



Talking PCO Power with Amrit Ahluwalia

Leading Learning Podcast Transcript for Episode 433

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:00:00] If the university is a beam of light that serves a very particular set of learners in a very particular way, the continuing education division refracts that expertise and refracts that knowledge and makes it accessible to the full spectrum of individuals who might need access to the institution at some point in time.

Celisa Steele: [00:00:21] I'm Celisa Steele.

Jeff Cobb: [00:00:22] I'm Jeff Cobb, and this is the Leading Learning Podcast.

Celisa Steele: [00:00:30] There aren't many times that Pink Floyd comes up on a podcast focused on learning businesses. Fewer still are the times that such a mention makes a profound point about how higher education is seeking to respond to the needs of post-traditional students.

Celisa Steele: [00:00:45] But that's exactly what happens in this episode, which features a conversation with the astute Amrit Ahluwalia. Amrit is executive director of Continuing Studies at Western University in London, Ontario, Canada, and he'd been in that role about six months at the time he spoke with Jeff in early September 2024. Western University is one of Canada's U15 (essentially the equivalent of an R1 institution in the U.S.). Amrit is focused on growing Western's professional and continuing education reputation and approach to match the reputation and approach the institution already brings to its research in undergraduate programming.

Celisa Steele: [00:01:25] Before joining Western, Amrit founded The EvoLLLution, and he ran the publication for a little over 10 years. He also now hosts the EdUp PCO podcast, where he highlights innovation happening in professional, continuing, and online education. The podcast focuses on giving visibility to leaders in the space and covering topics such as AI, strategic planning, and more—all with a student-first philosophy.

This transcript accompanies the episode of the Leading Learning Podcast available at www.leadinglearning.com/episode433.

Celisa Steele: [00:01:51] In this episode of the Leading Learning Podcast, number 433, Amrit and Jeff talk about the revenue imperative facing most professional, continuing, and online (PCO) education units; the need for the 60-year curriculum; collaboration between higher ed and associations; COVID's impact on learner expectations; the value for many businesses of moving beyond a content producer mentality to being a curator and a guide; and more.

Jeff Cobb: [00:02:28] Can you talk a little bit about the path that got you to Western?

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:02:32] Well, it's funny. In continuing education, we say that no one was eight years old dreaming about being a continuing education leader. Certainly, we've all had circuitous and unique routes to getting to where we are in this profession. Mine has probably been both more streamlined and more random than many of my peers. As you mentioned, I founded and ran a publication called The EvoLLLution for a little over 10 years. It was a publication focused on transformation and change in the higher education space, with a particular focus on continuing education. In fact, for those of you who don't know—who know the publication but never understood whether we just typoed it or whether that was intentional—the reason EvoLLLution has three Ls in it is for "lifelong learning."

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:03:17] The publication has a square focus on creating pathways to education for learners that aren't traditionally served by the institution. That was our bread and butter for over a decade. In that time, I had the opportunity to work with thousands of leaders from colleges and universities across Canada, the United States, and around the world—all talking about their unique approaches to driving innovation in the postsecondary space, to some of the key considerations and key challenges they were navigating, some of the unique and mission-critical work that can happen in a division like Western Continuing Studies.

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:03:52] My wife and I actually moved to London, Ontario, in the middle of the pandemic. We were part of the exodus from Toronto that happened at that time. Western University is located in London, Ontario, and they were looking for an executive director of continuing studies. It felt like kismet, an opportunity to bring some of that knowledge, some of that expertise, some of that vision that I've been fortunate enough to have—probably the best crash course in the world on how to run a continuing education division—and bring that into practice here at Western. And so a lot of what our team is doing is applying the lessons that I've spent the last decade learning.

Jeff Cobb: [00:04:28] I'll note that The EvoLLLution carries on without you. It's still out there.

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:04:34] Yes, it does. In the very capable hands of Shauna Cox. She is just a tremendous leader, and I think the publication is richer for having her at its helm.

Jeff Cobb: [00:04:43] She's doing a great job. For listeners who were not familiar with EvoLLLution before this, I very highly recommend checking that out, seeing what's going on now. There's a huge backlog, going back and seeing what your work was there, Amrit, and everybody who's participated and brought their voice to that publication. It's a very rich experience. But you're in a different setting now; you're where the proverbial rubber meets the road, so to speak. How has your perspective on continuing education and professional development evolved? It's been six months, so not a long time, but I imagine you've got a little bit of a different perspective now.

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:05:16] Yes, it's been a fascinating transition. Peers and colleagues will laugh about this, but, when I started, I thought, "Starting on March 25, 2024, I'll come in; we'll continue to do things as a status quo; I'll learn the ropes and then start to insert myself." Around that time, the Government of Canada released new regulations on international student enrollments—basically executed a federally mandated cap that, at the provincial level, meant that the province was setting the number of international students every postsecondary institution can enroll. As many of my colleagues will know, international students have become something of a revenue lifeline for postsecondary institutions in Canada and certainly in Ontario.

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:05:58] In Ontario, we faced a tuition freeze that was executed in 2019. Certainly taking inflation into account, the public funding for postsecondary institutions in Ontario has gone down quite significantly. International students have been looked at as a pathway to maintain a steady and healthy margin. So, when that international student cap came into place, effectively the role of the continuing education division completely changed, which meant, upon my start, we had to take a very close look at the way we were running things—taking a look at reformatting and recalibrating the learners that we were bringing in and serving and taking a very close look at the role we played in supporting our community and in supporting industry in and around our region. Instead of having a few months to settle in and find the ropes and things like that, really day one was completely reinventing continuing education at Western University and finding ways to leverage what we had and finding ways to implement new models so that we could get faster and get larger as quickly as we could, while still respecting the roots of what we do and who we are here to serve. It's really been an interesting transition.

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:07:04] I'd say the biggest shift in perspective for me has come from going from a place where I could operate very comfortably at 35,000 feet to now being at the ground level and not only having the vision of where we want to go but working with the team to figure out how do we execute it? I'm very fortunate. I've got a phenomenal team of folks here at Western, both in institutional leadership and within the leadership team in continuing education, who can help to navigate some of the challenges that many of my colleagues have faced. Historically, there's a great deal of support and interest in finding ways for continuing education to be a more active player at Western University, and that goes all the way up to the provost and the president. For us, it's a matter of bringing that trust to life, and it's been a fascinating transition. I think the biggest shift from a corporate mindset to a public institutional mindset is the pace of change. It can be a little slower to enact a shift than what I'm used to.

Jeff Cobb: [00:08:02] Yes, I bet. I'd be interested to hear—because it's an area that we're focused on quite a bit now at Leading Learning and Tagoras, and I feel like it's a hot topic in general—how much has a focus on workforce development and collaborating with and supporting industry employers in general factored into where you're going to be taking Western?

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:08:25] It's so critical. Ultimately, any professional, continuing, online education unit has to be responsive to industry needs. We need to be proactive in supporting talent pipeline management. We need to make talent pipeline management a clear part of corporate growth strategies. One thing that's unique about London, Ontario, is it's one of the fastest-growing economic regions in Canada. We have a booming manufacturing sector specifically but also quite a large computing sector, significant agrifood sectors. There is rapid growth happening in a range of fields. For us, it's a matter of finding the connective tissue that will allow us to serve the largest number of employers and industries as we can while bringing our expertise to life.

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:09:13] We're also very fortunate here in London. We've got a phenomenal college in Fanshawe College that also serves this region. Between Western University—which, as I mentioned, is a U15 (basically the equivalent of an R1 institution in the U.S.)—and Fanshawe, which is a premier college, we have the ability to serve every level of the labor market or every level of the labor force with specialized and distinct focus. It basically means we have the opportunity, if we're mindful about it, to create a talent pipeline strategy that should be effective in not only serving the industries and serving the businesses that are already here in London but also in attracting new businesses to set up shop here. We have the capacity to pivot the booming population that we have in the region and to transition it into a really effective talent pipeline. It's unique. It's about being responsive and proactive at the same time.

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Jeff Cobb: [00:10:05] Practically speaking, what does that look like? Do you have business development people who are going out to meet with corporations? Are there task forces across the region? How are you aligning yourself with workforce and employer needs?

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:10:20] It's a great question. I would say, right now, we're bootstrapping a little bit. There's some of the startup mentality that we had in launching the publication, some of the startup mentality that came from the tech sector of my background that we're now applying to the way that we operate in continuing education. At the same time, we're fortunate to be supported by some incredible organizations. In particular, the London Economic Development Corporation (or the LEDC) is the business hub for our community, and they're incredibly active in promoting London as a place to do business. They're really active in working with us to give us a clear sense of what the talent pipeline gaps are and helping us identify what are some of the areas where our programming needs to evolve to be responsive to the largest number of industry members as possible.

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:11:06] They also have been instrumental in facilitating introductions to industry-specific organizations to help us dive deeper into the work that we can do to be of greater support to the businesses in our community. It's relational at its core. One thing that's really important about the higher education space—that has been a lovely consistency from the technology world and from the publication world—is that everything is relational. At the end of the day, it's people working with people to help people. If you approach it like a robot, you're not going to get very far. But, if you approach it like a person and are honest about what you're trying to achieve and some of the obstacles in your way and want to have an honest conversation about what industry needs and what some of their challenges are, it's not a question of an institution-to-industry partnership; it's a question of two people having an honest conversation about where their strengths are and where their weaknesses are and how those things can come together to form something greater than the sum of its parts.

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:12:01] We're really fortunate that we've been able to go on a bit of a listening tour, that we have organizations like the LEDC supporting us and supporting our capacity to be responsive and proactive to the needs of industry. The reality of it is it's also a mentality shift as to what continuing education is. At many institutions—and we're no exception—continuing education has historically operated in a bit of a silo. It's been a space for experimentation. It's been a space for skunkworks. But, given that mentality and given that focus, it's historically operated of its own accord, off to the side. And the way I see continuing education is more of Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* album cover. Bear with me.

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Jeff Cobb: [00:12:46] Yes, all right. I will.

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:12:48] Yes, you weren't expecting that. It's funny because any colleagues of mine, certainly at Western, who are hearing this interview will have heard me give this example about 700 times. If the university is a beam of light that serves a very particular set of learners in a very particular way, the continuing education division refracts that expertise and refracts that knowledge and makes it accessible to the full spectrum of individuals who might need access to the institution at some point in time. That's my mental image of what continuing education is here to do, where we almost serve as a relational hub, extending the reach of institutional research and extending the reach of institutional faculty to make that learning applicable and to make that knowledge practical to folks in our service region, to make sure that we're making Western as accessible as we can. That mentality shift around what we're here to do makes itself seen in our business model, makes itself seen in our program catalog, and hopefully makes itself seen in the quality of offerings that we're bringing to market.

Celisa Steele: [00:13:58] At Tagoras, we partner with professional and trade associations, continuing education units, training firms, and other learning businesses to help them to understand market realities and potential, to connect better with existing customers and find new ones, and to make smart investment decisions around product development and portfolio management. Drawing on our expertise in lifelong learning, market assessment, and strategy formulation, we can help you achieve greater reach, revenue, and impact. Learn more at tagoras.com/ more.

Jeff Cobb: [00:14:35] I feel like, as I've watched it, that the role of continuing education or professional, continuing, online education within universities has grown, has been elevated quite a bit over, say, the last decade or so, to the extent that maybe more funding is going towards it, more attention is being paid to it, maybe a little more respect is being paid towards that function within universities. Does that jibe with your experience?

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:15:05] Yes and no. I'm not sure on the funding side necessarily, but I think there's more respect for the business model of continuing education than there has historically. Continuing education divisions are at minimum cost-recovery units and are increasingly revenue-generating units. Once upon a time, I think this created a bit of a cultural gap between the continuing education unit and its staff and the rest of the institution. But, as revenue issues and revenue challenges have brought themselves more to the forefront of university operations in Canada and the U.S., probably over the past three to four years, I think the understanding of

the work that continuing education divisions do to balance and access mission with the revenue generation expectation is greatly respected. I don't know necessarily that more funding is coming our way, but I think there's more space that allows us to operate the way we need to operate to be as effective within the bounds of what's been set up for us.

Jeff Cobb: [00:16:02] I think that that's a good distinction because, obviously yes, continuing education units typically are going to have to be revenue-generating, so they're not necessarily looking for funding per se. They are self-funding. But I think that ability to self-fund has probably grown as the focus on lifelong learning has grown.

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:16:16] Absolutely. The reality of the labor market that we have today necessitates continuing education as a foundational principle of any postsecondary institution. The work we do is critical to maintaining a healthy and knowledgeable workforce, and I think part of the challenge we've had historically as a sector is that people have bought into the idea that, once you earn a degree, you're done and that the relationship between the institution and the learner, after that degree is conferred, is either a purely academic track, where you want to get a graduate degree for the purpose of, effectively, workforce training for the academy, or you want to come back every five years and blackout while watching a football game.

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:16:57] There's a common understanding now that the relationship between the learner and the institution needs to be value-based, and our value primarily is as a provider of learning experiences and a provider of intellectual growth. Our role in providing the conduit to that intellectual growth has become increasingly important. This is the foundation of the principle of the 60-year curriculum, which is the idea that, if an individual is going to come back to an institution for a lifelong experience, we can't just be reactive and responsive. We need to be proactive in ensuring that individuals are seeing the right learning opportunities at the right time that are designed to help them achieve the goals that they're starting to unearth for themselves.

Jeff Cobb: [00:17:38] That's a great segue back a little bit towards that industry / workforce question that I had because you just referenced the 60-year curriculum and staying with learners throughout their lives and careers. We do a lot of work in the trade and professional association world. Traditionally, that has been their domain. Somebody joins a trade or professional association because they're in a career, and they're going to use that organization as a vehicle throughout their career. I think there's possibly a little bit of a tension there between universities now potentially playing that role—what the associations have traditionally played—but I think there's also fertile ground for collaboration, particularly when you're

talking about serving an industry or a profession, where you've got the association for that profession and collaborating with a university that has the intellectual firepower behind it. Are you seeing collaboration happen between associations and academia?

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:18:32] Absolutely, 100 percent. Because the reality of it is no one can be everything to everyone. I mentioned earlier how happy I am that we've got such a great college in our community. The reality of it is there's a fair amount of training for the manufacturing industry that we're simply not set up to do. But, at the same time, there's a fair amount of training and development that needs to happen for folks that are progressing in their careers that the college might not be as well set up to support as we are. And so, within our postsecondary field, we're recognizing that we've got roles to play, and this extends as well to the world of professional associations.

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:19:06] Now, I will be the first to admit—and my colleagues who are a part of trade and professional associations that I've spoken to will back me up on the fact—that our industry has not been great at partnering with trade and professional associations in the past. We've not been responsive. We haven't been reactive. We've believed that our role in educating people happens right at the start of their career. And so, for professional and trade associations, they've had no choice but to pivot to serving as the training provider and training facilitator and best practice hub and relational hub for their industries. Fortunately, we have a new wave of leader coming into the postsecondary space who recognizes, increasingly, the role that postsecondary institutions need to play in the practical delivery of high-value learning experiences for folks to progress in their careers. I'm here to say that you don't necessarily have to be everything to everyone if you don't want to be. If the role of the association in the realm of any given association is to be the provider of training, fantastic. That's great. That's going to be tailored, and it's going to be high-quality, and it's going to be based on years of experience. And that's tremendous.

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:20:17] But, if an association feels that they would rather be a relational hub and a best practice hub, and they would rather serve as a conduit of learning needs to a learning provider, as an industry, I would say we are starting to come out of the dark and recognize our responsibility in delivering that. So I think that's where we're starting to pivot, and I'm finding that colleagues in professional and trade associations are starting to see the value in that approach of positioning the university as a partner for your members' growth strategies. One thing that's becoming increasingly common, that we're talking about more and more with folks across industries is, as companies scale and grow, you have folks that have

worked on a shop floor or worked for years, for decades, potentially, who are now in leadership positions.

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:21:01] Have they been trained in how to lead people? Do they know how to read a budget? Do they know how to manage performance issues? Are they OSHA-certified? These are the kinds of things that partnering with a postsecondary institution can help to bridge those gaps and facilitate that scale. As the association evolves its role into a relational hub between the higher ed industry and the professional and trade communities that they represent, there's an opportunity for us all to be a little bit better at doing the things we're supposed to be doing while at the same time facilitating scale and growth. That can be really challenging when you're doing all things for all people.

Jeff Cobb: [00:21:39] Yes, I think that scale question is certainly an important one. I think the confidence, the authority in whatever the educational experience is, I think, is increasingly important if both sides—well, I'm making them sound like they're opposing—both parties involved can help each other with that. Because it's been clear to us in much of the work that we're doing and in a lot of the market research we're doing. I'd be interested to know what you're seeing—as continuing education has evolved, as the demand for and need for lifelong learning has evolved, both the learners and the employers have higher expectations than they used to. You've referenced value before. It takes time, and it takes money to invest in these educational experiences, and they want to know that it's actually had an impact—that it's actually moved the dial, that it's done something for them. What are you hearing or seeing along those lines?

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:22:32] I couldn't agree more. The reality of it is that the adult learner is a unique individual—and a very challenging individual to serve if you're not set up to do it. These are individuals that have significant competing priorities for their time, energy, and attention. There are folks that are very aware of the importance of job security and job progression, but, at the same time, they have extremely high standards for digital experience and service. I think this is historically where postsecondary institutions may have missed the mark on serving adults in the past. There's this belief that the experience that we provide for an 18-year-old, historically, should be good enough for an adult, where the reality is that an adult's not going to line up or wait in a queue to register for something because their perspective is, "If I'm giving you the money, why do I have to line up to do that?" They think and act like consumers. And so, for continuing education divisions, we specialize in serving learners *as* customers while at the same time ensuring that their educational experience is meeting the mark of an educational experience. We have to compartmentalize the customer experience and

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the student experience, and we have to ensure both those things operate at as high a quality as possible.

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:23:47] The learning experience as well has to be foundationally different. The principles of andragogy, which is the education of adults, are completely different than the principles of pedagogy, which are the principles of educating children. The way that we approach the learning experience, the way that we construct a learning experience, the way that we facilitate communication and collaboration, not just between learners but also between learners and their instructors, is totally different. And that's really intentional. We're adopting more seamless online experiences. We're adopting shorter, stackable courses, and that's because these are things that meet the needs of an adult learner who has very limited time at their disposal and extremely high expectations for distinct outcomes that they're expecting to achieve. This is where as a continuing studies division here at Western University and broadly as an industry segment, where professional, continuing, and online education divisions have a unique role to play—if more and more adults are going to be pursuing learning experiences so that they can progress their careers, so that they can keep up with the pace of change that's happening in their industries, we're poised and ready to serve those individuals, and we have a mandate to do so.

Jeff Cobb: [00:25:08] Where would you say we are with digital learning experiences at this point? Obviously, online has been around for a long time. It got a huge boost because of COVID, and people who didn't want to go online suddenly had to. But I think there's still a little bit of a sense out there that maybe online isn't completely living up to its promise in terms of what the experience is like, what the quality is like. What's your perspective on it?

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:25:34] Yes, it's an interesting question. I think, if it's intentionally designed, you won't run into those issues. The biggest problem—and this is something we covered on The EvoLLLution. Very shortly after the pandemic hit, we pivoted our entire editorial calendar to content related to adapting to the closures, adapting to COVID, adapting to the need for online learning. Very early on in that series, a leader named Sasha Thackaberry—who, at the time, I believe was at LSU, and she's now leading a company affiliated with D2L called SkillsWave—but, at the time, she was leading online continuing education at LSU. She said, "Be careful. Because what we're doing right now is not online education. It's remote learning. And, if we tell people that this emergency remote education is akin to distance and online learning in terms of quality, in terms of product, and in terms of focus, we're going to do ourselves a disservice." Frankly, that's largely what happened. We had a lot of people taking

their first what they felt was an online learning experience that did not facilitate peer-to-peer interaction, did not facilitate peer-to-instructor interaction. It was just a lecture on Zoom.

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:26:50] Their feeling was that that was what online learning was. The reality of it is that's not what online learning is at all. And so more people experienced the capacity for flexible, on-your-schedule, in-your-location-of-choice learning, which is fantastic. I think it opened the door to people to be more curious about whether they could stack an online learning experience into their lives or stack an online learning experience into their degree program. But the experience of a Zoom lecture is not an online learning experience, and we, as an industry, have a bridge to cross on that topic in terms of highlighting to folks what online learning really is. It's something I'm particularly concerned about as younger audiences progress to college and beyond, who maybe were in grade five, six, or seven with the shift to online learning, or rather with the shift to remote learning. And, as they enter college and as they enter their careers, hopefully, they will not feel threatened or frustrated by the potential of online learning because of their experience through COVID. But I can fully understand that might be a hill we have to climb with that demographic.

Jeff Cobb: [00:28:03] We've gotten into technology, so I have to ask about artificial intelligence. I cannot not ask about that.

Speaker4: [00:28:10] Yes, it's about that time.

Jeff Cobb: [00:28:11] What's your perspective on AI? Certainly, it will change the delivery and the experience of learning, so I'd love your perspective on that. But also the need for learning—what we're going to need to learn, how we're going to need to learn. What's your thinking about AI at this point?

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:28:26] Technology is completely reshaping every component of every industry, and generative AI and the rapid advances in machine learning are only going to contribute to that. McKinsey has—this was a report from years ago, I think, 2017 or 2018 that's been recently refreshed—but their expectation was that by 2030, about 30 percent of working tasks would be able to be automated with existing technology. Now, those are not jobs. And I think this is where the automation train really freaks people out. We're not saying 30 percent of jobs won't exist by 2030; we're saying 30 percent of working tasks won't exist by 2030 because they'll be automated. That means suddenly you have 30 percent more time to be a human. So the challenge is there's a fair number of jobs where about 30 percent of the focus is manual and

repeatable tasks—highly manual, highly repeatable, highly automatable tasks that take a third of every day.

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:29:29] As those things become automated, the question becomes, "How do you fill that 30 percent of your week?" Where we start to think about the value of a professional, continuing, and online education, where we think about the value of a learning experience, it's really in how do we become more human? How do we make sure that our human skills are front and center for the purpose of doing more human-specific work in the era where 30 percent of our tasks are automated? In terms of what that translates to, prompts are a really easy place to start. Digital media literacy, really important. When we think about a lot of the skills that are going to be necessary for humans in a digital era, we're talking about a lot of the things that are core to a liberal arts curriculum if I'm totally honest. Synthesis, the ability to analyze, the ability to criticize, the ability to communicate effectively—these things are core to our capacity to be human, and I think those topics are going to become more and more important, frankly, as we go forward.

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:30:37] Now, from the postsecondary side, we have a bit of a challenge on keeping pace, not in terms of the development of durable skills. We arguably have been building and shaping durable skills and learners for over a millennium. We're pretty good on that. But, when it comes to how do we keep curricula at the pace of technological change, I think there's a philosophical shift that we have to enact there because there's a core principle here around, again, the 60-year curriculum, which is having a more concrete sense of where the institution has expertise and where the institution needs to partner for expertise. In this new era, the university is not a gatekeeper of knowledge, and, as the online world, as digital access to information widens and widens, our ability to make our bread and butter off gatekeeping access to knowledge will reduce because knowledge in and of itself is highly accessible. So then there's a question of contextualizing knowledge. There's a question of verifying and validating knowledge. There's a question of curating knowledge. And, all of a sudden, our role starts to evolve from being a place where knowledge is formed and knowledge is transferred to a place where knowledge is contextualized, and our role shifts to that of a guide through the world of knowledge.

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:31:57] We have a responsibility to orient ourselves away from, exclusively, the delivery of content to more learner relationship management. How do we understand the learner's needs? How do we understand the needs of the learner in the context of a changing labor market? And how do we facilitate access to the right learning experience at the right time that's going to allow them to build the skills, the knowledge, and the competency

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that they need to be successful in the thing that they want to succeed in? That's a very different job. It's a very different job. But, to a certain extent, it's incumbent upon us to find the right partners who can offer the series of courses or the series of programming that they're able to keep pace with because that's their specialty—and ensuring that that learner has appropriate experience. And ourselves going through and validating the quality of the offering itself. This isn't a white-labeling, hands-off experience. But our role can't be recreating the wheel. Our role instead needs to be being a car. The wheels already exist; we're just going to put them together in a very unique way to provide the learner the experience they need. Some of that might be stuff that we develop internally, but some of it might be creating access to things that we didn't create but that we believe in.

Jeff Cobb: [00:33:15] In terms of your own lifelong learning, continuing education, how do you approach that? What are your habits and practices that keep you on the top of your game in life and work?

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:33:26] Well, you're making an assumption that I'm anywhere near the top of my game, but I'll take it. First and foremost, I do believe in informal learning, which seems ironic, but I spend a huge amount of time learning from my mentors. I'm very fortunate to have a really passionate and supportive group of leaders who seem to care about what happens with my career and seem willing to give me advice. I'm an active member of our industry association—going back to the comment earlier about the role of industry associations in sharing best practice and creating avenues for professionals to learn and to grow—but specifically UPCEA, which was formerly known as the University Professional and Continuing Education Association. Here in Canada, we also have an association called CAUCE, which is the Canadian Association for University Continuing Education. I'm incredibly passionate and incredibly fortunate, rather, to be surrounded by passionate colleagues who believe in our work and who are willing to share best practice and share experiences.

Amrit Ahluwalia: [00:34:25] For more formal, more technical learning, it's really a matter of finding the right learning experience for the thing that I'm trying to solve. I tend to, as any consumer, identify a broad challenge that I'm trying to fix and then take both informal and formal approaches to bridging that gap. Some of those might be chatting with folks about the problem I'm having and then distilling that problem into a set of skills and a set of culture shifts and then trying to practice executing the culture shifts with the feedback that I've been given and then looking for the right learning experience for me to tackle the skill gap. So far that's worked for me relatively well.

Celisa Steele: [00:35:12] Amrit Ahluwalia is the executive director of Continuing Studies at Western University, host of the podcast EdUp PCO, and founder of The EvoLLLution. In the show notes at leadinglearning.com/episode433, you'll find a link to Continuing Studies at Western University, The EvoLLLution, and EdUp PCO, as well as a link to Amrit's profile on LinkedIn.

Jeff Cobb: [00:35:36] At leadinglearning.com/episode433, you'll also find options for subscribing to the podcast. We'd be grateful if you would subscribe if you haven't yet, as subscriptions give us some insight into the impact of the podcast.

Celisa Steele: [00:35:49] We'd also be grateful if you would rate us on Apple Podcasts or wherever you listen, especially if you find the Leading Learning Podcast valuable. Those ratings and reviews help us show up when people search for content on leading a learning business.

Jeff Cobb: [00:36:02] And please help us grow the Leading Learning community. At leadinglearning.com/episode433, there's a link to find us on LinkedIn.

Celisa Steele: [00:36:10] Thanks again, and see you next time on the Leading Learning Podcast.

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