

Learning Uncut Episode 188 - Minimal Interventions, Maximum Outcomes - Andrew Lawson & Alice Smith



Michelle Parry-Slater

Welcome to Learning Uncut. Today's episode we'll be speaking to Andrew

Lawson and Alice Smith. Before we begin, in the spirit of reconciliation, Learning Uncut acknowledges the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community, particularly the Kombumerri People whose land I am joining you from today. We pay our respects to their elders past and present, and we extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples present or listening today.

Listeners may also wish to take a moment to acknowledge the traditional custodians where you're listening from today, as we begin by welcoming Andrew and Alice to today's conversation. Now, today's conversation is really all about how do we get those minimal interventions for maximum outcomes. Now that's the dream, isn't it? Of course, all people in learning and development, we don't want to play with it too much, but we want to actually get maximum bang for our buck, maximum impact for our learning. We're going to hear a little bit more today from Andrew and Alice about how they have done exactly that. So welcome to Learning Uncut. Andrew, do you want to say a little bit about who you are and what you do?

Andrew Lawson

Sure. Thanks for having me on the programme, Michelle. Really appreciate it. So I'm Andrew Lawson. I'm a learning and development practitioner with twenty years' experience. I love spending my day doing instructional design and facilitation. I run a business called The Learning Zone and a few other different L&D businesses. But what I really get excited about, what gets me up out of bed each day, is combining my passions of neuroscience and short courses that really help drive behaviour change. That's what I'm really excited about. And yeah, I've had the privilege of working with lots of different organisations right across Australia and different sectors and the like. And that's how Alice and I met, through an inquiry into that. So I might flick over to Alice.

Alice Smith

Yeah, thanks, Andrew. I'm Alice Smith. I've worked in the federal government for about 20 years now, in a range of different enabling roles and service delivery. And yeah, Andrew and I met each other through a need that I had with some learning and development for a number of our leaders in our division. I had asked for recommendations for people aligned with the way I wanted to deliver this training programme. And Andrew was one of the top recommendations that came through. So, we met up through a procurement process for that.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Thank you both for sharing a little bit about yourselves. But Andrew, I think you're being a little bit humble there. Let's shout out the joy that is the congratulations deserving of you from the Dr Alistair Rylatt Award for L&D Professional of the Year. Now, this is the 2026 AITD highest individual honour. You mentioned you've spent 20 years in the profession, and so it sounds like you really do deserve, through The Learning Zone in Canberra, to get this award. What does that recognition mean to you?

Andrew Lawson

Michelle, it was really special recognition. The fact that it's judged by industry peers, and they're recognising your contribution to the industry, is a huge deal. They called out things like the neuroscience approach I've taken and the impact I've had through my work across that time. So it was just great kudos all round to get that.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Awards are really important, I think. And if we go into learning and development projects with an award mindset, what would judges be looking for? I think it sets us off in the right track. It also helps us to build community, because we can follow people who do good work, recognised by peers, like your award. How are you involved in the AITD community?

Andrew Lawson

So I'm local president here in the ACT and we organise local networking events and learning events for fellow practitioners. They would come along every few months to an event we run here. Look, it's a great little community we've got here in the ACT and it's been a lot of fun connecting with other members. The conversations you have at an event and obviously post-event are always a real joy, a place where you can explore different ideas, chew the fat so to speak on different issues that we all face. We all face similar issues. So it's always good to just bounce around ideas with people in that sense, Michelle.

Michelle Parry-Slater

I agree. Community is what gets us through, I think, when we're facing challenge and change. Community is definitely where it's at. So thank you all. Congratulations, it is an absolute honour to be able to talk to you today. And what I'm keen to hear about is what got you there. Some of the work that you're doing in order to be recognised by your industry peers. And so let's talk a little bit about leadership training. It's one of the biggest things in the world in terms of spend, yet I don't necessarily think that traditional leadership training works. What are your thoughts, Andrew?

Andrew Lawson

I would happen to agree with you, Michelle. Look, there are some fantastic programmes out there, there are fantastic facilitators out there. I've been to some of those sessions

over the years, we can walk in and have a great experience. But the bottom line for me is I feel pretty drained at the end of that day-long or two-day-long session. And there's a reason for that: it's not aligned to how our brain likes to process information. And the second thing that I sometimes think is problematic is that we're not embedding the work that needs to happen back in the workplace. We're not walking away saying, well, how are we going to give you those nudges to ensure that you're actually doing something with the learning? I guess those are my quick thoughts. And that's why I design learning differently. I take a more modular approach, spaced out over time, with those nudges in between. So that learning is really a process, not an event. That's my thoughts on that, Michelle.

Michelle Parry-Slater

I agree, that classic two or three days out of the office. It's all about the networking, the lunch, the biscuits, the quality of the coffee, not about the learning. Whereas what you're describing is actually about the quality of that learning experience. Now, obviously Alice agreed with this approach. So tell us a little bit about what was behind this case study today. What did you need? What was your first instinct Andrew when this came to you.

Alice, why don't you kick us off? What was the problem that you were trying to solve? Why did you need some leadership development?

Alice Smith

Yeah, look, through a number of feedback mechanisms we had identified that leadership was a bit of a problem within our area. I guess I've been in a number of organisations over the years and I've been really fortunate to have access to some of the more traditional learning and development and leadership programmes that are run. And my experience just told me that wasn't going to work for this cohort. They had been around for quite a long time. They were really busy, time-poor, and quite specialist in some of their skill sets and just hadn't had exposure. And I thought getting access to that leadership stuff that does take you out of the office for two days at a time just wasn't going to work. So, I started using my networks to ask around about people that might have a different approach.

Andrew had done some work in the department previously and he was recommended to me, so I had reached out to him basically to chat about my thoughts and hear about what his approach might be.

Michelle Parry-Slater

So Andrew, you kind of get flushed out, which is great. When you're volunteered by someone else from their work, that is really tantamount to doing good work. Referrals are the best business to get, I always think.

So, they came to you with this need. What was your first instinct for solving that?

Andrew Lawson

The first instinct was really, once Alice and her colleague Emily described what they were trying to achieve and where the current thinking was at, they were saying, look, we want about two days of total time, but we're not wedded to doing that as a big block. We're actually open to doing it in a more modular approach. And so their thinking was already really strongly aligned with how I'd approach that. So I felt there was a real synergy there already. And then we spoke about some of the other elements of the programme they wanted to include, like a diagnostic and some of the coaching elements. And it just felt like a really good match. So from that point of view, I really loved where Alice had already considered, I want to come at this differently.

Michelle Parry-Slater

It's excellent when a client says that and they're open-minded to it, good on you, Alice, for having that foresight. But this didn't come out of nowhere, did it, Andrew? Your approach to learning and development is something that you've been honing over these 20 years. And my understanding is that you've built upon David Rock's AGES model. I'm really curious for you to share with our listeners and our watchers, now that we're also on YouTube at Learning Uncut podcast what did you feel was missing from AGES?

What did you do differently?

Andrew Lawson

Firstly, it's no criticism of AGES. I'm a huge AGES fan, in fact, it's been a massive influence on my career in learning and development. For me, I was just paying attention to the neuroscience stuff that comes out. And I felt one of the areas that we sometimes overlook as practitioners is the time factor. So that was one of the elements that I felt was really important for us to focus on. Time is really key around making sure we don't overwhelm learners. And it's actually a really important factor in memory formation, we can talk more about that a bit later maybe.

But that was the first thought. And then the other thought I had was... we sometimes start with a great icebreaker, but how do we make sure that energising start we sometimes lead with is actually really on point and relevant to the learners? Because learners are really searching for the why. Why should I pay attention? Why should I keep listening to you?

So that was another really important factor. David Rock also talks about spacing, and that's a really important principle. I kind of just reframed his spacing point to be more about retention. Still, spacing is the philosophy that underpins it all, but there are different elements going on through the retention blend. So those were the levers that I thought were really important. And that led me to create a new kind of model or checklist for learning called TARGER.

Michelle Parry-Slater

So TARGER, tell me all the different parts of that acronym. We're very good in learning and development at creating acronyms, aren't we. So let's talk about it in its fullest sense. What's TARGER?

Andrew Lawson

So T stands for Time, A is Attention, R is Relevance, G is for Generation, E is for Emotion, and the final R is for Retention. Those are the different elements.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Excellent. I can see how you've moved that AGES model, Attention, Generation, Emotion, and Spacing, into this more full picture. It's almost like a learning design version, if you like.

Andrew Lawson

Spot on. Think of it like a checklist for helping you design learning that's going to be brain-friendly, learning that's going to help things stick post-event.

Michelle Parry-Slater

It enables, of course, you to get in all of the good adult learning principles. You've mentioned neuroscience a lot. Things like chunking down, avoiding cognitive overload, spacing out. That time piece is really important here. Do you want to just start us off? What does that look like? In this particular programme, for the design, for example, why is time so important?

Andrew Lawson

Yeah, look, the time idea has been around for a while. I think we haven't always applied the principle as well as we could have. We've known for some time from the research into understanding concentration and focus that we can go for up to about 90 minutes in a single stretch at the high end. But the neuroscience that's been coming out lately from the Huberman Lab and places like that is actually showing us that there are proteins in the brain that actually help form memories and after 90 minutes, they're in decay. So we need to be really paying attention to this idea that time is actually a significant factor in learning. And I think what happens is and Huberman talks about this, if we push on past 90 minutes, learning becomes harder and harder. So it's like, why fight that? We've got these biological principles that are governing how learning should be done. Why wouldn't we want to align what we do in terms of learning with how the brain actually works?

Michelle Parry-Slater

So that attention piece is coming from that. You're saying nothing more together than 90 minutes. And then the attention, I mean, I've heard in the past, 20 minutes at a time in

an hour session, only make three points, don't make more than that. Is this where the attention piece is coming in, or am I on the wrong track? Help me out.

Andrew Lawson

I think there are some important principles there as well. But I think what we're trying to do with attention is, the brain will naturally go into a slump. So what we're trying to do with attention, it's about is get their attention early and often throughout the session. So you might say, well, let's make sure we cover three points. We're injecting those new ideas in. Say, well, this is the why, this is the what, and this is maybe the how of what we're talking about. And so each time we progress through those, or it might be a different concept: concept one, concept two, concept three. Those are different ways of getting attention. Think of it like changing the scenery each time. We're getting that attention and getting them to refocus on what we're about to put before them. So, you're right in some senses, but I think there's the upfront work we do around that and then the ongoing work we do about that.

Michelle Parry-Slater

And that feeds into that relevance piece, isn't it? You call it relevance, I call it connection to content. So make sure that we have some connection. Like you say, we've all done those really very embarrassing, oftentimes cringeworthy icebreakers. No one wants to do them. But actually, if we do an activity upfront which is linked back to the content, then that actually helps us to start gaining that attention and maintain that relevance. What more in your area of relevance, Andrew?

Andrew Lawson

I think you have to be really on point with talking about the why we're looking at this. So for example, we might be exploring a subject on difficult conversations and I might have sent something out pre-workshop saying, we're going to be talking about this, think about what are some of your challenges or your barriers around difficult conversations. I often lead in the room by saying, look, early on in my career I used to really struggle with having difficult conversations because I didn't want to upset people. And a lot of that will resonate with a lot of people. None of us are fundamentally sociopaths, we don't want to upset people.

But we're trying to get the attendees to put on the table their dea cat, their problem. What's their problem that holds them back in terms of their leadership? So that's really about getting them to put that forward, and then that signals to them, thank you for putting that forward, we're going to work on that today. It's about addressing that why again, I think Michelle.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Creating a really safe space for people.

Andrew Lawson

Yeah, totally. It's really important if we want them to be truly honest and make progress, I think.

Michelle Parry-Slater

So your G is Generation. Now we're not talking about there being five generations in the workplace here. What are we talking about when we use that word?

Andrew Lawson

Yeah, great question, Michelle. It's about generating existing and new ideas and sometimes how those need to merge together. So a really good exercise I run around this is we run leadership sessions on coaching. I get them to just draw a diagram on what coaching means to them. So they sketch something on their paper and they have a chat with their partner and that's really surfacing what they currently know about coaching. And then we say, well, let's just push that a bit further. When we talk about workplace coaching, we're talking about this idea. So now that we understand that, redraw the diagram, redraw the picture. And that is often a good way to bring the existing and the new together. So they end up with a new understanding. And there are no wrong answers, you're just trying to surface what people already know, and then we're able to go on and demonstrate that. So that's really all about generation, which helps form those memories. That's really the purpose of generation.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Okay, your E and your final R are still hanging in the balance. I'm curious to come back to them. I'm going to leave them hanging because I want to know a little bit more about the actual programme, because our E is Emotion and our final R is Retention. And I'm curious to hear a little bit more from Alice before we get into the emotion of the programme and the retention.

Thinking about the actual programme itself, the design, I totally understand how you're coming at this with your TARGER mindset. With your framing, the actual programme itself, either of you let us know, what did you put together? What did you create? I'm assuming this was a collaboration Alice? This isn't something that Andrew just came and presented to you and said, ta-da, we're doing this. I just get the vibe already that you worked on this together. Is that right?

Alice Smith

Yeah, that's right. And I think what I loved that Andrew did was he drew out a lot of our data points to pull the information that we needed to be able to pick the relevant programmes and modules for the team. So looking at employee surveys that told us what people thought about their managers and what they thought about the leadership within the group, talking to our managers' managers to find out what they thought their blind spots were or what their development needs were, and just general sentiments

that we had around some of the gaps and then being able to pick subjects. Talking to the managers themselves and picking subjects that we thought would be relevant to them, that there were genuine gaps for them, would actually help them develop in the areas they genuinely needed to develop in, rather than just picking general leadership topics. It was very targeted. And doing some of the diagnostic tools that Andrew used allowed them to also do a bit of self-reflection and identify where some of their gaps were as well, and be a lot more open to receiving the training than maybe they would have been otherwise.

Michelle Parry-Slater

I'm loving the way that you're describing Andrew as a real performance consultant here. This is partnering in its truest sense, isn't it? What's the data? What's the diagnostic? What's the information saying? But then also let's go out to the people, talk to the people, really recognise what's going on in the organisation. There's no guessing here. It's really about who you are, how it fits with your culture and approach. And then that subject selection being collaborative. Andrew's not coming in and going, yeah, I've done leadership programmes for 20 years, I know what you need. He's coming in and saying, actually, you talk to me and tell me, show me what you need. Did it feel very collaborative in that way?

Alice Smith

Yeah, absolutely. I think Andrew had a bunch of topics that he suggested and we really workshopped those together and looked at what the data was telling us and looked at what the actual needs were and toyed with, what are our actual priorities here? We could have done them all, but are they realistically going to engage in all of them? What are our priorities and where do we get the most bang for our buck in this?

It definitely was a collaboration, and Andrew was able to bring his expertise to make suggestions and make a really good and thorough programme that actually addressed our needs.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Brilliant. I'm loving it, Andrew. This is exactly how we need to be working in learning and development. So where did it land? What did the actual programme look like month to month?

Andrew Lawson

Yeah, I might just backtrack a tad if I could, Michelle, just to add one more thing to Alice's point. We collated all that data and then pulled that short list of what we're going to cover. But then yeah, there's this back-and-forth conversation between Alice and I saying "Alice, here's what I'm thinking, is that what it looks like on the ground?" And Alice is going, "hmm, I feel like this is lacking in the team." And so we were able to have that more granular conversation around what are we wanting to progress, what are we wanting to move the needle on. And I found that hugely valuable as Alice has already

flagged. That allows that really important targeting of the material and around the skills and what we're going to build together.

So to go back to your question about what it looked like, up front there was a diagnostic, and that was really used to inform what they were going to cover across the whole programme. But yeah, as people rocked up every month, the whole programme ran eight months. We ran a 90-minute learning session once a month. And either side of that there was a pre-workshop primer and post-workshop what we call nudges, do something with the learning back in the workplace.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Coaching as well, you mentioned that earlier. Was there coaching?

Andrew Lawson

Yes, coaching as well. Everyone got three coaching sessions as part of this. Though I wasn't part of the coaching myself, I have others in the team who are coaches, so they did that. My strength more lies in the learning and development space. That's where I hung out more on that side.

Alice Smith

I'm not sure I agree with that. I think Andrew's a very good coach. I think he would have been very valuable in that space. But the participants also filled out their own questionnaire and plan for their learning. And through that, they identified some of their own coaching needs and they were able to be lined up with coaches that had experience in the areas that they were looking to develop.

Michelle Parry-Slater

That's wonderful feedback in the moment, thank you, Alice, for jumping in there. What I'm just curious about is: you're trusting your participants to do reflection. You weren't mandating this. This was on them. Why would you take that risk in a learning design, Andrew?

Andrew Lawson

It is a risk, of course. And the risk is, well, they won't do it. But I wanted to allow them to take that self-ownership. And I was giving them lots of prompts and nudges along the way. Like, I want you to take this away and I just want you to try it on. Just try this method on, see if it fits, see if it works. I'm not precious about it. These are just ideas, these are tools, these are techniques up our sleeve. It's about finding out what works for you.

And really what I was inviting was, take these ideas away and just be experimental. That's it. They weren't left solely alone, whilst I wasn't there walking every step of the way with them, senior managers were in the loop. They were in the loop regarding the post-workshop nudges, and they were often following up with people saying, "hey, are

you going to this?” And so conversations were still going on in the workplace, which I think was another really important element in terms of the programme. And I really appreciated their involvement in that as well.

Michelle Parry-Slater

I think it makes a big difference if you've got senior sponsorship and if you've got people talking about the learning during the activities and beyond, it does make a big difference.

So Alice, let's come to you before we go back to our Emotion and our Retention piece.

Talk me through the experience really from the participants' perspective. How did it feel to get this pre-experience, the actual 90 minutes and then the nudges? You get nudges in the middle of your working week, surely they're just easy to ignore, aren't they?

Alice Smith

Yeah, I think for some it was easier to ignore than others. But the feedback that we got from those that actually really engaged was that they saw the benefit. And I think the more that they engaged and saw the benefit, the more they were likely to keep trusting the process and continue with it. So overall we had really positive feedback from the participants about the programme itself. They really did like the shorter, broken-down chunks and the topics that they were working through. They knew in advance what they were in for and they could prepare mentally. And having some homework in advance of what to come prepared with, and the homework after to help consolidate that learning, I think the view that we formed was that those who actually engaged with it got the most benefit out of the process.

Michelle Parry-Slater

What are your observations of participants putting things into practice? Did you get feedback beyond the learners themselves? Did you notice behaviour was shifting?

Alice Smith

Yeah, again, not everybody, there was a small group that maybe didn't engage and didn't get that benefit. But Andrew definitely did interviews with managers afterwards, and we did some surveys that indicated that they actually had moved the dial, and you could see that as a cohort. Their approach had changed. I think we went from very siloed leaders, or silent managers really managing a team or a function, to understanding that they were actually a leadership group and engaging with each other. And those silos really did break down. So there was a leadership element, but there was also a cultural and organisational benefit that came from the group going through the leadership training together.

Andrew Lawson

They got the T-shirts and everything, right, Alice.

Alice Smith

Yeah, that's right.

Michelle Parry-Slater

I think you're right. any learning that really equals behaviour change does impact on culture. When people see something good is going on, I certainly have run leadership programmes in the past where the people who aren't engaged at the beginning realise they're missing out and suddenly scramble to catch up.

I've actually had somebody who became the biggest advocate for a blended, spaced programme similar to this for exactly that reason, totally disengaged at the beginning.

So I'm curious, Andrew or Alice, in fact both of you perhaps answer this one.

What would you say to a senior manager who's sceptical about this sort of 90 minutes every few weeks, a few nudges? Seriously, can that really outperform a two-day intensive offsite? What would you say to that sceptical perspective, Andrew?

Andrew Lawson

The first thing I would say is: have you tried it?

You've got to have had the experience to truly know whether it's going to compare or not. I mean, I've run this style of programme for a long time. I was sold on this sort of approach a long time ago. But not everyone is and we know this already from our sector. That would have been my first thought. But I'd love to hear Alice's perspective as well.

Alice Smith

Yeah, I think from a government standpoint, we are asked to do more with less resources, less money, more so than ever in the current climate. And having people offline for two days or even one day just doesn't happen. We aren't resourced to be able to do that. So in terms of getting people actually engaged, a one-day programme, chances are they're on their laptop, they're on their work phone half of the time, they're not taking it in, they're just there.

And I think being able to chunk it down into that bite-size training means they actually can genuinely engage. The world's not going to crumble if they're not there for an hour. It's much more manageable than trying to commit one or two days on top of everything else you're trying to deliver.

Michelle Parry-Slater

I agree entirely. You've got that opportunity for them to really pay attention for a short amount of time, which, to your point earlier, Andrew, fits in with what we know about the brain and how we can actually learn.

Andrew Lawson

Totally, Michelle. I agree.

Michelle Parry-Slater

So I want to come back to the Emotion. I want to come back to the Retention, because it's great while you have the lived experience of going through the programme, and it seems that you've had some outcomes and we'll dig a little bit more into those.

But actually going through a programme like that, I believe, is a different emotional experience than the two days out of the office where you turn up and your kids have been late for school and your dog's been sick on the carpet before you get there. And so who's coming in the room on that particular day and you only get one shot. I call it injection education. You only get one chance. Whereas what you've proposed here and what you've done, Andrew, is you've spaced that out. So you're actually tapping into the emotional responses for a longer time. Now I may be way off the mark with my interpretation of your TARGER approach. So help me to understand the Emotion and the Retention elements. What does that actually look like in your framework?

Andrew Lawson

Look, I agree with you, we are holding the emotional space for longer with these people. I'd start every session with just a really quick pulse check, "how are you?" Things like that. So sometimes people showed up and they were really overwhelmed already. So we just took some time to acknowledge that and talk about that, and then get people in the space ready to move forward. That was really important.

But in terms of the Emotion and there have been lots of studies done on this, but emotions are really important in terms of memory formation. So it's not just the relational side, as we're talking about Michelle, but it's also about emotional storytelling. So for example, you could share an inspiring story, or better still, get participants to talk from their lived experience, how have they overcome a challenge? What did that feel like overcoming that? And so that generates all this beautiful social learning, but it's also pulling the levers of emotion, which really strengthens memory, a very powerful part of memory formation. I don't know about you, but I'm a sucker for a good story. And I'll often remember the story well after the event.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Well, I think eight years of case study stories being shared on Learning Uncut just goes to show everyone's a sucker for a good story. We can learn so much from hearing other people's stories. And when those stories evoke an emotion, like you say, we remember them, which is why it is social learning in action. It's our most fundamental way of learning. You tell kids stories for a reason. So, I'm loving that storytelling piece. What about the wider retention? Do you think that this spaced approach helps alongside the emotional response for the retention of the information?

Andrew Lawson

Absolutely, Michelle. I think it's a really important factor in how it's designed and how it really serves memory formation.

Michelle Parry-Slater

So let's then pick up on the outcomes, Alice. If we've gone through an experience which has been very deliberately and precisely designed by Andrew and we've got to the end where we're wanting people to retain, the results at the end of the programme in terms of confidence of the cohort, in terms of behaviour of the cohort, how do we know that this has actually stuck rather than just being a lovely experience? Which often it is if you do a two-day offsite, it's a lovely experience, but does it stick? This actually offers a different approach. What are your thoughts, Alice?

Alice Smith

Yeah, I think that's exactly what we saw. We saw incremental changes. We saw them putting their learning into practice. We saw a shift in them trying to share the knowledge that they've learnt with their staff and doing some of that coaching and mentoring with their staff and teams. And I think the data told us that the majority actually had moved the dial, the majority had gained. You know, whether they had a couple of gaps or they had quite significant gaps, they all picked up somewhere along the way. The data showed us that through post-training interviews that Andrew did with all of the senior leaders on their staff who participated, and overwhelmingly it was positive, they had actually improved. And sentiments around the floor, from team members who had seen a shift in their leaders and managers, that they actually are more engaged, trying these things out. Yeah, it's been a positive shift for us.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Excellent. Andrew, I'm curious about how much you talked about the data at the beginning. You've obviously mentioned that you gathered data at the end. Is that what helped you answer the question, how do we know that there was a shift, or was there something else?

Andrew Lawson

Look, Michelle, a couple of things. I mean, I was evaluating along the way as well as at the end.

So, I've changed my evaluation methodology a lot over the years. It used to be in the early days: hey, what did you think of everything today? And what did you think of me, let's be honest, that's the old happy sheet.

I've really shifted the evaluation to be more about: okay, so we covered this today, what are you going to do with it? How confident are you in applying that as you go forward?

So, it was questions like that.

But then, as Alice just touched on, when I met with senior managers, I was really only interested in one thing: what has changed?

And so I was fishing for the behavioural changes. And Alice touched on it perfectly before when she said, yeah, there was a whole bunch of things we saw in terms of confidence, progression of skills. We saw them become a more collegiate group. We often don't design a programme to go, we just want a more collegiate group, but that's an additional benefit we're getting through the programme. And I think because we've got this regularity of spaced work coming together, they're getting that chance to connect and share around a range of different things, which is beneficial.

Alice Smith

And I think just to touch on the feedback thing as well, I think Andrew also took feedback in the room as he went. Even if it was just informally gauging how the team was responding to certain things, he would tailor the agenda. It might be, I can see that they're really interested in this side, we're just going to spend more time on that because that is what they are interested in or that seems to be resonating with them. So there was also on-the-spot feedback where he was able to adapt and adjust the training on the day to actually get a better outcome that suited them.

Andrew Lawson

Great feedback, Alice.

Michelle Parry-Slater

That's again another lovely bit of feedback in the moment. And I think it's fundamental to all people that facilitate any learning that we've got to be flexible, not determined. When we're trying to stick to the script, we're missing the whole emotional piece. We're missing the connection. We're missing the opportunity for generation. So this has just been a wonderful story to hear, and I'm really grateful for you to come and share it with our listeners and our viewers.

For me, I keep circling back to a bigger point, it's about minimalism. And I opened this with suggesting that this really is a conversation on minimal interventions, maximum outcomes. And this whole piece around well-designed interventions that really do tap into the people that are coming, and the problems that they're bringing, the emotional state, the regulation, the human, the whole humanity. It just beats volume over and over again. Andrew, what else do you want to say about this systemic approach that you're taking?

Andrew Lawson

Michelle, I think I've really tried in my career to move away from this idea of learning as the event or the moment, to how can we integrate learning in a better way for how people actually learn at work?

So if they're wanting to upskill and we do want to do rapid upskilling, can we truly expect great results from a two-day programme? We can expect some results, of course. But what if we were more intentional and targeted in how we went after things? And we were really able to get into the top three barriers for people around, you know, influencing, whatever it might be and we chase that. And so we run this modular approach with these nudges in between, which brings up probably the R (retention point), Michelle, so I might circle back to that.

And so the retention piece is really key. We have to think about what do we want people to do with the learning.

So I'm in there going "well, here are a bunch of things that I think are really important in relation to this topic." Of course, Alice and I have vetted these before I walk into the room. And then what happens is they get a series of post-workshop nudges. What I'm wanting them to do here is, retention is really about retrieval, it's about practice, and then it's about reflection from my point of view. And then of course this is all spaced over time. But we're wanting them to retrieve it. "Hey, remember when we covered this idea?" We're wanting to resurface that. "This week I'd like you to inject that method into a one-on-one conversation with a team member." Or it might be "next time you run your team meeting, start with this question and then just zip it and notice what happens after you've led in that way. You're really just doing a setup piece." And then what I invite people to do with these post-workshop nudges is say: once you've run that experiment, reflect on it. "How is that better, or maybe different, to how you normally do things?"

I'm wanting them to reach their own conclusions as to whether it really gels with them and their style and whether it's something that's going to serve them going forward or not. I'm not precious about any of this. We're all adults. We'll cherry-pick what's useful for us and what's not. And I think that freedom-of-choice element is a really important one, they're choosing what they can carry forward and what they might just park for now.

Michelle Parry-Slater

It's just wonderful. What a great example. Fantastic case study to share on Learning Uncut. Just before we wrap up today then, is there anything that you wanted to say that you haven't had the opportunity to? Go ahead. Alice, is there anything that you haven't added that you want to?

Alice Smith

No, I don't think there's anything. I don't think we would have had the programme that we had without Andrew leading it. I think the collaboration and the knowledge and everything that happened along the way is as a result of having someone like Andrew with such great experience. And I think even for myself, I took away things, every conversation I have with Andrew, I feel like I learn something new. And his favourite kind of term is he's going to 'nerd out' on something. So I always am the beneficiary of his nerding out. He always shares and imparts some wisdom on me that I write down and

draw on later. So I think really his approach is what made this programme so good and so actually meaningful for the participants.

Andrew Lawson

Thanks, Alice. Appreciate that.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Wonderful. Andrew, so nerd Andrew, we'll call you now. Is there anything that you haven't said that you wanted to share with our audience?

Andrew Lawson

Yeah, look, I guess for me it's probably two quick things if I can just mention them. I think the minimal intervention thing is something it's really important to underscore.

We had fifteen hours of contact time, which isn't a lot in the scheme of things, across eight months. Fifteen hours across eight months. And I think the results that then flowed out of that, as Alice has highlighted, were actually really great results for fifteen hours of contact time. So, we had people leading differently. People saying "I'm having better and different conversations with my team than I ever was before." "I'm thinking more about strategic planning and strategic thinking." There's a whole bunch of stuff.

But the other thing that I think is really important to emphasise, so often as practitioners we fall into the trap of "I'm going to run a session on collaboration." And I need to make sure I include XYZ in that topic. And so we've often got our preferred ways of doing things and we naturally gravitate to those and include them in programmes. I want to kind of burst that bubble and say, we need to shift the paradigm. What do we want people to be doing differently?

This is my big question. This is the thing that's been the influence in my career. And when we think of it in that way, it's not about us and our preferences and our comfort. If we can be bold and say that, I think we're pushing the limits and saying what do they need and what's it going to take to actually get them to move the needle? And that's actually really exciting because it pushes you into uncomfortable territory. And when you see the fruit on the other side of that, that's actually really powerful.

Michelle Parry-Slater

I really love that. A fantastic place to end, because it's never about us, it's always about the learners. It's always about them and their experience. So if you are listening to this and staring down a two-day workshop for your own team, perhaps it might be worth testing a smaller, spaced approach first.

And just check with your suppliers, are they really looking out for themselves, or are they looking out for your learners?

Thank you both so much for sharing. If anyone wants to contact you, where's the best place for them to go?

Andrew Lawson

Happy to connect on LinkedIn Michelle, I can give you those details later and through the business, thelearningzone.com.au. Probably the main two areas.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Lovely. Okay, we'll be sure to put links in our show notes. So take a look on our Learning Uncut website under the podcast tab and you can find all of those there. But for now, that's the episode of Learning Uncut. Thank you for listening and we'll see you next time.

Alice Smith

Thank you.

Andrew Lawson

Thanks, Michelle.

Learning Uncut Episode 188 - Minimal Interventions, Maximum Outcomes - Andrew Lawson & Alice Smith

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