# Emerging Stronger

# New Era for L&D

## Shifting Perspective to Emerge Stronger

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# Contents

# The Reality of Disruption

The priorities and plans of organisations around the world were upended in 2020. While the speed of business had been increasing for many years, the rapid change when the pandemic hit was unprecedented. Organisations swiftly cut through barriers to protect their workforce and maintain business continuity. Rapid change provided unique challenges and opportunities for L&D.

## Workplace Disruption

The most obvious shift is the significant increase in employees working remotely.  A recent McKinsey study concluded that 20 to 25 percent of workforces in advanced economies could work from home between three and four days a week[1].  More flexible working models will persist, both in regard to where and when people work.

Physical workplaces changed to protect employees who could not work remotely. Adjustments included new personal safety protocols, altered shift patterns and changes to workplace layout.  Many companies accelerated deployment of automation and AI to reduce workplace density and cope with surging demand.

# Changing the Rules of Workplace Learning

> "We're having conversations within our company about how this changes how we want to work. What does work mean? Humanity has an opportunity to have that discussion right now."
>
> Brandon Carson

Learning and Development often played a critical role in the initial period of flux. Rapid digital solutions such as curated content and short live online sessions were deployed to support people to adapt to remote work[2].

Some L&D leaders saw opportunity in disruption: they were ready to scale up to meet demand, or to lean into shifts that they had been advocating for. Others were ill-equipped to adapt. By mid-2020 some teams faced new demands at the cutting edge of sustained business critical change. However, others were increasingly sidelined or scrambling to keep up.

# Reshaping

Business is in a liminal state, seeking to reshape work and workplaces. Regardless of where you sit on the spectrum between essential and sidelined, L&D is at a critical juncture.  Disruption has changed the rules and relationships, creating opportunities for L&D to reposition services, rebuild credibility, rethink value - and to emerge stronger.

# How?

Michelle Ockers (Founder of Learning Uncut), Shannon Tipton (Founder of Learning Rebels) and Laura Overton (Independent Industry analyst) explored this question in Emergent[3]– a  podcast series bringing together leading practitioners and experts in a global conversation. Each conversation explored disruption from a fresh perspective.  Together they start to show us how to map a way forward.

This paper explores the opportunities and challenges that disruption has created for L&D and offers four lenses informed by the Emergent  series that will help L&D to shift perspective and act now to emerge stronger.

# Recognising the
## Business Opportunity

In a nutshell, the role of L&D is to help people, teams and organisations to get ready! To get ready for change. To get ready to perform better. To be adaptive and agile. Disruption has shown that this role is needed now more than ever. L&D has the opportunity to help their stakeholders to address immediate business challenges in a period of ongoing disruption, and to prepare for long term business priorities including:

- Cybersecurity
- Increased use of e-commerce and virtual services
- Faster adoption of automation and AI
- Large scale upskilling and reskilling due to displacement of lower wage jobs
- Addressing the workplace digital divide[4]

## The L&D Danger Zone

Having spotted an opportunity it's tempting to rush in with a solution. This can lead L&D to trip on avoidable hazards such as:

- Responding to orders for digital content and courses without analysing the underlying need
- Defaulting to online content and classrooms
- Overconfidence in technology without data to support user and/or business needs
- Failing to consider the extent and impact of the digital divide in your organisation[5]
- Cognitive overload and fatigue of remote workers in and out of lockdown
- Failure to recognise and draw upon existing effective practice
- L&D readiness, be it skill set[6], fear of technology[7], or lack of confidence and courage[8]
- Inflexible and outdated L&D thinking habits[9]

The first step to *Emerge Stronger* is to be clear about the opportunity and the risks.

# The Path Ahead

If L&D can avoid these hazards and not trip up the potential upside is tremendous.

To shift out of the danger zone and emerge stronger, L&D must look beyond their own activity and engagement measures and focus instead on the outcomes that are important to their organisation[10].

Underpinning all of these hazards is a myopic focus on learning value rather than on business value, which is  where the opportunity lies.

On the flip side, there is a risk that L&D misses the opportunity altogether. Denial that the current disruption will have a lasting impact on workplace learning is a ticket to extinction.

"L&D should take a deliberate choice and start changing your business model to create sustainable change and business value." Jos Arets
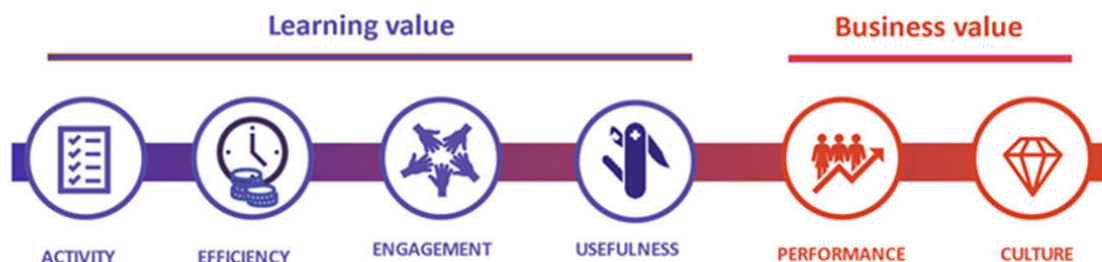
# Orienting
## for Success

The tools, models and approaches required to refocus on business value are available to us now.  How we use them matters -  we can't shape tomorrow with yesterday's thinking.  Our orientation will determine our goals, our success and whether we emerge stronger.

How we orient ourselves and respond to opportunity depends largely on our destination.  Are we seeking to create learning value or business value?  The evidence is clear. In 15 years of research co-author Laura Overton consistently found that high performance L&D teams define their success in terms of what is important to their organisation[11].  Our Emergent podcast conversations provided many examples of what high performing L&D teams focus on such as customer service ratings, sales figures and faster adoption of technology.  It also includes building a productive organisational culture that supports innovation and agility.

## The L&D Value Spectrum

@LauraOverton

**Learning value**

**Business value**

ACTIVITY    EFFICIENCY    ENGAGEMENT    USEFULNESS    PERFORMANCE    CULTURE

It's crystal clear that business value should be L&D's north star.  To this point, recent disruptions to the global economy have created a greater opportunity to strongly reposition L&D to a business first orientation.

# Shifting Our Orientation

Disruption has caused change to accelerate and now L&D is at a bend in the road! Let's explore the options:

**1** Maintain the status quo - keep driving straight ahead while looking in the rear view mirror. Miss the bend and drive off the edge of the cliff. While experience is useful, past successes can limit how you flex and embrace new approaches to drive business value.

**2** Pull over - sit stationary beside the road. In the grip of a fixed mindset, you lose your momentum in the face of real or imagined barriers such as your manager, budget, team, skill or organisational culture. Inertia sets in and you will eventually be sidelined.

**3** Adjust for the bend - shift your direction to make the turn. Maintain momentum with your immediate path, and scan your environment to anticipate what lies ahead. Sensing and responding to opportunities enables you to drive business value.

Adopting a business first orientation as your north star keeps your eyes on the road ahead and creates a readiness to adapt and flex. Using new lenses to explore the road ahead helps us to adapt fast and prepares us for success.

"We have to come out of the dark ages (of training). We have become a cost center. We're just this function, usually buried within an HR hierarchy that's just producing process manuals and checklists and things to do." Brandon Carson

# Exploring Opportunity
# with New Lenses

*You've spotted opportunities to help people and the organisation to get ready for change, and adopted a business first orientation. You know that traditional methods of L&D are no longer enough; in fact disruption rewards new approaches. Emerging stronger requires that you see things differently.*

## The Purpose of a Lens

A lens is a transparent material that concentrates or disperses light rays. It bends light to bring images closer or move them further away. They are used either singly (as in a magnifying glass) or combined with other lenses (as in a telescope).

How do we use lenses?

- Magnify something to help see things, like using a microscope
- Zoom in on a specific aspect rather, like using a telescope
- Share something small with others, like using a projector
- Bring something into sharper focus, like using spectacles

*Different lenses* **help us to see things differently**

## Traditional L&D Lenses

Lenses traditionally used in L&D have helped us see programmes, interventions and courses. They might include:

- Training needs analysis - to see training requirements and learning objectives
- Instructional design - to see courses and content
- Competency - to see skills
- Classrooms - to see training events
- Formal qualifications - to see traditional outputs
- Learning evaluation - to see evidence of learning

Whilst serving L&D in the past, these lenses potentially limit our ability to flex and adapt, essentially serving as blinders, closing the view which might allow us to work within uncertainty, ambiguity and disruption to emerge stronger.

# Contemporary L&D Lenses

During Emergent we spoke with 32 guests about 16 different challenges. Tapping into their collective wisdom, combined with external evidence and our own experience, we identified four new lenses that enable L&D to explore and harness the opportunities arising from disruption to drive business value and emerge stronger.



**Data** — Exploring the information around you to make smarter decisions.

**01**

**Technology** — Enabling change vs solving problems. Used as an enabler rather than a saviour.

**Business Value**

**04**

**02**

**Experiment** — Trying out new ideas, methods, or activities to improve a concept or idea.

**03**

**Community** — Leveraging diverse perspectives and skills of others.
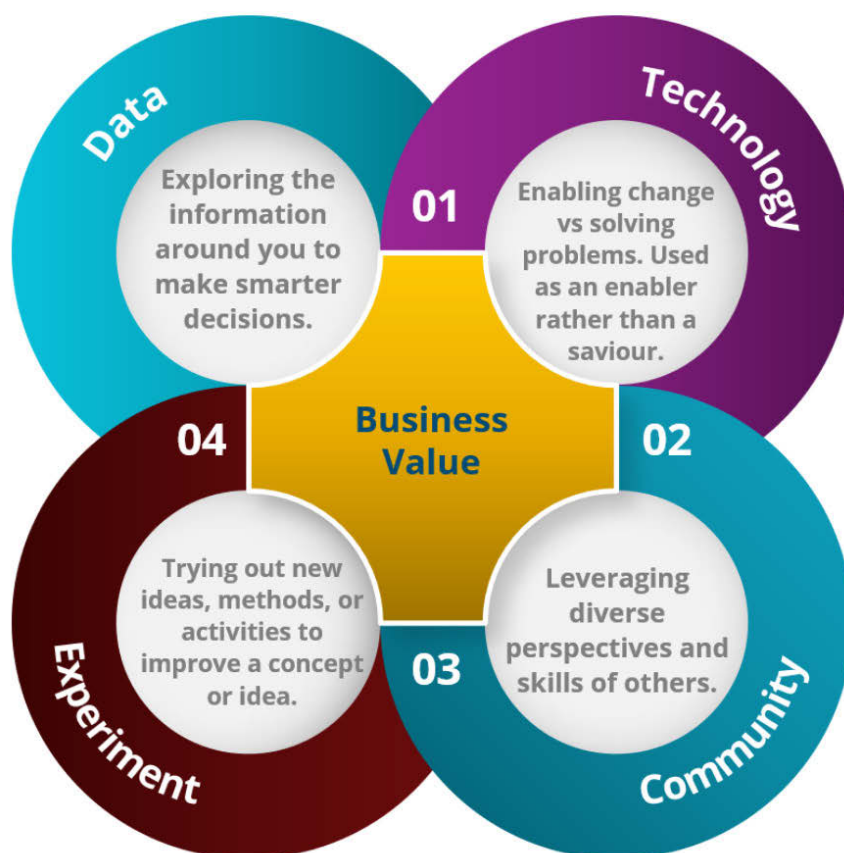
**Let's explore how each of these lenses helps us to see L&D's role differently.**

# Re-Prioritising
## with the Data Lens

The dictionary definition of data is 'factual information used as a basis for reasoning, discussion, or calculation.'

When we look at the wider perspective, the data lens helps to critically explore information around us to make smarter decisions. Historically the L&D data lens has been constrained specifically to L&D Its use has been focussed on reporting evaluation impact or to explore engagement behaviour with digital assets.

> ''Data is not just the L&D story.
> L&D is part of the bigger story." Kevin M Yates

## Making Sense of Data

When we know where to look, we see that we have access to facts and information from a wide range of sources: quantitative data (from our learning and management information systems); qualitative data (from the stories that people tell, the observations and reflections that they make); external evidence from scientific research, benchmarks and case studies; data from our own experiments.

The challenge with data is as follows:

- Each individual data point is meaningless unless we understand the context
- Humans struggle with information overload
- Data has been taken over by technology - i.e. our mobile data plan, or big data. Our stories and reflections also count; they are 'data with soul.'

*The Data Lens* means exploring the information around you to make smarter decisions

> 'We need to use data in the service of solving the problems that matter.' Trish Uhl

# The Power of Data

The power of the data lens is released when we understand the context in which the data has been gathered and when we apply multiple sources of data to explore the problem at hand.

The data lens starts to add real value when

- We formulate useful questions and hypothesis
- We critically assess sources of data
- We combine multiple sources of data to create evidence to test and refine the hypothesis
- We are willing to let the emerging evidence challenge our own assumptions

# Breakthrough Moments

Smart use of the data lens helps us to:

- Set priorities - in design and decision making
- Reduce risk
- Improve impact
- Influence change

*The data lens encourages us to explore new insights in the information around us. Technology has created opportunities to explore data in new ways - it also allows us to fundamentally change the way we respond to the insights we gather.*

# Ask Yourself

1. What do you want to see differently with the data lens?

2. What will it help you to do?

3. Who will it help you to engage?

# Reinventing
## with the Technology Lens

The dictionary definition of technology is 'new capabilities through the practical application of knowledge.'

A cursory internet search will bring up numerous ed-tech maps - tools and technologies for managing and creating content, community and experiences[12]. While technology itself can support multiple business needs, technology on its own cannot solve business challenges. There is a large body of evidence that demonstrates that the specific tools that an L&D team uses do not correlate to impact[13]. What matters is how the tools are applied to solve challenges.

> "L&D folks have this fear (of technology) because they see it as a replacement for what they do. When in actuality, it's just an augmentation to what they do." Dani Johnson

## Technology Challenges

Learning technology is evolving rapidly and the array of platforms and tools on the market continues to expand. While some L&D professionals find technology is attractive and exciting, for many it is overwhelming and even threatening. It's difficult to stay abreast of developments, select appropriate technology, make the business case for investment and implement it.

The challenge with technology is as follows:
- Selecting technology to drive the solution rather than enabling it
- Gaps in L&D skill and confidence creates missed opportunities to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of solutions
- Lack of organisational investment in infrastructure, connectivity and bandwidth limitations, or restrictive policies may limit access to technology and interoperability across an organisation.

*The Technology Lens* means asking what will I see if I use technology as an enabler rather than a saviour?

# The Power of Technology

The power of the technology lens is released when we use it as an enabler of strategy and solutions. Start with strategy. Get clear on the outcomes to be achieved and the experiences that will lead to this. Use technology as a supporting player to help people thrive and create business value.

The technology lens starts to add real value when:

- We start with strategy, goals and experience
- We understand what tools people are already using and how
- We embrace rather than fear new technologies
- We treat it as an enabler rather than a saviour

# Breakthrough Moments

Smart use of the technology lens helps us to:

- Drive efficiencies, releasing capacity for higher value activities
- Augment our work, bringing the best of our human capabilities to drive value
- Connect people to both content and each other to learn and improve continuously
- Run smart experiments and drive continuous improvement

*In the past, learning technology has been about management and delivery. It has just as much power in providing insight and driving connection and community...The humanity of it all!*

# Ask Yourself

1. Will you be able to see challenges differently with this lens?

2. What will using technology as an enabler help you to do?

3. How can technology help to support strategy?

# Reconnecting with
# the Community Lens

The dictionary definition of community is 'a group of people with common interests, characteristics and history.'

The community lens is about engaging with groups and people inside and outside of your organisation to leverage diverse perspectives and skills in order to create business value.

The shift in work and workplaces is ongoing. We are in the midst of a period of large-scale sense-making and adaptation. L&D professionals must make sense of what is shifting in business and how to adapt organisational learning to support this. Breakthrough thinking is required, beyond the blind spots created by cognitive bias and our own expertise and past successes. Having gained clarity we can take action with internal and external partners to create better solutions.

# Community Challenges

Interest in collaboration rebounded in 2020 as we grappled with how to effectively work together remotely. We recognise the benefits of connecting with others in rapidly changing environments. Yet pressing deadlines and performance targets make it difficult to allocate time and effort to build connection in communities and strengthen partnerships. Community requires a long-term commitment.

The challenge with communities is as follows:

- Humans are drawn to others who are similar rather than diverse
- Building connections and relationships with others is a long-term undertaking that many struggle to prioritise
- When nurturing a community it is hard to strike a balance between supporting people to engage and controlling interactions

*The Community Lens* **means asking what will I see if I draw on the diverse perspectives and skills of others?**

"Communities are our primary 'sense-making' entities: we use them to discover new information, share knowledge, and figure out what on earth is happening in the noisy world around us[14]." Julian Stodd

# The Power of Community

The power of the community lens is released when we consistently seek to build and strengthen relationships with others and build more diverse networks.  Actively seek out and draw upon diverse perspectives to gain fresh insights.  Partner with others whose experience and skills complement your own to create stronger partnerships.

The community lens starts to add value when:

- We actively interact with others with curiosity
- We seek out experts and ideas from outside or our own domain
- We use structured processes with groups to slow down our thinking
- We actively seek opportunities for new types of partnerships

# Breakthrough Moments

Smart use of the community lens helps us to:

- Sense and adapt to change
- Spot opportunities
- Analyse and diagnose challenges
- Make smarter decisions
- Draw on different skills to get things done
- Create better solution

*Data, technology and community all create an opportunity to explore and experiment.  The next lens helps us see how.*

# Ask Yourself

1. Will you be able to see challenges differently with this lens?

2. What will using the power of community help you to do?

3. How will you consciously engage with community?

# Re-energising with the Experiment Lens

The dictionary definition of an experiment is 'an operation or procedure carried out under controlled conditions in order to discover an unknown effect or law, to test or establish a hypothesis.'

The concept of experimentation within business is not new. Consider Netflix, Amazon, Adobe, Uber, Apple... the list goes on. While the results of experimentation are easy to see, what does it mean for input?

Democratising experimentation[15] requires breaking out of L&D silos. It builds a culture of psychological safety and helps the organisation to fail fast and fail forward. Through experimentation L&D can work hand-in-hand with the business to make better, smarter, faster decisions that drive business value.

> "When I was in engineering school we were told to keep a lab book. And in that lab book goes all your successes and all of your failures. And you look at that stuff in that lab book as data." Dani Johnson

## Experiment Adding Value

The experiment lens starts to add real value when:

- We need to re energise our stakeholders
- We need to challenge traditional thinking
- We need to explore quick wins with limited resources
- We have the opportunity to fail fast and learn!

*The Experiment Lens* means creating an environment of curiosity, testing and questioning current realities.

# The Power of Experiments

A thoughtful and evidence driven L&D team wouldn't develop or make major changes to any L&D effort without first running experiments to understand how they would impact change. Though the L&D world searches out big, disruptive ideas, in reality most success is achieved by reviewing data, shifting perspectives and implementing minor improvements.

Experiments set in solid research and data can help L&D leaders figure out how much money and time investment in a potential project is optimal.

## Breakthrough Moments

Smart use of the experiment lens helps us to:

- Enable curious thinking
- Make better use of data
- Open silos, creating higher levels of collaboration
- Open the doors for transformational organisational change
- Lower confirmation bias; increase acceptance of change

## Ask Yourself

1. What will you be able to see differently with the experiment lens?

2. What will it help you to do?

3. Where can you use experiments?

These different lenses and the alternative perspectives they offer are necessary as we emerge stronger from past disruption. They help us challenge the status quo and explore fresh thinking, keeping us true to the north star of business value.

# Emerging
## Stronger

## Bringing this all together

Current disruption has changed the rules and relationships, creating opportunities for L&D to reposition services, rebuild credibility, rethink value - and to emerge stronger. This has created a unique opportunity for L&D to apply its credentials to being a business partner that can add value, not just at the moment but over time.

The stories and experiences captured during the Emergent Series podcast emphasised business value as a north star, meaning L&D needs to be in a position to respond and adapt. The use of the four lenses provides alternative perspectives that help us hone growth mindset - the belief that our efforts and professional contribution can constantly be developed to drive better business value.

## Why these lenses?

Because most business challenges are viewed within the perspective of past failures and successes, L&D may tend to see only what their siloed perspective allows them to see. Change the perspective and it changes the way that L&D interprets past events for the future.

Importantly, changing perspectives can help challenge bias. When presented with a mass of detailed data, L&D tends to pick out and focus on facts that confirm their prior perceptions (confirmation bias) and to disregard or perhaps misinterpret those that call their perceptions into question.

The power of the lenses is in how they train us to see things differently. The potential of the lenses is released through their application, and enhanced when they start to overlap.

**This much is clear.**

**We cannot solve today's problems with yesterday's thinking.**

**Changing perspectives and shaking up norms is not only uncomfortable, it is essential for building and maintaining partnerships with the business.**

# Taking Action

When using the lenses to change perspective L&D makes business value decisions that are more relevant, effective and impactful. But how do we get there from here?

## Essential questions to map a path through disruption

**4**

What is a key organisational pain point?

What is my perspective on this pain point?

What do I see when I apply each lens filter?

What breakthrough moments can be discovered?

This lens approach to using different perspectives is the secret sauce of all that L&D has mastered: constructive problem solving, collaboration, and conflict resolution to name a few.

Changing perspectives and shaking up norms is not only uncomfortable, it is essential for building and maintaining partnerships with the business.

**Data**

**01** Exploring the information around you to make smarter decisions.

**Technology**

Enabling change vs solving problems. Used as an enabler rather than a saviour.

**Business Value**

**04** Trying out new ideas, methods, or activities to improve a concept or idea.

**Experiment**

**02**

**03** Leveraging diverse perspectives and skills of others.

**Community**

**It's time to train ourselves to see things differently!**

# EmergingStronger DigDeeper

You can listen to the whole Emergent Podcast series via a **Spotify playlist,** or access all of the episodes and show note resources in a **curated collection**.

| To dig deeper into: | With our Guests, the Emergent Experts: | Go here for contacts, conversation and resources: |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Emergent series introduction | Laura Overton, Shannon Tipton and Michelle Ockers | https://bit.ly/01MOES |
| The new business context for learning | Brandon Carson (USA)<br>Director of Learning, Delta Airlines<br>Paul Dunn (Singapore)<br>Chairman, B1G1 | https://bit.ly/02LOES |
| How L&D can create business value | Jos Arets ( Netherlands)<br>Co-Founder at Tulser<br>Geraldine Voost (Belgium)<br>Global Learning & Development Manager, Bronkhorst High-Tech | https://bit.ly/03MOES |
| Building creativity and innovation into the future of work | Arun Pradhan (Australia)<br>Co-Founder, ModelThinkers, Founder Learn2Learn App<br>Kevin Thorn (USA)<br>Chief NuggetHead, NuggetHead Studioz | https://bit.ly/04STES |
| Building L&D confidence and courage | Sarah Lindsell (UK)<br>Global Chief Learning Strategist, PwC<br>Rachel Hutchinson ( USA)<br>Director of Learning and Development , Hilti | https://bit.ly/06STES |
| How to make the business case for change | Lori Niles-Hoffman (Canada)<br>Senior EdTech Transformation Strategist, NilesNolen<br>Dave Buglass (UK)<br>Director, Learning Services Operations, PWC | https://bit.ly/07LOES |
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|---|---|---|
| Culture and Curiosity | Nigel Paine (UK)<br>Co-Presenter of Learning Now TV<br>Simon Brown (UK)<br>Chief Learning Officer, Novartis | https://bit.ly/10LOES |
| Working Out Loud | John Stepper (Canada)<br>Founder, Working Out Loud<br>Katharina Krentz (Germany)<br>Corporate HR Transformation Team & Collaboration Crew, Bosch | https://bit.ly/11MOES |
| Connecting the dots on data for L&D | Trish Uhl (USA)<br>Consultant, Owl's Ledge<br>Kevin M. Yates (USA) L&D Performance Detective | http://bit.ly/EP12MOES |
| New Priorities for L&D capability | Michelle Ockers (Australia) Organisational Learning Strategist, Learning Uncut<br>Seb Tindall (UK)<br>Head of Learning and Development, Vitality | http://bit.ly/13LOES |
| The rise of technology and L&D | Dani Johnson (USA)<br>Co-Founder & Principal Analyst, RedThread Research<br>Stella Collins (Belgium)<br>Co-Founder & Chief Learning Officer, Stellar Labs | http://bit.ly/EP14STES |
| Smarter working relationships for L&D | Barbara Thompson (UK)<br>Learning Transformation Specialist, Network Rail<br>Shai Desai (Australia)<br>Co-Founder, Learning Plan and ModelThinkers | http://bit.ly/15LOES |
| The Skills Economy | Simon Tindall (UK)<br>Head of Skills and Innovation, The Open University<br>Simon Gibson (UK)<br>Advisory Board Member, The Learning and Performance Institute | http://bit.ly/16STES |
| New structures for L&D teams | Krystal Irving (Australia)<br>Product Area Lead, Learning Strategy, Culture, Capability and Technology, ANZ<br>Harold Jarche (Canada)<br>Principal, Jarche Consulting | http://bit.ly/17MOES |
| The social currency of communities | Julian Stodd ( UK)<br>SeaSalt Learning<br>Rachel Happe (USA)<br>Principal & Co-Founder, The Community Roundtable | https://bit.ly/06STES |
| The future of physical spaces for work and learning | Anne Bartlett Bragg (Spain)<br>Founder and Managing Director of Ripple Effect Group<br>David Shirley (Australia)<br>Partner, Flex We Are | https://bit.ly/08MOES |
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# About Us

We believe Learning and Development is at a unique moment in time where the opportunity is higher than ever to make the radical shift that L&D needs to become more business critical.  We have joined forces to support this shift across the industry.

This shift requires L&D to focus on outcomes and creating business value, while also making a tangible difference to the betterment of people.  We view learning as an organisational wide activity founded on a  symbiotic relationship between the organisation, individuals and their managers.

We encourage L&D to adopt an open, curious mindset, evidence informed, independent thinking and pragmatic approaches to build their impact, relevance and credibility.  We will meet practitioners wherever they are in order to inspire, inform and support them to take action to move them forward.

Laura Overton is an author, facilitator and award winning learning analyst dedicated to uncovering and sharing effective practices in learning innovation that lead to business value. She is also known for leading a 15 year global research programme to uncover and share learning strategies that lead to business success.

Michelle Ockers is an organisational learning strategist and modern workplace learning practitioner. She helps organisations build high impact L&D functions. Constant threads in her work are developing and implementing learning strategy, building mindset and skillset of L&D professionals and teams and enabling L&D to be a business partner that creates value.

As Owner of Learning Rebels, Shannon Tipton is a skilled learning strategist experienced in developing successful learning functions across North America and Europe. Recognized as bringing a "business value first" mentality into the learning field, she works with L&D teams to strengthen workplace alignment and enhance organizational collaboration.

"L&D should take a deliberate choice and start changing your business model to create sustainable change and business value." Jos Arets

Change the perspective and it changes the way that L&D interprets past events for the future.

Adopting a business first orientation as your north star keeps your eyes on the road ahead and creates a readiness to adapt and flex.

# Endnotes

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2       Josh Bersin Academy, August 2021, The Big Reset Playbook, documents examples. Additionally, Fosway, May 2020, COVID-19 L&D Research study reports that 71% of respondents experienced an increased demand for digital learning from end users.

3       See appendix Digging deeper for a full list of the Learning Uncut  Emergent Podcasts and experts

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5       As described by Tipton (ibid) the digital divide is "is the gap between those organizations that are at the fore-front of technology and those that have failed to invest in technology infrastructure."

6       Learning Uncut Emergent podcast, New Priorities for L&D Capability: Sebastian Tindall and Michelle Ockers, published 2 September 2020

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## Imagine ...

3 weeks of working through your business challenges with Laura, Michelle and Shannon PLUS many of the Emergent Podcast speakers.

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Being part of a lasting community of like-minded people who are dedicated to helping each other emerge and thrive!

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Contact us with your Emerging Stronger questions

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