

Michelle Ockers:

Welcome to this very special year in review for Learning Uncut. Looking back on 2025 with my co-host, Michelle Parry Slater. Welcome, Michelle. It's great to have you here again. And Michelle, one of the things I've noticed recently is I've started working more with you is you come from a place of deep appreciation and gratitude and you constantly ground and kick off everything you do with gratitude. So let's kick off with a moment of gratitude. for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples all around Australia, their connection to land, sea, and country, and the beautiful job they've done looking after our country for many thousands of years, including the Brinja Yuin Nation on whose lands I stand, Michelle.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

And I'm on the Kombumerri people's lands, and I would like to offer my appreciation for you noticing. I do try really hard to be inclusive in my practice, and appreciation sits very deeply with me for all things that I do.

Michelle Ockers:

It comes through loud and clear, Michelle, which is one of the reasons I love speaking with you and working with you. So the conversation today, listeners, we're going to look at what's been happening for both of us professionally, because that lens shapes how we look at then the other two topics, which are around the year for L&D, the year that was, as well as what we've seen in the Learning Uncut podcast conversations. So, the heartbeat of Learning Uncut podcast, of course, is case studies, real world examples of the great work that learning professionals are doing inside organisations, sometimes in partnership with external partners who we love to have come along and share the body of work together. So this was an interesting year for the Learning Uncut podcast, Michelle, because I took a few months off in the middle of the year. And that's the first time in the seven and a half years since the podcast has been launched, where I just felt like I needed a break off the back of writing a book and you know, a couple of things in my family and friendship circle that needed more of my headspace and heart space for a little while, but we've come back strong. So in that seven and a half years, we've now published 264 podcast episodes, including this one, and that includes a couple of special series, Disruption, Emergent and Elevate, all of which, well, Disruption and Emergent were during the pandemic, some special series and Elevate. You know, we've dipped in and out of Elevate. We can talk about what we might do with Elevate in the coming year, but really the heartbeat is the main series. And this is episode 177 of that main series. Do you have any idea, Michelle, how many unique downloads there've been or how many countries that we've got listeners from around the world?

Michelle Parry-Slater:

I would imagine there's absolutely stacks because that is such a body of work. I mean, well done on that effort and well done on noticing that you needed the break. I think that many of us just keep going and going and going. And actually, like you say, we come back stronger when we recognise what does our body need? What

does our heart need? And stopping for a little bit, I think is a good thing. But yeah, to those unique downloads, fill me in. What do you reckon?

Michelle Ockers:

267,000 over time. There's a lot of reach, right? A lot of potential impact across 140 different countries. 35% of our listeners now are from the US or 35% of the downloads, which is the equivalent of the downloads from Australia. So it really has grown from a down under podcast to one that reaches more of the world. 8% of listeners or downloads are in the UK, which kind of surprised me. For a long time, the UK and Australia were the key places where we were being listened to, but more so in the US now as well, and 5% in New Zealand, all the way down to a handful of countries where we have had one person listen to one episode over that seven and a half years. So if you've tuned in, Kazakhstan, Ethiopia, El Salvador, Samoa, plus there's a stack of others, but there's some of the countries where, you know, there are L&D professionals right around the globe who are at least tuning in occasionally to Learning Uncut. You know, Michelle, one of the things that I just love is when people actually let me know that they've been listening to the podcast and they've gotten something out of it. So when I'm at events or conferences, it's most typical when people reach out and say, I listen to the podcast all the time. It really helped me get started in L&D or think about this new initiative I wanted to undertake. So listeners, don't be shy, reach out to Michelle and I anytime you want to give us feedback, either something you'd like to see on the podcast or hear more about or what you're finding is working well, as well as any ideas for continuing to improve the podcast.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

It does make a difference, Michelle. I had a client this week I was talking to in the UK because I have lots of UK coaching clients. And that person said to me that he's always shouting about the Learning Uncut podcast because what he likes is the case study element and the application of that in the real world. And so there's at least one listener I know of in the UK, but I'm surprised it's as low as 8% because so many people know you over there. Certainly, the work that you've done has got that global reach. So let's see if that grows over the course of the next year. I'm sure it will.

Michelle Ockers:

Well, I think with your profile being added and your network through the UK, I think it's bound to bump up, but we'll check in in 12 months time. So let's start by looking at some of our personal professional highlights in 2025, because I think the people we engage with individually and the kind of work we do and the communities we're interacting with do shape what we notice. So tell us a little bit about what's been going on for you in 2025.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

So this year for me has been a bit of a consolidation year. We relocated to Australia in 2024, but nothing really shifted for us because we were tied back with a lot of UK stuff for quite some time. But this year we've seen a lot of shift. Personally, my daughter graduated, which was just wonderful for her. My son made the decision to go back to the UK, which these family dynamics, they feed into, you know, the world that you're living in, work, so you can't separate the two, I think, bring your whole self

to work, you're allowed your private life at work, but it does impact it. So that's kind of been going on for me personally, but at the same time, having moved here, I've noticed that work from a learning and development perspective, is different. Now, we think we share the same language, therefore we share the same work, but it's not true. And it just has been a good reminder this year that, you know, there's countries all around the world with their own cultures, with their own beating heart, with their own way of approaching things. And they're not right or wrong, they're just different. And I've really noticed that this year, particularly. So there's a lot more facilitation here, a lot more training, as we might call it. But I've been surprised at that. And then when I reflected on it, which is one of my practices to reflect a lot with the amount of COVID lockdowns that were here and the length of time, no wonder people are wanting to be connected and wanting to be social. That makes total and utter sense that there's a lot more facilitated conversation, that there's a lot more of coming together. But I guess I just didn't expect it. I thought that with a country as large as Australia, people would be online a lot more, would be sort of live online sessions, but it's not the passion. The passion and the focus is very much let's come together and have great conversations, that need for social connection. So that's one thing I've noticed. I think the other thing I've noticed this year is a real keenness here for the lived reality of neuroscience. So I think there's a lot more understanding around neuroscience. It's been really interesting for me to sort of relearn, reignite my learning from people like Stella Collins and Amy Brand, who've been my go-to people, but to see it lived out and talked about in a much more, I was gonna say casual way. It's not casual, it's just everyday, ordinary. It's part of the learning vernacular down here. So that's been an interesting highlight for me personally. And I guess we can't go even this early on, we can't go far without saying that the major professional change which is shaping the world is of course the normalisation of AI in action. And I know this podcast has had many a conversation this year about AI and we really feel like I've embedded it now into normal life when it comes to learning and development. But how about for you, Michelle, what have been some of your professional highlights in 2025?

Michelle Ockers:

It's really interesting because when I thought about this question, I thought, oh, there've been a couple of things, but really, I've had a bit of slow time, a bit more of a break in a couple of spaces this year, but it's been a big year with a couple of really significant milestone initiatives from an industry perspective for me. First up, of course, is the L&D Leader book, which I co-authored with the wonderful Laura Overton, whom I'm just deeply, deeply grateful to for including me as her co-author, as we explored the insights from the 20-year body of evidence from the benchmarking work into high-performing L&D teams, which Laura has well established and has continued to stay close to since that benchmark was sold five years ago, six years ago. And then looking at insights alongside that for not only our professional practice, but our mindset as L&D leaders and what that means for shaping the future. So that was, I think I need a whole separate conversation. In fact, we're shaping up to do a couple of book podcast episodes for the Down Under summer period. So that ended, the writing ended in late April and that was very intense. And I basically was doing around 20 hours a week on writing. Towards the end, it was just all consuming. You've written a book, you understand. I remember it well. And then, of course, it gets published. So it was published in October. And then

there's the second project, which is sharing it out with the world, engaging with the community on the ideas and application of what's in the book. So that was the first big project. The other big project, which was in full swing at the start of the year and was published in mid-year, May, June, was the capability framework for the Australian Institute of Training and Development, which if listeners haven't seen that conversation yet, episode 171, I spoke about the body of work around that, how that was brought to life with Ben Campbell, who's the CEO of the AITD and Lisa Elias, who was a wonderful co-editor and working group lead. Learning strategy projects, been working with Northern Land Council and more recently Australian Red Cross Lifeblood on learning strategy. So have been enjoying that real world work rolling up our sleeves on that. You know, conference wise, Michelle, we didn't talk about conferences. I only went to one conference this year which was the Association for Talent Development in the US. Just with all of my other commitments and needing a little time out, I was a lot less active on the conference circuit than usual. How about you? You went to some conferences here in Australia?

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Certainly did. The AITD conference was a bit of a highlight for me. So not just speaking at that event, but it was meeting people. It was names to faces that was really joyful. I did have quite a lot of FOMO because in the UK, before I moved, I was always at all the conferences, all of the time. So I've kind of watched from afar, but what is interesting is how do those events get shared? How do we talk about those events outside of the actual event? And I guess I was missing Twitter a little bit, because where we met on Twitter back in the day, it used to be a joyful community. So I was curious to know, like, where is, where are these conversations going? How do you bring new people into the conversations? What if you can't afford to go to the conference? Where are you getting the info? So I'm going to have a keener eye on that next year, I think, for sure. So just so I don't get FOMO.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. So I've seen recently a really good example of sharing from a conference from Jo Cook at the Specs Exchange in Berlin, and she created an article, a LinkedIn article, and just kept adding to it, updating it live. So I thought she did a great job of that.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Excellent. Jo is really good at that stuff. Yeah, she had a really lovely event as well, which was shared quite a lot, the TJ Training Journal's 60 event. And I remember going to the training journal was 50 event and suddenly 10 years have gone by in, you know, the turn of an eye. So we need to keep on top of this stuff. We need to pay attention. And I certainly will be intending a lot more events next year. I did enjoy ILP events as well this year, and I've enjoyed a lot of the local events. So the AITD and ILP have a lot of local chapter get togethers. So it's been great to be able to get to know people that way as well. And again, I think that's probably one of the things that surprised me, so many local events when this country is so ginormous. They really do keep things motoring forward and keep the professions, the real hungriness I think in the profession to connect, to learn from each other. And of course we enjoyed our beautiful book event recently as well, which was joy because people were there to listen to you read from your new book and to listen to me read, but

actually the conversations that they were having were just as important. So let's not forget as when we think about the big conferences that the little events as well are really valuable.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, and I think we've kind of maybe set a little goal there, Michelle, for ourselves to do more deliberate sharing out of the events and activities, community work that we get involved in next year.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Sure. Okay, I'm curious then. I'm curious to know, if you had to sum up all of L&D in 2025, what word or phrase might you use? Why would you choose it?

Michelle Ockers:

Okay, I did think long and hard about this. I came down to relevance and value.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Relevance and value. I'm writing it down so I can reflect on those as well as you're talking.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. And the reason I came up with this. So we are in a period of time where budgets are tight. And I know you and I have often had conversations. I think it's probably tighter in the UK and Europe than it is here in Australia. But nonetheless, particularly with AI, a little bit of economic tightness, budgets are tighter. So my sense is that L&D teams have a little less money than perhaps they might have. And the labour market is definitely slower this year than it was last year here in Australia. I've heard of some very experienced, very good L&D professionals who've taken longer than you would expect to find another role when they've moved on or when there's been restructures and so on. So I think we're more conscious of relevance and value. And of course, the L&D leader, my book was all about practices and principles for creating business values, hence my comment about the lens. So I think because I've been so focused on conversations about how do we create business value and talking to people about that topic for the book, I think maybe a little bit of it's teased out there. The other interesting linkage around this theme is to the conversation you and I had with Donald H. Taylor in episode 175 this year about his most recent research report into AI and L&D alongside Egle Vinauskaite, and he titled it Race for Impact, or they titled it Race for Impact. And I think this reflects the interplay of AI and where we're at now with more than half of the response to their survey using AI rather than just experimenting with it, increasing range of use cases, increasing sophistication, and kind of the observation in the report that AI not only has the tools to generate greater impact and influence, but AI has removed the barriers to creating content, which has been L&D's, well, in the minds of many L&D's traditional role. So the cost of perceived value of content have plummeted, producing more of it faster is not the value at it once was. So now we're leaning into new roles to remain relevant and create value. So for me, my phrase is relevance and value.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

I really agree with that sense of, I feel like we've been talking about making impact in learning and development for such a long time that now maybe this is going to force our hand. I know I've been made redundant way back in the day, you know, in 2007, the UK had a big economic hit and I got made redundant from a learning job and it really sharpened my focus on how am I adding value? Why would it be that I go? Because when learning is a nice to have, you're out the door. When learning is a need to have, then you're first in the queue to stay. And that was my decision back in 2007. I always wanted to make sure that we could prove that value and impact, but I'm not sure that everyone thinks that way because if you're a content creator, just keep creating content. If you are putting out courses, just keep putting out courses, but I think you're right. We definitely need to show our relevance and show our value.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, and I think you mentioned, did you mention the pandemic and the ships in the pandemic?

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Yeah, what I was talking earlier about, I think that that really is a bit of why social connection is really important here. Because, you know, when I hear about the lockdowns in Australia, it makes me shudder. You're like locked up for, especially in Victoria, forever.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, shout out to everybody in Victoria, we felt for you. But in the same way that COVID created, as awful as it was, created some opportunity, the disruption created opportunity to accelerate shifts that had kind of been underway for a while and that many people in L&D wanted to lean into, it created new opportunity. I think AI is doing the same in some ways in that it's not it's not the reason that we're thinking about what is our role moving forward and how do we become, you know, stronger enablers of learning and performance rather than just pushing out courses and content. But I think it's accelerating and creating more opportunity to lean into that.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

I agree.

Michelle Ockers:

So, how about you? Did you have a word or phrase that you think sums up L&D in 2025?

Michelle Parry-Slater:

I don't know if it's prophetic or if it's reflective, but the word I would choose is human. And as we navigate this new normal, working alongside technology, redefining what the human in learning and development is bringing, I think that that's the word that sort of, you know, when I was looking through this year's podcasts that you'd put out, That's what keeps coming through long, sort of longitudinally but also, you know, relevantly this year, that we need to redefine what does it look like to be a human being in a world which like you say the AI can check out the content but it won't be

as relevant. And I think that there's that sense that we need to understand our businesses more. We need to understand how do we ensure that the learning that gets put out from AI is relevant to that business. So I think that we're going to be looking at these really current skills, relational skills, critical thinking, human intelligence to redefine what does the human bring in this AI world of L&D. And like I say, is that prophetic? Is this 2026's job or is this what we've seen during 2025? Personally, I feel like I've seen quite a lot of it because AI, if we think about 2024, 2023, it was new. We were, are we going to be doing it? But that conversation with Don and the report that Egle and Don put out very much reminded us, this isn't normal now. We're using this stuff now. We've got to keep bringing the human.

Michelle Ockers:

I think it is both reflective of where we're at in 2025 and potentially where we're headed as we continue to grapple with it. I hear a lot of conversation about human plus AI and what distinguishes the two and how do we work effectively with AI and what are the human skills we need to double down on. So I think you're right.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Yeah. So I think if this is what we're thinking about for 2026, let's go back. We're here to reflect on 2025. What patterns and themes have you noticed, Michelle, particularly in the Learning Uncut episodes this year? Any standout guests, any standout episodes? I know you're not allowed to pick your favourite child. That's not fair. But I'm asking you, pick your favourite child, please.

Michelle Ockers:

Oh, can I can I come back to the favourite child after I talk about some of the patterns? Let's not go there straight away. Let's not spoil. And maybe listeners, while you're listening to this, if you have been someone who's listened to Learning Uncut throughout the year, maybe have a think about which guest or guests or episodes most struck a chord with you and see if they match what Michelle and I hone in on. So, I've kind of got three key themes. I'll share one and then I'll move to you to see what you had there and we can maybe bounce it around a bit. One which is something that has been a part of Learning Uncut episodes for many years. So, it's not a new theme. It's the idea of co-design and human-centered approaches. But I think they are way more mainstream. Back in 2018, I recall doing a couple of episodes about human-centered design approaches with Damien Woods, who was then at NAB, National Australia Bank, and Gareth Killen, who was at Reece Plumbing. And they used HCD or human-centered design approaches. And those episodes are one of the most listened to episodes from that period because we were still trying to think about how do we embrace human-centered approaches. I think it's pretty mainstream now, but there were some really standout examples of it, which I'll just mention a few of those. One is co-designing with the frontline, Ryan Byrne, in episode 164 at Sydney Trains about a customer service performance campaign. They ran design sprints where frontline staff were brought in, they were taken off roster, off shift to help co-create the design solutions around real world friction points. So, that was one really good solid example of a co-design approach. One interesting one, and I loved the language that was used in this episode. Keith Hegart from the University of Technology Sydney in episode 167 talked about designing a certification program for learning designers. And they created personas, which the

names of his personas, just even the names express the empathy. So one was the tired teacher, and there was another, the uncertified learning designer. So, he put a lot of effort into the connection with people who would be coming into instructional design roles and what's their background and how to cater for those. And it led to some fairly unique approaches in the academic world. I think Christine Gaynor-Patterson in episode 172, which was about building AI literacy, she also used personas for AI adoption, ranging from hesitant workers to innovators to tailor the learning pathways. But she had a really interesting addition. We're used to, I think, a persona saying, what do we want people to think, feel and do? But she had this extra box on the personas around who do we want people to become? which I thought was really interesting in terms of what kind of shifts are we looking to support. And then there were a couple of episodes which went beyond co-design from a human-centered approach to really looking at how do we build learner agency. And this, I think, shifts in with the conversation we had with Don around moving from being content producers and content curators to actually potentially learning enablers. So, two in particular stand out for me. One was episode 170 with James Swift from Leighton, and it was called Rethinking Learning, Autonomy Over Content. And I think the name says it all. And in fact, where his body of work started, and it was in a business development sales environment, was identifying what the skills were that people needed to move into different roles, then providing a little bit of coaching and allowing them to figure out how to build those skills. And there were so many ways people went about doing that. So, the coaching was the key enabling mechanism. And the other one around learner agency that I loved was with McKinsey, Lisa Christensen, episode 163, which was about what she called a feedback skills surge, which was completely opt-in, got great take up and was all about giving people the ability to take something and apply it in work. And the content was very light touch, very simple to engage with, but it really was all about allowing people to go and practice stuff in their work rather than feeding them a whole stack of content. So that co-design and human-centered approaches is the first pattern, not a new one, but I think some really standout examples of it from guests this year, Michelle.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

I love the fact that we didn't talk about this before we recorded it, because I've picked really different ones. We've only got one hit. If this was Battleships, we've only got one hit of James, which is James for me. But my themes really are very much in that human space. And I think it's just reflective of where my mind has been at this year, embedding myself into this new location. And so some of the themes that have come across for me are how those that are successful really are thinking about the human, which is why we had that same hit around James. So for me, James' story is important to remind learning and development professionals. It's never about us. It's always about the learners, making them accountable for their own progress like he did, helping them to measure, helping to see what progress is critical, it's always about them, whether you're in front of a classroom environment, an online live event, whether you're, you know, delivering through e-learning, it's always about their experience. And so that really is one of the themes that came through. Those that have been successful, you know, thinking about Hannah Ryan episode 174, she was an absolute joy for me to listen to. She was talking about some of my favourite things, learning culture and learning community. So, you know, This is why they're linked, because culture and community, it's always about the people. It's always

about the people. So that came shining through. And then some of the others that I really enjoyed, episode 176, the most recent one with Jana and Joe, I loved the encouragement there to women in engineering. Again, community. It's all about that human. It's all about who's the end user and how are we trying to help them. I'd love that they could see their value. They could see the progress that they were building over a period of time, which is something that we're perhaps going back to your earlier relevance and value. Longitudinal study helps us to see that, Laura Overton is the queen of that, you know, so I really like the sense that, following the stories over a period of time helps us to see what works and what doesn't work. And thinking on that theme of human, thinking on that theme of the learners, Moly blew me away.

Michelle Ockers:

Moly Ashtari, yeah, amazing.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Molly in episode 166. I think it resonated with me given my move to Australia, her move to Australia and how hard she found it to get work. She described being on the plane with nobody to wait for her, to welcome her. And when she said that, I mean, filling up a bit now, I really resonate that with many migrants around the world, people who even move within country. A lot of people in this country, Australia, have moved from Victoria up to Queensland and other places. So, you know, when you arrive and there's no one to greet you, when you really are on your own, I loved her drive and her focus. And I really think that that's helped her to have that drive and focus on behalf of learners. And what a great lesson for all learning and development professionals that we can link into, you know, she chose to live in this place. She's ambitious for herself. Well, as learning and development professionals, we've chosen that profession and we need to be ambitious both for our profession, but also for our learners as well. So that was really what was popping out for me in terms of a theme, you know, really focus in on what do our learners need? How do we bring that human, you know, certainly that was one of the things. The other, I guess, was the move towards strategic. Now it stands to reason that somebody who supports people in strategy like you do, has guests who are doing things that are strategic, but you also have a lot of award winners as guests. And what are the award winners winning for? They're winning because they're strategic. So I think you open the year with 161, Episode 161 with Millie and Millie Law really reminded us of the winning approach was from the fact she was using an enterprise wide strategy. She wasn't building learning from nowhere. She was building learning grounded out of the wider organisational ambition. And I think whenever that happens, that's always a win.

Michelle Ockers:

It was just such a solid example. I mean, it was a blended learning approach, but end to end, it was such a solid example of good L&D practice from the linkage to business goals, the performance consulting, the design, all the way through to kind of the rollout evaluation. And I think, you know, Millie works in ANZ, of course, Arun Pradhan, who is a longtime collaborator and friend, is the GM of learning there. And I think, you know, the environment, you can see the thinking that he brings and the kind of environment he's created for his teams. They've really been doing some great work at ANZ.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

I think if I had to pick a favourite child, it might be that one. And for me, it was because of the more organisational development lens that she was bringing to it. It was that more systems thinking mindset. And of course, that really appeals to me. That's when I ground out my practice in that more holistic overview. And of course, she said, I'm a big fan of performance consulting. So I was like, well, that sings to my heart. So potentially, Millie wins as the favourite child, but Moly is certainly a close second, but we shouldn't have favourite children. They're all great.

Michelle Ockers:

You know, Moly, the thing about Moly Ashtari is she's not an L&D person, right? She's a structural engineer who's come to Australia, gone through the migrant experience of having, despite having qualifications, just facing rejection on every door she knocked on due to her lack of local experience and just being so persistent. If you haven't listened to episode 166 listeners, please listen to it. I fell in love with Moly, I've got to say. But just her own experience and empathy and then when she was working, started her organisation, and you'll have to forgive me, I forget what the name of the main organisation is, Learnpedia was the second organisation that she and her partner Alex set up, but they set it up off the back of both Moly's personal experience and wanting to help others, either migrants or fresh university graduates who didn't have enough practical real-world experience to really get good jobs in structural engineering, but also as small business owners running a construction company, they were struggling to get the skills they needed. So they're kind of solving problems at a personal, organisational, and industry-wide level. So it's a great story. And I think it's an example of how our personal experience can shape our work in L&D. And there were kind of a couple of others who stood out. In fact, so much, I'm going to make this the December blog post talking about the way our own experience builds empathy for the people in the work we do. Jo Farrell, who was in episode 176, which is about the mentoring program for women working in construction, her own experience as an apprentice carpenter from 1996, where she was told she should go and be a hairdresser. She got that from a lot of people around her. And then she's experiencing the isolation of being out on building sites full of men, often being the only woman, no female bathrooms. And, you know, when she's just about ready to quit and go, this isn't for me. You know, she had the opportunity to be mentored by a senior female leader. Alison Merriman, she described it as winning the professional lottery. And it just, you know, the cycle of support this sets up, but her then doing so much with building mentoring programs for women in the industry over the years. And there's other examples that I pulled from the guests. But I think for me, what often stands out, I just find it really heartwarming when I can see the connection between someone's background and lived experience and the work they do, Michelle.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

I totally agree. A lot of people ask me why do I have such an inclusive lens and you know when you're bullied at school or when you experience a shift or a move or something happens, you can't help but be shaped by those things. And that's really, you know, that's my story I moved from Lancashire to Hertfordshire, now, anyone in Australia is like, that's down the road. That's like moving from sort of, you know, Noosa down to Northern New South Wales is really not far, but it's far enough to

have the wrong accent to where the wrong to where, you know, and these are the things that shape us. And I really love Jo's story because I felt sad really listening to it. It's still happening today. It's 2025 and still there is this level of misogyny, this underground kind of you know, that not accepted, not included, not welcome. And it's certainly not part of my practice and where we can influence it, then let's do that. And Jo, what a fantastic, fantastic advocate for everything that she brings. It was a really great listen and it's great to hear that you know, the podcast can amplify that work as well.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. There was one other standout guest that I just love the conversation with. I love all of them, but this one in particular, for different reasons, you mentioned Hannah Ryan from Versent before in episode 174. She has not been in L&D all that long, about seven years, and she moved into Versent as the first L&D person. She had a specific brief around running a leadership program, you know, rolling out stuff through the LMS, but she brought fresh eyes to that role. And she kind of looked around and said, there's something else going on here we need to amplify, which led to building, really leaning into that learning culture and community and meeting people where they were at and eventually throwing out the LMS, Michelle.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Yeah. I know it was revolutionary. I have to say Hannah was a joy to listen to. I connected with her on LinkedIn afterwards because I was so sort of bound by this joy that is fresh eyes. And it made me think about a book called Adjacent Learning by Steve George and David Hayden. And they talk in that book about how we can learn so much from communities outside of learning and development. So communities which we all belong to, you know, the music group, the choir, the scouts, the guides, the church, whatever it might be, the running club, and how we bring that into our work. And when I hear about Hannah's story, and there were so many, James' story, he came from a sales background, right?

Michelle Ockers:

Exactly, you know. Fresh eyes.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

And like you say, Moly, not necessarily an L&D person originally, this is how we need to keep fresh. So if we've been an L&D like me for 30 years, you know, we've got to keep fresh, we can't keep looking at the world in the way that we've always looked in the world, because the world's moved on, the world's changing. So how do we keep fresh? I have found it frustrating over the years that if you've specialized in, I don't know, leadership development, and step one of your leadership development is to do a personality profile, and you've trained in the tool, every problem that you're faced with looks like a hole for that shaped tool. And that isn't true, because every context is entirely different. So I think we always need to have fresh eyes. Every single engagement we come to, we need to try and evoke those fresh eyes. And I know I'm quite an impatient person. I'm quite an impulsive person as well. So it's easy for me to have those fresh eyes. Cause I find that joy. It's one of the reasons you don't, you don't move halfway across the world. You know, if you think about it too much, just jump on a plane and go, but

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, I think the Australian government made sure that you had plenty of time to think about it from the time you first had the idea, Michelle. It took a little while, right?

Michelle Parry-Slater:

To be fair, it wasn't the easiest of journeys. Yeah. And I respect the Australian government for actually the process that they go through, especially for getting my dog in. That wasn't an easy process, but I wasn't coming if he wasn't coming. So, yeah, we've got to respect the process. But at the same time, we've always got to have that kind of that inspiration from others to help us to have those fresh eyes. And that's what the podcast does for me, for sure.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, absolutely. Community, looking at other people's works. I think that's really important. Interestingly, one of the things I've noticed over the past few years is that people who are in small L&D teams or solo L&D people, it's very natural for them to go to the network and to build their network. I've noticed there is a risk, and it's not sort of always the case, but there is a risk in organisations where there are more L&D people, bigger teams, multiple teams, that people don't look outside the organisation enough. They feel like they have enough community within the organisation. So if that's you, listener, have a little think about where you're reaching out beyond the organisation to build your network and have conversations and share reflections on your work and hear about other people's work. It's so important. So important.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

I agree.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. So, Michelle, I did introduce you as my co-host earlier. which, you know, the curious listener may have picked up on. So I'm just so delighted that from this episode moving forward, you are now officially the Learning Uncut co-host. And not only that, but even more delightful from what has been a collaboration, even when you're in the UK, you are working on some projects with Learning Uncut, that we're taking that up a level and you're actually joining Learning Uncut to work alongside me in 2026. I'm so excited, Michelle.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

I think I'm even more excited than you, Michelle.

Michelle Ockers:

The two Michelles. Did you see Damien Woods posted something on LinkedIn with a hashtag, the two Michelles? I think that might become a thing. I think we've got to embrace that.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Yeah, just let's lean in. But yeah, I am super excited to be able to just share, I think we've got really complementary skill sets and experiences. And that means that we

can broaden the horizons for learning uncut. It means that we can you know, carry on doing the work that we've done but also have that community with each other. We know that you're, as a practitioner, you're always stronger when you work with others and certainly through Kairos Modern Learning I've always brought people in and I've always looked at what is the problem that we're trying to solve and then how can we build community around that and the team to make that problem solving easier and better and I'm looking forward to being able to do that as well with you and any others in the community. because I think we're always stronger together, aren't we? All of us.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes. Yes, indeed. And I've always enjoyed a good collaboration. This is just taking it up next level. And what I really like, Michelle, is that you joining Learning Uncut brings both greater depth and breadth, particularly around the OD lens, the organisational development lens, and often in my work on learning strategy, I'll see that there are other things going in the organisation that L&D needs to embrace or other levers that need to be, actually, I don't like that phrase, levers that need to be pulled. It sounds so mechanistic, but the world isn't like that, is it? But there's other areas where you can shape things to ensure that the work we're doing in L&D lands well and to support people. you know, to make the kind of changes and improve performance in ways that matter to them and to the organisation. So I know we've had this conversation a couple of times. In Australia, people often think OD equals leadership development, but you have a much broader lens on that, right? So there's an education piece I think we have an opportunity to do here as well. Do you want to give us the elevator pitch on what is OD in the UK or OD according to Michelle Parry Slater?

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Well, okay, I'll do I'll take the second one I won't take the first one so I am an accidental OD practitioner and even now I say out loud and I think, am I, but of course most OD practitioners will say the same because you get a different interpretation depending on the work that you do. I've learned from the best people like Meg Pepin, Paul Taylor Pitt, Gary Roach, Danny Bacon. These are people who've influenced my thinking and I didn't even know that my way of thinking was organisation development originally. I can't think of learning and development. You say levers, I say ripples. We don't work in isolation in learning and development at all. Well, everything we do is in order to change behaviour or to change culture or to improve skills. We don't do our work just because, you know, even if it's to make people compliant, you're making people stay safe, to be ethical, make legal decisions at work. So what we do has an impact and they have ripples. If you don't think how those ripples will impact on the wider organisation, then I think there's a lens that's missing. And that's really where I see that organisation development lens. So what does the whole organisation look like? Well, what does culture look like? What does leadership look like? What does the structure look like? What are the strategies look like? And once you can kind of get your head around all of those aspects of complexity, that systems thinking, how does the system work with each other? Then we know what we put into from a learning perspective, it will work or it won't work. And I've been brought in many a time where somebody's perhaps put in a really great program and it's worked in one context, but they've moved it to another

department and it's absolutely crumbled and fallen. Well, you'd think it would work because it's the same setting. Well, it's not. You need to really look at all of those different perspectives. And so that's why I really enjoy that kind of systems thinking approach. And it's also why I really enjoy the case studies of Learning Uncut because I'm excited to respect the podcast. I'm excited to be part of the value of the case studies. The trick is understanding how those case studies can be applied in action. And that's, for me, the same in L&D and OD. So it's one thing to understand the complexity of the system, but what does that look like when it's applied in action? So I've been doing this kind of work and helping people make that translation for quite a long time. So things like chairing at Learning Technologies Conference, one of the best conferences for having chairs of value. As a chair, we do something, we translate what the audience needs. So it's not just the speaker speaking their truth, it's actually what does that look like for the audience themselves, what are they taking away. Similarly with my pieces on Learning Now TV over the many years, you know, helping translate what's this great story mean for you, in that case viewer, in this case for the podcast, it's for the listener. So certainly something that I love doing is helping people to take a story and how does that fit to your relevance, because that's the whole OD lens. If we don't look at the bigger picture, if we don't look at the ripples that we're going to create, then we might be wondering and left wondering why does our learning not work.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. You know, I just want to loop that back to a piece of work I mentioned earlier, which is the AITD capability framework. So two kind of threads right through the framework. And in fact, they're more than just threads. They're very explicit is around partnering and the need to partner with others that our work doesn't happen in isolation and the systems thinking approach and how important that is. And that's embedded in the learning culture capability within the framework that we can only do that through a systems thinking lens. So thank you for that. So listeners, if you would like to discover a little bit more about Michelle, look out for a January episode of the Learning Uncut Elevate podcast, where I'll be talking to Michelle about her book, the L&D Handbook, which is now in its second edition. And Michelle, you'll be interviewing Laura and I about our book as well, right?

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Can't wait. It's going to be a really good exchange. So we're going to be looking at your L&D Leader book and it's an absolute pleasure always to spend time with yourself and with Laura as well. So I'm looking forward to that in January.

Michelle Ockers:

Yep, there are lots of resources and people and so on that we mentioned during the conversation. Michelle, I'll do some curation and throw a stack of that stuff into the show notes if anyone wants to explore further over that kind of Christmas, New Year period, particularly down under where it's summer and we take our longer school holiday break and so on. It's a great time. It's a huge break.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

It's so crazy. I've seen so many things on LinkedIn and people are like, I'll see you in February. I'm like, what?



Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, it's crazy, isn't it?

Michelle Parry-Slater:

It is. But when you think about it, Northern Hemisphere people, it's not just the two weeks of Christmas, but it's actually that sort of big, long summer holiday that we would normally have in July and August. Australia and New Zealand are having now. And I'm still getting my head around it. And no matter how much I put on Mariah Carey and all of the Christmas songs, it's not I'm not feeling it. It's just too lovely and warm. So I'm going to go with it's the summer holidays as much as it's the Christmas

Michelle Ockers:

So, both of our links to our LinkedIn profiles will be in the show notes. I will post about this on LinkedIn, as I know you will as well, Michelle. And I think the invitation to listeners is to find those posts, just use the hashtag Learning Uncut and or the hashtag the two Michelles, which is officially a thing now. And you see our posts and add your reflections on the year, any standard episodes or guests. And please, please, please reach out to either of us via LinkedIn DMs and suggest topics or guests, including yourself. I do have some people sometimes who are brave enough, courageous enough to say, here's my offering to the L&D world. Maybe people would like to hear about this work. And, you know, the answer is generally yes. So, Michelle, thank you for joining me, not only for this episode, but as the co-host moving into 2026. Thank you to all of our guests who have been so generous with sharing their work with the L&D community and to you listeners as well. And something I don't often ask, but I will ask, if you've been finding Learning Uncut valuable in 2025, share it with others, tell a colleague about it, post it on LinkedIn, you know, write on your podcast listening app so that others can find it more easily. And as many people as possible have an opportunity to learn from the work of our guests. Thanks, Michelle, and have a great Christmas.

Michelle Parry-Slater:

Thank you. Happy New Year. It's going to be a great 2026.

Michelle Ockers:

It certainly is.



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](#)