Learning Uncut Episode 184: A Longitudinal Study of The Development of an L&D Practitioner – Greg Wilton

Michelle Parry-Slater

Welcome to the 184th episode of Learning Uncut. In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. We pay our respects to elders past and present, we pay our respects to elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples present today listening in. I'm on the Combomerie People's land. My name is Michelle Parry-Slater.

And as you know, Michelle Ockers is off on her travels, so just my voice today alongside our guest. Now, as long-time listeners and we're already at 184 episodes, so you are long-time listeners this podcast brings you great case studies of practice in L&D.

Today we're joined by our guest Greg Wilton, who's based out of St. Louis in the US of A. And Greg is a long-time L&D practitioner, like many of our listeners. And so this case study we're discussing today is actually Greg, his own career, his practice as an L&D professional. And I'm sure that many of you are going to resonate with how, being in the profession for some time, we move from one thing to the next, sometimes not even celebrating one achievement before we move on to the next achievement.

Now, anyone who's read my book, The Learning and Development Handbook, will know I am a huge believer in reflective practice. There's so much of my belief in it, I have a whole chapter dedicated to it in the book. So we are going today to do some reflective practice with Greg and his career. I hope that we can learn a lot from looking over what he has done.

I believe genuinely that you know, if it's in the immediate moment of how well did that call go, right through to checking and focusing in on ourselves about a program that we might have delivered, that larger body of work, it all needs reflective practice.

So, it is so important. In fact, at Middlesex University, you can study a doctorate in exactly this. Professional practitioners who have a substantial amount of output in the public domain can spend their PhD time reviewing that body of work. Many players in our field have actually done this. Nigel Payne, for example. Julian Stodd is on the program at the moment, and so is our lovely friend of the show, Laura Overton. So today, Greg, you are the subject of our case study - your career, and I'm curious to know how that will inspire others to focus in on their own growth, to think about their critical thinking and to build their own reflective practice.

Now, enough of me. I want to introduce you. Greg, who are you? Tell us a little bit about yourself and start at the beginning. How did you decide to come into our fair profession of learning and development?

Greg Wilton

First of all, thank you for having me on. It's an honour to be on Learning Uncut. It's very exciting to be here. And hopefully I'll be able to provide a little bit of, maybe a little bit of wisdom, along the way. So you asked me, how did I come to being a learning and development professional? I did not major in learning and development at university. I was a history major. I thought I was going to be a history teacher. I wrote a book and I wrote a one-act play, so I learned how to speak

publicly. I learned how to think critically about systems, to build a narrative, all those types of things that go into being a history major or history professional.

But my career took kind of an unexpected turn coming out of university. I ended up getting a job as a darkroom technician for a photographer. And this was right around the same time that film resolution and digital resolution were coming up to be about even, everyone can kind of tell how old I am now by that! But during that time, I learned a lot about creative operations.

I learned about how to be both a creative professional while also doing it efficiently and effectively. I also learned a lot about image creation software in the digital space and HTML. And then eventually I landed as a web publisher.

Coming out of that experience, I ended up managing the web presence for a national nonprofit here in the States. And I learned so much about search engine optimization and the use of words for findability, communicating at scale, component-based content architecture.

So not just working in documents, but also working in chunks, user experience. These are all skills that were central to that role. But I hope you're hearing that I'm also picking out components of those roles before I came to L&D that prepared me for a career in learning and development. Because eventually I was recruited to a sales training organization at a national private health insurer here in the States to become a web developer in the sales training organization. And that's how I came to learning and development. So in the three years that I spent with this organization, this is where I learned instructional design.

This is where I learned how to do facilitation, video editing for personalized learning, and reflective practice in the late 2000s. And so then my career continued to bloom within learning and development, especially as we started going from more classroom-based work during that time to education at scale, where I've now led learning campaigns for over 50,000 users.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Wow, that's amazing. And what you're describing is so many people's careers, that it's just an almost non-sequitur route to where we are today. But the beauty of what you've described in your reflection is that this digital piece was stacking up for you along the way.

We won't have time to have a curious conversation about what happened to history, I'm married to a history teacher, I'm sure he'd want that conversation another time, Greg.

But your journey to get to L&D reminds me, with you talking about film and digital, we're at that point now with the inflection with AI, and I'm sure we'll talk more about that a little bit later on. But this is the same sort of thing. We're not arriving at AI having had no experience of turning points in industries. And certainly if anyone was working at Kodak, then you know this film-to-digital piece is a real challenge. And that's where we're kind of at now. But I know from our discussions before, your work in learning and development took you to a place where you realized that perhaps there was another way to approach L&D.

You had this digital background, this web publishing background, you really knew about communication — but something wasn't quite sitting right for you. So, I'd love for you to talk us through what happened next, particularly in 2013.

Greg Wilton

Absolutely. So Michelle, after the three years with the health insurer, I got the opportunity to become an e-learning developer for a global agricultural company. So this is where I got to a point where I was training on a global scale, up to 24 different languages. And that's a really exciting prospect. The learning operations really influences how we create learning experiences.

When I was there, I was an e-learning developer based in our global headquarters here in St. Louis. But I was making training for a global audience in up to 24 different languages. I rarely ever met the humans who took the courses that I developed. But I had spent most of my education development time with the health insurer meeting every single person I trained.

And so human empathy was a real part of how I understood the impact of what I was doing. So occasionally I would hear negative feedback. It's oftentimes a lot easier to hear the negative feedback than the positive, right? And a lot of times that negative feedback was like “the learning experience was boring”, or they just clicked through it without learning anything ... things like that. Now, I was part of a team, so sometimes it might have been my course, sometimes it might have been a course that somebody else had built. But just by me saying "it was my course versus somebody else's course," you can already hear that there is not much standardization of the learning operations process.

So, in this area, how we got our money, how we were funded as an organization, was a bill-back model. So, the business process owner, or the person commissioning that training, would approach the organization, and one of the developers would get assigned to that project. And you'd manage that project from intake through delivery.

And so, because of that autonomy as a practitioner, we had a wide variety of styles and varying levels of adherence to instructional quality and adult learning principles. And so, I felt like I never wanted to make a click-through narrated PowerPoint.

And so, my original thought was I was going to lean on the skills I had developed earlier in my career, things about narrative and creativity. And so the second assignment I ever had at the company was for a series of e-learning modules on the risk-based process safety approach published by the Centre of Chemical Process Safety in 2007.

Michelle Parry-Slater

That sounds complicated.

Greg Wilton

That RBPS asset is made up of 20 elements organized into four major foundational blocks.

Have you checked out already?

Michelle Parry-Slater

Yeah, maybe.

Greg Wilton

It sounded and looked terribly bureaucratic. And I thought, I am not going to make a click-through PowerPoint about this. I am going to build a narrative around a detective character. The detective is going to go around and see what the problem is with this process safety stuff. And I

came into my intake meeting so jazzed about this idea, like I was going to rock it out and it was going to be so much fun. And the process owner listened to my pitch and said, I love the enthusiasm, I love the creativity, but I can't do it.

And I was holding back my heartbreak a little bit. And then I just asked: I completely understand and respect that, can you tell me a little bit about why? And he said, because if people get this wrong, people die.

And that changed my entire outlook around this series of education. That ended up translating into something I had never really considered before: the learner's value proposition.

Why should they invest their attention in an assigned course?

And so, this really opened up the way that I thought about intakes for the rest of my career. And so when you think about who is the customer of your learning? If you're familiar with Peter Drucker and some of his business management writings, he has this great example of who is the customer of a doll.

Is it the child who plays with it or the parent who buys it?

And you kind of think about that for a little bit, right?

Because the answer is really bold.

But the eye of the beholder, is how you create value, where you create value. So, I needed to adjust my intake methodology to this "doll method" concept. Who is my customer? Is it the learner or is it the business process owner paying the bill?

And the answer is both. But the business process owner is rarely set up to represent the learner. And that's why I really changed a lot of the way I approached how to produce an e-learning experience.

Michelle Parry-Slater

It's wonderful to listen to you talk. You're a great storyteller, Greg.

I really appreciate the way you're sharing this with us.

But I wonder how many of us in our careers have had this kind of pivotal moment, this realization. And one of the reasons I wanted to share your story with the Learning Uncut listeners is because we don't need a pivotal moment, we can learn this from others. The more we share as a community, the better. But talk to us more then. You were really putting the human at the heart of intake. So by intake, you're talking about that initial briefing conversation, that initial "what is it that we're trying to build here, what learning are we doing", is that right?

Greg Wilton

Exactly. Absolutely. So many processes, whether creative or systemic processes, getting the proper needs analysis and the proper intake methodology makes so much more of the design, development, et cetera, work well. Now, in that model I had at the agricultural company, the bill-back methodology kind of assumed that the business owner was paying for the design, development, and implementation of the ADDIE process.

They were really thinking they were paying for the D, D, and I of ADDIE. They weren't really interested in paying for the analysis, nor were they especially interested in paying for the evaluation.

Michelle Parry-Slater

I think that's a story that resonates with a lot of people, to be honest. The evaluation is hard to come by.

Greg Wilton

Exactly. So how do you become a better practitioner of learning and serve the full spectrum of your learner's needs in that constraint? Because in that constraint, you are in a data-poor environment. And so then questioning strategy that I developed in my intake tried to bridge some of the gap.

Now, I'm sure many of your listeners are going to think: this seems kind of not very data-driven. And in a world where my commissioners weren't going to pay for data, I needed to come up with something else. So, I developed a human-cantered intake methodology where I crafted very specific questions to move me from the business process owner being my customer to the business process owner being my partner.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Tell me more.

Greg Wilton

And so these are questions that really start with the human. So oftentimes intake starts with, tell me about your project. What do you want to train on?

What is the behaviour you want to change? I just started with: “tell me about your learners.”

Michelle Parry-Slater

Could they answer that question?

Greg Wilton

And it was a wide variety of answers. Some had really terrific empathy for their learners. Some were truly business process owners and the humans were part of the process. And any matter of a gap in between.

So in a successful intake, I was really looking for four things for learning architecture. I wanted a learner value proposition. I wanted a performance outcome. I wanted my learning objectives. And I wanted my metrics.

Those are the four things I was looking for, and I only had about an hour to get them. My intake meetings were typically about an hour. Now, some of that is a lightweight kind of getting into the realm of a high-performance learning journey. But again, in those kinds of constrained areas, you look for the best answers you can get. So my first question was always: tell me about your learners. My second question was always: will they be happy to take this training?

And about 70% of the time, the answer was no. And then I would let that just sit for a second. And then I would lean in across the table and say, “then why are we doing it?”

And that question was really important for capturing the learner value proposition. And for anyone who said, no, they're not going to be happy to take that training, they probably haven't thought deeply enough about their learning value proposition.

And so that then really changed things, it was the foundation of the shift from the business process owner being a customer to being a partner. Now we're starting to define the behavioural challenge that we get to partner on together to try to solve.

So after that, I would typically ask: “if we walked away from this meeting now and decided to take no further action, what would happen?”

And this question is really meant to surface current-state behaviour. I'm mining for metrics.

How would I observe or count that?

I'm looking for the cost of delay. “If we did nothing, what's the real risk here?” Sometimes it's also an off-ramp to an alternative modality other than e-learning.

If the cost of doing nothing is such that it's actually better to just use signage or a QR code that goes to short videos or something along those lines, this is one of those ways for me to have a data point upon which to make a modality recommendation.

Next question: I would also give the reflective prompt. I'd say: “complete this sentence for me. This training will be successful if...”

Michelle Parry-Slater

I love it. Could they answer it?

Greg Wilton

And typically they could answer that one. They knew why they were coming to me. But by asking about the current state first, “what happens if we do nothing”, now I've got the endpoints of the performance gap.

And so we can start working on learning objectives within the boundaries of those two items. Another one that I'd like to ask is: “describe for me the moment on the job where this training matters.”

Yeah, so in Brinkerhoff's high-performance learning journey, there is actually a column for "moments that matter." But my follow-up question on that is: “how will the learner know that this is the moment?” And “what would you observe when they do it?” This is about getting the real context of the performance and the behavior.

And I'm not using any learning practitioner language here. I'm using their language to be able to start mapping into the components of proper instructional design.

I'll oftentimes ask if there's anything that a learner needs to stop doing to be successful. Because if we just continue to pile on more and more behavioural expectations without taking anything back, then we're just overloading the system with rules and expectations. And then my favourite question at the end is:

“let's imagine this training is so successful that the board of directors invites you to speak to them about how this is the most spectacular training the company has ever seen. But the catch is you only have five minutes and one slide. What's on your slide?”

And when I paint that story of remarkable success and ask them what's on their slide, inevitably it's always the business metric. The correlative business metric they are looking to influence through behaviour change.

And that's the foundation for a correlative ROI calculation.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Instantly you can tell what difference it makes and you've got them to articulate it.

Greg Wilton

Exactly.

Michelle Parry-Slater

It's a masterclass in performance consulting, and I'm loving it and loving that you've shared it with us. For anyone listening, I'm sure they're going to rewind and write all your questions down. But I am curious, we can't shy away from the evaluation piece. This is a conversation today about reflection. So, what difference did it make when you shifted away from the world of autonomous e-learning design to your human-centred intake methodology? What was the result?

Greg Wilton

Sure. So certainly we started to see qualitative feedback coming back that was much more positive, because we were thinking about who is the learner and where is the moment they're applying that learning.

We started getting into more situational application within the e-learning module itself. So, it becomes more relevant. It becomes more useful. The transfer of knowledge, the transfer of training - the friction is reduced. So, feedback was really nice there.

We also saw that we got to about a 95% accuracy rate for our estimates.

So, we were in a bill-back method, right? We were making an estimate for how much is this going to cost. And we got so accurate with it because we were so good about the instructional design upfront that the expectations for rework started to really diminish.

So, the quality of our training work started to increase substantially without expanding the hours and manpower in order to make a better learning experience. So, Michelle, I really appreciate the question about evaluation.

And unfortunately, in the environment I was in, we didn't see a lot of measurements beyond consumption and completion types of metrics. Now I can tell you about some other things we did later on in my career, where we used level-one surveys, the methodology of that, to get into predictive level-three intent-to-apply measurements.

So, we started dipping our toe into predictive indexes.

Later on in my career, the direct impact was one of operational efficiency and qualitative improvement, and people started enjoying getting a learning assignment again.

Michelle Parry-Slater

It is fair to say it was a long time ago, wasn't it? And so, I want to start thinking about those lessons learned, demonstrating impact along later areas of your career.

So, what can you share with listeners today - the reflections of your work as we've gone on through time?

Is there any sort of advice that you might have for L&D professionals, particularly about using this sort of evidence-based learning methodology?

Greg Wilton

Yeah, I have continued to learn and appreciate how important it is to build partnerships and relationships with adjacent disciplines. When you are conducting learning in a business environment, you are really conducting learning in an ecosystem. Now, you can do it effectively or not effectively.

But when you're working in an ecosystem, you almost never have full control over it. And so, as I got better at my career, identifying key stakeholders, building relationships with those stakeholders, finding common measurement, common guardrails, common methodologies. I started to develop a lot of systems thinking. And then as I also got better at human-centred design, as I became a design thinking practitioner later on in my career, I could apply the concepts of design thinking and human-centred design to systems thinking and to how our people learn in systems, sometimes in systems we control, sometimes in systems where we don't have authority over.

And so, this has guided a lot of my own personal development, to get better at the practice of learning and development, as well as prepare for the inevitable evolution and disruption that comes to learning and development as technology advances.

Michelle Parry-Slater

I'm smiling to myself because, as Michelle Ockers is on a beach somewhere listening to this, because no doubt she will be, she will no doubt be laughing, because the words you're using are the words I use in my practice too. And I swear, dear listeners, we did not have this level of detail of a conversation prior to our recording.

But I genuinely think that when we as L&D practitioners borrow from the adjacent community of our organizational development practitioners, our human-centred design practitioners, our systems thinking practitioners, we will all benefit.

I love that you've talked about an ecosystem. I often say that when we drop the ego and we move away from ego-system into ecosystem, we realize how we're all interconnected and we can't do anything in L&D without realizing it's going to blow up something somewhere else in the organization, or just have no effect, which is what you were describing in the early days.

So, you are now at your career today and you've been doing human-centred work throughout it. Getting us there from 2013, that wonderful story of thinking up this human-centred intake methodology - to 2026. Along the way, have you been your own critical friend?

Have you practiced reflective thinking?

Talk to us about now. Bring us up to date, Greg. Where are we at?

Greg Wilton

Over the last 10 years, I've had the opportunity to work at one of the major wealth management firms here in the United States. And in this role, I've really grown from a practitioner to a leader, then to an agent of modernization and change.

In this role I got to work on things like revamping the financial advisor onboarding development program. This was a program that was bringing through thousands of financial advisor candidates every year - a pipeline of the industry's talent.

Being able to modernize that system, being able to not just learn design thinking myself, but be an early champion for the people I led on my team to also explore some of these adjacent disciplines.

Some of these folks have gone on to have incredible careers outside of learning and development in some of these adjacent areas - I'm talking operational excellence, strategy, human-centred design, digital product management.

And so when we lead learning as a system, we also create these opportunities for talent pipelines to expand into the organization, taking that learning mindset with them and helping to build a learning organization.

You typically can't build a learning organization from an ivory tower in your L&D practice. And so I also got the opportunity to modernize our learning technology stack and move from a singular learning management system to more of a suite of learning tools that worked in concert together. And then I also got the opportunity to work on the firm's first-ever generative AI use case in 2023.

Our use case was selected out of a pool of candidates. And as I worked on that, as I learned the foundations of responsible AI, as I learned the mechanics of how you train a model, I really came to appreciate how much organizational knowledge management - and what I call wisdom management - is going to be important for learning and development moving forward.

Earlier this month, Anthropic released a report with some early indications of displacement risk for different job categories as AI matures and adoption moves throughout industries.

If you haven't looked at it, I think it's extremely instructive. It might be a little scary, for some people, if I'm being totally honest. But as I think about what does that mean for L&D — many of us think about what does that mean for my job.

I think it's also important for us to think about what does that mean for our practice of learning and development. So, in jobs where you're going to expect a significant amount of displacement risk, the work being done is typically going to be done in concert with humans and AI agents working together.

So, in a world where that is true, knowledge management and wisdom management become extremely important for those AI agents doing some of that work.

And so I believe, Michelle, that as the agentic future comes through, we in learning and development should really come together with knowledge management to help manage the ground truth of our organizations.

That is both the technical knowledge that you would typically find in, say, a manual or a policy, certainly all of that is still really important. But I think where we can make a wonderful partnership is in what I call wisdom management.

Because knowledge is not just what's documented. It also happens in the artifacts of our daily work. It happens in the tacit knowledge that's stuck in our experts' heads. And if we can build knowledge models that can produce reliable results with AI - and combine that with the human learning and development work that we're already so good at - that's a field that I believe will eventually end up sounding like human enablement.

And if we continue to think ahead about a world where it's not just people doing the work but also agents doing the work, I think this is an important reflection point for us as we think about what's next for us as a discipline.

Michelle Parry-Slater

I think that's definitely where we're at, isn't it? What is next for us? And you're right to raise the Anthropic report. We'll make sure there's a link in the show notes for others to read it. People may feel scared by that.

But the way you approach your whole career and there have been turning points throughout it, reminds us that change is constant.

We're always moving forward, we've had this moment before: film and digital, e-learning or not e-learning. There have been lots of these moments. I think this moment feels bigger than some of those other ones, perhaps — but it might be because we're living through it. But I'm curious.

How do we work alongside these agents? What does that more augmented career relationship look like? Have you stopped the human at the centre of your learning? I mean, you've never stopped thinking about thinking — that's very clear. So much so that you're developing a narrative of where the profession needs to go. But where's the human in this, Greg?

Greg Wilton

Well, Michelle, I think there's already a lot of ink spilled on where's the human in all of this, right? And when I was thinking about what's my contribution to this discussion, I thought it's more important for us to start thinking about the mechanics that we use in our work and updating them for this moment.

So, one of the things I've worked on recently - I just released a revised, or at least my personal position about how we should revise Bloom's taxonomy's verbs for this day and age.

I'm sure everybody listening is probably familiar with Bloom's taxonomy. It was designed originally in 1956 and it has six tiers of learning objective verbs for lower-level and higher-level cognitive processes, as we build learning experiences around these learning objectives. And as I'm looking at those, those verbs are built for a much more analogue time than we are in now. And so as our work changes - to be either AI-augmented, where we're doing the same work but doing it faster and better with AI, or doing it in concert with AI agents where there are probably fewer humans but they are much more supercharged by AI - there's probably also another kind of vision for full transformation of a business where it's mostly agents.

But we'll leave that one for another day.

I posted an article with a suggestion for a completely new set of verbs for Bloom's taxonomy.

So, these would include verbs like "prototype" and "govern" and things along those lines - where verbs of judgment, of oversight, of critical thinking, applied in that same kind of hierarchical model, could give us a practical way to think, at the point of each one of those learning items:

Are we teaching people for today's age of AI and teaching them the skills of what we need them to do with AI?

Or are we holding onto historical models that have been taught to us since university that never conceived of an AI-augmented world?

So Michelle, as people think about what's coming for them, as people think about what is AI going to do - I really encourage us all to think about what we can do in the near term is, update our practices for the modern age.

And if we do that, we'll be able to keep pace with change a lot better than if we just use the same tools we always have.

Michelle Parry-Slater

I think it's a good lens to look at the world through, updates rather than this sense that we're losing something. And there is definitely an air of fear and concern. AI is taking my job. AI is morphing and changing the jobs.

I think the jobs will shift, but I genuinely believe that there will always be jobs for humans.

I often go back to thinking about when farriers were around when the car was invented – “we'll be a’right. No problem.” Let's bury our heads in the sand. Everyone's always going to have horses.

Horses are a privilege today.

So, the jobs shift, but those wise farriers started to become blacksmiths making gates to put the cars behind, because they're expensive items.

So, we need to think about what our gates might be, what we will start to morph into.

So, I think it's a really good opportunity to help people to reflect. We'll put the link to your LinkedIn post in the show notes.

And I really encourage people to jump on board. What do we think about these new verbs?

What do we think about where the human sits in Greg's new thinking?

One of the things I love to do is take learners on what I call a meta-learning experience. I describe it as being in the thing is the thing.

It teaches us reflective practice. And so, I think it's appropriate that in today's podcast we stop and zoom out.

Let's look above ourselves. And if we were looking down on this conversation, you've been talking about your career, Greg, your thinking, your brilliant ideas, how you've grown and adapted over a number of years.

Looking down on your career, are we seeing in that more holistic, bigger picture?

You're a systems thinker, you know how this goes. So what themes have we got that you've latched onto? What's consistent throughout change?

Because I think it's important when people are worried about change - some things don't change. Some things are rooted, you know, right back in you writing a one-act play, in being a history major. Some things are rooted back there.

So, what's consistent? But then of course many things do change.

So, what would you have done differently perhaps?

What would you recommend to others?

What have you learned just from this reflective conversation today?

Greg Wilton

I love being in the thing.

I'd say that as I've thought about this, I've really reflected on how much I've matured as an L&D practitioner who serves a business.

When I learned about the fundamentals of learning and development, a lot of it was theoretical.

And the more responsibility that I accepted in my roles, the more I understood that I was a business leader who practiced L&D.

And so that's a theme of consistent growth that I'll never, I'll never achieve. I'll always be growing in this area. And so, if others are reflecting about that, I would say: if you are in a corporate environment, instead of saying I'm a learning and development professional, think of yourself as: I'm a business professional that uses L&D tools to get results.

This helped me to really change my thinking, from being someone who produces learning products to being something closer to what I heard from McKinsey not that long ago: underwriting outcomes.

Imagine how valuable you are if you can help to underwrite and co-travel toward a key business outcome, whether it be in business transformation or any number of different kinds of outcomes. That feels purpose-driven to me.

If I were to do it all over again, I probably would have put a lot of effort into those relationships and partnerships with adjacent disciplines. And I probably would have doubled my effort to create and nurture those relationships if I had to do it all over again.

There is no point where you've done enough. I've never regretted making that connection with anyone, whether it be with my partners in compliance, where I really got to think about someone who thought about risk all the time and I became a much better practitioner of learning and development because of it.

And then lastly, I learned about the scientific method when I was a pretty young person.

And I have been thinking a lot about the scientific method and its use for pilots, because our environment right now is one where we will have to move through remarkable ambiguity for a long period of time and things will always be iterative.

And so as we try to keep pace with the business, keep pace with the evolution in our discipline, our ability to craft a pilot, to test and learn, becomes all the more important for us now.

And I got the privilege of learning how to do that along the way in my career. But imagine that if you don't know and you go back to the basics of the scientific method, construct an experiment to get at least some guidance.

That makes "I don't know" a lot more comfortable. And if you craft it correctly, you always have an off-ramp to declare success in failure.

Meaning: you may put the pilot together, the pilot doesn't produce the results that you want. If you have constructed your experiment correctly, then there's a success in the knowing that it failed.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Yeah, failure is great learning. FAIL — First Attempt In Learning. That's what the acronym stands for. So I agree with you entirely. A pilot really does help.

Greg Wilton

Right. Right.

There are all sorts of people that say: “we need to make it safe to fail.” I would suggest that instead, that comes from the way that we construct our experiments. And it's a responsibility of us to create the conditions where failure is an option that's forecasted. And if you fail something, it's still success because you learned that this stuff didn't work. It's not an accident.

It was one of the possibilities that you forecasted in the first place, and now we know. Boy, I tell you, whether that is a constructivist learning experience itself, or if it is us experimenting with should we invest in that learning technology - I've been thinking a lot about the fundamentals of the scientific method and how that can give me courage in ambiguity.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Wonderful, wonderful. Well, we do need to bring this wonderful conversation to a close.

I wonder, Greg, is there anything that you haven't said yet that you wish you had said to your fellow L&D professionals?

They might be considering their own career journey.

They might be starting out in our profession.

They may have been around for a while and are wondering what's next in this new augmented age of AI.

So any thoughts?

Greg Wilton

First of all: you all matter. And we matter as an organization. We are the enablers of growth of people, and that's a really important thing that fuels people's purpose. And if that doesn't get you out of bed in the morning, then you're probably in the wrong profession.

But at the same time, we're entering a time of substantial disruption to our profession. And so, I really double down on some of what I said earlier about adjacent skills and adjacent disciplines.

When things get disruptive or disrupted - think of it almost like a game of Boggle, right? Things pop up into the air and then they resettle.

And if you are really familiar with all the pieces in the Boggle bubble, then you'll probably find a graceful spot for how you create value.

Because if we all agree that learning and development matters, we can always adjust to where we sit in an organization.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Thank you. Thank you so, so much.

So, if you're considering your career, if you're wondering about what's next for you in this age of AI, then we can all do this. We can all reflect.

You've mentioned a few times adjacent communities. I want to give a shout out to the book Adjacent Learning by David Hayden and Steve George. In that book, they take our profession and really look at where we can learn elsewhere and throughout it. So that might be a good resource, I'll pop that one in the show notes.

But I just want to say thank you, Greg Wilton, for allowing us to put your career in the spotlight as our case study today. You've shared your vision, your values, your passion, your thinking, and we definitely appreciate it.

So, I encourage listeners to connect with Greg on LinkedIn. Get involved in that Bloom's taxonomy conversation. Stretch your thinking as we navigate this changing world of AI.

I would also like to encourage people to leave a review of the episode. If you leave a review on your favourite podcast player, it does help others to find the podcast.

We're in well over a hundred countries, but we could always be in more. And as you know, we've got 184 episodes - that's of Learning Uncut alone, not even the specialist series such as Elevate.

So, we have got a lot of opportunity for people to reflect on their career through listening to the podcast. And we would love for more people to hear it. We want to walk our talk.

So, if you have any feedback for the podcast, we are open to hearing it. Until next time on Learning Uncut, thank you, Greg, and good luck to everyone thinking about your own careers.

Learning Uncut Episode 184: A Longitudinal Study of The Development of an L&D Practitioner – Greg Wilton

Learning Uncut **About Learning Uncut**

Learning Uncut are learning and development consultants that help Learning and Development leaders and their teams become a strategic enabler so that their businesses can thrive. We work in evidence-informed ways to drive tangible outcomes and business impact and are strong believers in the power of collaboration and community. We specialise in helping to build or refresh organisational learning strategy, update their L&D Operating Model, enable skills development, and conduct learning evaluation. We also offer workshops to shift learning mindset and practices for both L&D teams and the broader workforce – as well as speaking at public and internal events.

Learn more about us at our website.