learning science background. You're not instructional designers. You are, you know, business owners. You are skilled people who are passing on your skills to others. How did you get it so right? Like, did you work with anyone? Did you have anyone review and provide any perspective or input who had, you know, a learning science or learning and development background? Tell me more about that.

Alex Jovanovski:

I'll start, but you can finish, Moly. Well, Moly had some educational background overseas, she was training engineers in a specific software package while working at the same time. But how did we learn? From training engineers within our own company, time and time again, time and time again, and the challenges we came across and so on. So I suppose that was our learning experience, that was our education at the same time, if you like. So Moly?

Moly Ashtari:

Yeah you touch based on the points that I wanted to mention as well so yeah.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, so it's a wonderful approach. And in terms of measuring success, you're talking about getting feedback. You've obviously got kind of your Facebook group. You've got the opportunity to stay connected to people, to your graduates. How do you measure success for both your students and also for yourselves as a business? Maybe if you want to start with your students and how do you measure success and know how it's helping them?

Alex Jovanovski:

Yeah, so we'd like to keep in touch with as many as we can, of course, and the ones willing to. But yeah, the way we measure success, as I mentioned before, is through the surveys that we provide for the instructor and also for the training program as well, for them to tell us their experience. And we also always ask for their feedback as well. Can we improve it? Can we change anything? Was there something else you would have liked to see, but also is there any other training or courses types that you want to see in the future? And of course, you know, regularly after they complete the traineeship program or the full course, you know, depending if they're trying to get into the field, we try to get in touch with them and say, Hey, how are things going? You know, have you been successful? If you haven't, what's going on, what are you not doing or what are you doing or what can you do different? And again, this is where Moly would come in then, have a conversation with them and see what the challenges are, see why they might be not in, they have the technical knowledge now, they've got the confidence, but maybe the CV is not placed right. And again, throughout the traineeship program, but even after, we provide these supports to make sure that they enhance the interview skills and also their CV as well.

Michelle Ockers:

Do you have any favourite success stories from your graduates?

Alex Jovanovski:

Joseph, a migrant engineer, came from overseas, here for two years, couldn't get into the field, started working in a non-related field because, again, had to make ends meet. As soon as he found us two years later, he registered, did the traineeship program. In the last, I think, week in module six, he managed to secure a job as a structural engineer, and he had no local experience whatsoever, and I don't even think he had any overseas experience. I think it was just academic. And within a month after him getting into the industry, he wrote a personal email to Moly, which

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now we've published with his consent saying that it's okay for us to publish. And the email was, hi, Moly, obviously, this is Joseph, I just want to let you know about my first month at my new role. First of all, thank you for your mentorship. This training was invaluable for me, et cetera. And at the same time, I was able to design and draft single story residential dwellings, double store residential dwellings, a retaining wall, acoustic structure, a garden structure of some sort, and contribute to a forensic project as well. All this in module one, and this is a migrant engineer in his first month at his new role. And this is a migrant engineer coming from overseas with zero local experience, and the only training he had was Learnpedia and Moly's mentorship. So these are the success stories we love to hear. Then we also help trainees that have been here for 10 years and they call us and, hey, can you please help me? I've been here for 10 years. I haven't been able to get into the field. I became a support worker because I just needed to work, and I got stuck there. So not only have I forgotten everything that I learned at university and possibly four or five years of experience that I might have had overseas, now I've lost all my confidence, my knowledge. Can you please help me? And when we do help these people and they get into the field, it is really truly amazing. And as Moly says, it is sort of the fire that fuels our passion about what we do day in day out. Yes, the struggles. Yes, again, going back to some of the challenges of recording these videos and getting it right. There's been mental breakdowns. There's been working around the clock seven days a week. It took us probably about a good four to five years for us to pre-record everything, get it right. And I'm talking about six, seven days a week for four to five years. So it's been a challenge, but definitely a rewarding challenge.

Moly Ashtari:

The success stories are really the ultimate reward for us that when you really hit rock bottom and you're like, oh my god, it's just so hard, lots of pressure, but then you hear the success stories and you're like, I'm making an impact. I'm changing lives. And it just gives you that fuel to just push forward.

Michelle Ockers:

I don't want to put any more pressure on the two of you because it's obviously been a massive undertaking. But what's next for Learnpedia? Are you kind of just consolidating where you are at the moment? Do you have any plans to do anything different, to do more? Moly, you're nodding. Alex.

Alex Jovanovski:

Well, without giving away too much, 2025 is set up to be huge for us, the way we're going at the moment. We've been in talks with industry bodies, we've been in talks with, and we are in talks with, local construction manufacturers as well. We've got a fair bit planned at the moment, without again giving away too much. So we really want to scale up what we're doing, because there's only so much that we can do in a small team and help so many people. But once we have that other support and we have more people within the industry wanting to do what we do and really help this, again, the crisis as Engineers Australia stated in 2023 of migrant engineers, especially, but even graduates working in non-related fields, then we can definitely, you know, help so many more and that's exactly where we're headed at the moment.

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Without, again, giving away too much. But then, of course, you know, we also pay attention and again, we did the surveys and we do ask our trainees and our engineers, you know, what else would you like to see? So, we also have a few ideas from them as well that they want to see these different types of training, different types of courses as well. So, these are a few things that we're trying to implement in the near future.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, and I just, I mean, the first conversation we had was based on an introduction from someone that you wanted to have a talk about, well, how do we continue to build our network, to build these partnerships across different parts of the sector, to reach out to higher education institutions, potentially, or RTOs, does it even make sense to be an RTO? And I love the living example that ultimately for us, in Australia or any other nation to make a difference to significant skills gaps. We have to work together across different types of organisations, different parties to come up with industry wide solutions. And I love that your journey has taken you from this very personal story of Moly's experience to then looking at how you can support others and both individuals and other small businesses like your own with this particular issue through to now looking at, you know, how do we make a difference to the national agenda with the skills gap here? It's just a beautiful trajectory through your story. So thank you so much, both of you, for coming to share it with us and good luck with all of these future plans. We'll be keeping an eye on what happens with Learnpedia. Where can people obviously, I was just going to ask where people can connect with you if they're curious, they want to know more. Obviously, I'll put a link to your website. Do the two of you use LinkedIn? Is there a better way if people want to reach out to you for them to do that?

Alex Jovanovski:

First of all, thank you, Michelle, for having us. And listeners, thank you for listening. At the same time, in relation to where to find us, you can find us on our website, which is, as you said, you'll have the link anyway, which is learnpedia.com.au, but definitely LinkedIn. We're both on LinkedIn.

Michelle Ockers:

We'll pop your LinkedIn profiles there as well as your website. So thank you, Alex and Moly, a huge thank you. And I know we didn't talk about this much, but not only are you a migrant, but you're a female migrant in what is probably quite a male dominated sector. I think you've just shown us through the way you've engaged in this conversation and talked about some of the things you've done that, you know, you've got a level of confidence and resilience and resourcefulness that I'm sure will inspire many of our listeners. Thank you so much.

Moly Ashtari:

Thanks, Michelle, for having us.

Alex Jovanovski:

Thank you, Michelle.

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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 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](#)