

Learning Uncut Episode 62
Luke Warwick – Digital Skills Uplift at PwC
Hosted by Michelle Ockers



Michelle Ockers:

I first heard about the PwC global digital skills uplift at an event seven months ago, and have been searching for someone to join me to share this story ever since. I'm so glad I persisted as this is such a well-designed change initiative. I'm joined by Luke Warwick who is a digital change consultant leading the implementation of PwC's Australian digital transformation. The initiative started in the US and has been picked up and rolled out globally with some regional customisation. What first piqued my interest was the digital fitness app which provides a self-assessment plus a range of resources related to each element of skills in the app. PwC has made this app freely available since the start of COVID and I strongly recommend you use it to explore your own digital fitness. You can download it using the link in the show notes.

The app is really a way to get everyone across the organisation engaged with first level of the digital skills development program, called the Academy. The next level up, Accelerators, targets 1-3% of employees to develop more advanced digital skills. Anyone can apply to be an Accelerator and they will remain in their current role, spread right across the organisation and connected through an internal community. Listen to hear why Luke describes them as the trojan horse of digital change in the organisation.

As I spoke with Luke it dawned on me that while we were discussing digital skill development this is also a great example of building a learning culture through an organisational-wide change initiative.

Michelle Ockers:

Welcome to the podcast, Luke. It's lovely to have you here.

Luke Warwick:

And thank you for having me. I'm excited to be here.

Michelle Ockers:

I have been chasing down this story for about six or seven months. So I'm thrilled that I found the right person in PwC to talk to me about it. Now, PwC is a global firm. Most of our listeners are going to know who you are, but just for the sake of completeness, could you introduce us very briefly to PwC and to your role in the organization?

Luke Warwick:

As you mentioned, PwC is a global firm, a global network of firms to be technically correct. And I work within Australia and our businesses is traditional accounting, which is probably most known for, but also modern-day consulting works. And so my role is within the chief digital office for Australia. And I also look after Asia-Pacific region. And what that means in reality is I led our digitization transformation program from Australia, and I'm now taking those skills and helping out Asia-Pacific region to build out their own local digitization programs as well.

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Michelle Ockers:

Right. And so the digitization program or the digital skills enablement program that we're going to talk about today, is it a global program? I had the understanding it was a global program. But you're talking there as though it's kind of being adopted at different rates across regions?

Luke Warwick:

Probably a symptom of our corporate construct. Rather than being one global firm, we are a global network of firms. So each firm in each country is a separate entity with a separate leadership and all that comes alongside that. What that means is a true global program would never exist, but this is the first almost global program we've brought to life and it's around aligning ourselves digitally, really focusing on the end client experience, but also our internal people experience. And that's why it really kicked off in our US firm, they were the first mover, I would say. And then from everyone's experience hearing about the story there, it got brought up to the leadership levels across the globe, and from that became both local projects, and Australia moved ahead of the global program, and the eventual culmination of the global program being put together.

Michelle Ockers:

It's a really nice example of kind of the diffusion of something across the network as well.

Luke Warwick:

And the excitement behind it, because the moment someone's passionate about it, there's no barriers, right?

Michelle Ockers:

Yes, absolutely. Let's take a step back, go bigger picture. Let's talk about the bigger context of the skills challenge, which we have been talking about in sort of people and culture circles, in business leadership circles for a number of years now, and which I think COVID has just made worse because of the restrictions on movement internationally. There was a recent PwC report on skills, which will pop in the show notes, which looked at Australian CEOs. It was an Australian based report. And one of the things I noted was that 78% of Australian CEOs, so that the availability of key skill was a top threat to growth, yet only 28% of employees said that their employer was providing them with upskilling in areas that were relevant to their role. Do you have any comments on this kind of this global skills challenge and I guess the PwC view on what's happening with the skills shortage either globally or in Australia?

Luke Warwick:

Just to say that it's exactly why we started upskill program for the Australian firm and globally. Just to add another stat in there, 77% of people, employees are ready to upskill, they want it. Converse to the 28% who have it available to them right now, I think it's an interesting gap, right? And we describe our skills journey for PwC Australia as bridging the authenticity gap. We're telling our clients, "You need to upskill in all these wonderful areas around digital and really focusing on the data skills," which is what why focused. In order to do that and remain credible, also the firm had to invest quite heavily in building the skills ourselves.

Michelle Ockers:



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Yeah, absolutely. I can see the connection there between the inside and the outside for the organization. That piece of data you shared there, the 77% are ready to upskill. Often I hear people in learning and development talking about people not being motivated to learn, or they don't have time to learn. Maybe we're not tapping into the things they want to learn or the way they want to learn, because if you can tap into motivation and people are ready and willing to upskill and we make it easy for them to do so and engaging for them to do so. I think there is an appetite of people generally, particularly in the professions recognize the imperative to keep the skills current, particularly in an area like digital, right?

Luke Warwick:

100%. And just to add one other exciting word there is keep them engaged and excited and passionate about what they're going to be doing in the future. I think that 77% I quoted came from people realizing that their roles will be disrupted and even the new term, the five-year horizon. And they want to now be empowered to go off and create the new skills and the new roles and take it on to move into the future, because they know it's coming, as we all do.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. You just spoke about an authenticity gap for PwC that you wanted to bridge, how has it recognized that you had a gap?

Luke Warwick:

That was probably something that came from the global conversation. We're talking about how we become more data driven. I mean, we've touched data probably for longer than most regular corporates around the world. And so when I say the authenticity gap is more, we need to be at the peak so that we can then advise clients who were just asking about their journeys. We want to be driving the kind of positive engagement with data and big data, because that is the future. I mean, you got to look at the big tech data companies like your Netflix or your Facebooks to realize that that's where the big opportunities are going to lie in the future. And so this is us preparing for that, and both in advisory but also in our internal strategy.

Michelle Ockers:

Right. And digital skills, we're talking about a digital skills agenda here. What does that term mean, digital skills?

Luke Warwick:

It's such a broad one, isn't it? I know we could use for anything from what we're doing right now over a podcast, that's additional skills in a way. But where we focused the foundations in PwC was around data skills. So everything from understanding data constructs and file formats, all the kind of the foundational bordering side of things through to how you cleanse those data, how you then wrangle that into what was meaningful and visualize that for valuable insights together with a light touch into then the opportunities for automation moving forward. And all that together is the kind of the core skill as we put together for our kind of masses, I would say.

Michelle Ockers:

Right. And I think we'll come back to skills and what those skills look like when we get into the solution, because it focuses very heavily around a set of clustered skills, I think the solution. You've got this network arrangement. Your organization operates as a network, something has been tried in the US, and clearly there's some interest in that. In terms of sponsorship and driving an initiative forward and stakeholders, is there an overall

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organizational sponsor for this initiative? Where does that sit and who are some of the key stakeholders involved?

Luke Warwick:

I'd say the overall sponsor is probably each territory senior partner or the CEO of the firm, because that's where it really came to life. There was a wonderful meeting of minds in the US I think in 2019. People heard the US story and said, "Hey, this is exactly what we've all been looking for, this is exactly what we all need to be doing." And that then spilled out interest in network firms and so for Australia that's built down into the creation of our digital transformation program.

Luke Warwick:

And to my boss, Vishy Narayanan, and he is our Chief Digital Officer. And so he has the true sponsorship role for this moving forward. And it's his job for good and bad to be coordinating with all our lines of service within the firm of Australia. We have our three lines of service, assurance, consulting and financial advisory, who all have their different identities and different challenges and different opportunities as well. So trying to create that into both the one firm narrative and strategy, but also respecting that each line of service has its own required skills and certain required opportunities that would want to drive forward.

Michelle Ockers:

Right. You're actually in the digital team. Are you a Learning and Development specialist?

Luke Warwick:

I don't know. I'm surrounded by specialists, I would say.

Michelle Ockers:

Did you partner with learning and development or did the digital era of the business run with this relatively independently? What was the role of L&D in this?

Luke Warwick:

I think definite partnership, but it was driven by the digital team initially. The transformation program was built out in digital function. So sorry, I will just add to that. We have a core training L&D team within digital, who partner even closer on their own level with L&D. And so they have a real specialism in L&D even in digital setting.

Michelle Ockers:

Understood. It was business driven to a large degree, but with the specialist in learning and development, who within the digital business unit being part of putting it together, driving it.

Luke Warwick:

Correct.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. A federated model is what we call that I think.

Luke Warwick:

I love it.

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Michelle Ockers:

Talk to us at a high level what the solution looks like.

Luke Warwick:

Solution in terms of the whole package?

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. Just like at a high level, what are the pieces that come together? This is about doing digital upskilling across the organization. What are the components of the solution? Maybe just walk us through it, if I were too as a participant, go right the solution from start to end. What would that journey look like for me?

Luke Warwick:

Perfect. I might take it up one level just to start and then dive into the upskill.

Michelle Ockers:

Great.

Luke Warwick:

Our transmission strategy fits into what we call three core pillars. It's learn, work and share, and it's about building a place to learn, creating a place to work, and then providing a place to share. And I talked a bit more about how that all needs to get in a minute. But the learning component is really what we're talking about today, and that's the upskilling. And that started back in 2019 with our digital fitness application that was launched to our people. And that was really the first level of engagement into pushing people in their awareness of digital skills. And it's a really fun gamified application where all the people in our firm were encouraged to download and use. You do an assessment, gives you a baseline score, and then you build your plan to increase that score.

Luke Warwick:

And it was driven by role models at the partnership level who had an actual target to reach. And I think they weren't allowed to go to the partner conference if they hadn't achieved a certain target. And I think it was a loose target, but it definitely inspired the right behaviours. And so the skills that came up there were about digital bravery, being ... what's the word? I lost my word there. Being willing to express vulnerability as well. I know I don't know this, but known unknown is almost better than the unknown unknowns. And so that really built a kind of openness and digital bravery culture of the firm, and built the foundations for our future learning pathways. Then that was 2019, 2020 we introduced what was called our Digital Academy Program. And that was intended for the 80% to 100% of our firm.

Luke Warwick:

And it really takes them from that foundational skills around data and analytics and kind of pushes it up to intermediate, but in a very practical experiential way. Pre COVID that was a two day in person event being done by meaningful team. And what that means is everyone from that team's partner down to the graduates who've come in just that week perhaps, working through their training together. And that was really important for the cultural shift required and permission to innovate and change their day to day on the outcome of this. And we've had really positive feedback on that. Two-day face to face, really focusing on application of skills as much as it's about learning of skills, so very case study driven, the outcome of which, say you or I Michelle would attend the Academy. The ideal situation is we learned the skills.

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Luke Warwick:

We applied them through structured case studies, but whilst we're doing that, we're building what's called innovation journal, ideation journal. So that when we walk out of that room on the Wednesday afternoon, Thursday morning, we walk back to our jobs and we know exactly what we can do immediately to keep those skills going and keep our innovation flowing. And that's the real power of it is that outcoming plan. And then on that level what we built as well was the Digital Accelerator Program. And that was much more targeted, so that was maybe 1% of our firm. And that's probably a stat, the global network of firms have all kind of stuck to between 1% and 3% of population being a target.

Luke Warwick:

And that's much more deeper knowledge. So that's a cohort who come together. They have what's called a lift-off session where they ... again, pre COVID it was a two day event where they came together and they did lots of softer skills trainings, I hate that term, I'm sure everyone does. But it's just the broader training that requires them to be set up for success. They then go off and spend six months doing an online program of training, where they start off doing core things around business analysis. So where they get that core skills foundation. And then from then it's choose your own adventure. Some would go and specialize in machine learning. Others would go and specialize in AI. Others just go deeper into DNA and data analytics. And the outcome of that is they become our network of change agents in the business.

Luke Warwick:

And so that has been really called out as a key linchpin to our success is building that network of individuals, who are there both to drive change and be the Trojan Horse into our business, but also to be the SNI network of people could go to. Say if I sit within a certain line of service, I know my accelerators and I can go and talk to them and say, "Hey, I've got this problem coming out of this Academy. I want to tackle it. I've got 80% of skills, the last 20% is just baffling me. Can we work together on this?" And that's what we're building.

Michelle Ockers:

A couple of observations there, Luke, you spoke about that higher level framework about learn, work, and share. And you said, "Well, this is all about learn." It's really not. What you've just described is a very well thought out strategy about people being able to go, people going through as a whole team, which makes it easier. The environment is set up then for them to go back as a team and say, "What are we going to do with this?" They go back with the ideation journal, having been building, ready to roll their sleeves up and work with what they've learned out of the Academy program straight away.

Michelle Ockers:

And then in terms of their share, obviously they're sharing within the team, but then you're very deliberately planting change agents right across the business. You're not saying we're going to skill up some internal experts in a centralized team. It's like we're going to distribute people with those expert skills right across the organization to actually spread and support and enable better application of these digital skills right across the organization.

Luke Warwick:

100%, yeah, completely spot on. And then in support of that, we have kind of 20% of the program is technology infrastructure. We're building environments which support that working component to make sure they have access to the tools immediately after Academy, the environments they can work in. But then the sharing component is then probably the

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most powerful. We've built what's called the PwC digital lab, and it's kind of based format. It is a micro innovation marketplace.

Luke Warwick:

So you and I Michelle might come out of an Academy. We might partner with our friend Ivan, who is just on an accelerator program to build a micro innovation asset. And that could be as simple as a visualization, the data, or it could be a full end to end automation workflow. We've got that, it suits our purpose, but we think if we tweak it, 10% is actually applicable to a wider group of people. We helped them on governance and curation team within PwC, can push that through and have it hosted on the digital lab. And then our friends in other lines of service, or even with our own business can go in, download, even adapt for their purpose and then use that further. And it's about scaling those innovations. That one idea that you and I had during our training Academy, just exponentially grows its impact.

Michelle Ockers:

This is a really great example of the kind of mechanisms that you want to put in place to be a learning organization to be able to spread insight, to spread knowledge, to spread new actions and innovations right across the organization so the organization as a whole is more agile, more responsive, more adaptive. And then I imagine if people take those micro innovations and then they adapt them and improve them or modify them in some way, customize and tailor them for some other purpose, and actually back into the marketplace.

Luke Warwick:

Yeah, 100%. And one thing we don't want to touch on too much today is the motivation side that you mentioned earlier. We have a recognition program where someone will be awarded kudos for their efforts. And since they would ... say if they have an asset or a solution's been shared widely, they get recognized as being a top innovator. And that comes through recognition from the top leadership of the firm or their lead partner. And it just brings it with the surface of kind of recognition and reward, but without kind of the dirty side of rewards like paying people for things.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. Again, a really nice example of a behavioural change and a signalling to the organization of the kind of behaviours and contributions that are valued, right?

Luke Warwick:

Yes. Totally.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. Lovely. The app is really fascinating, and I don't know for how much longer, but at the moment PwC has made the app available for free. We've got a link in the show notes to that, and I have gone on and done my own self-assessment. And I was pleasantly surprised by a lot of what I saw in the app. Let's take a closer look at the app and where it fits into the solution. You're presented with a self-assessment. Let's talk about what you're self-assessed against. Because earlier on when we were talking about what is a digital skill, you said there's a real focus on data skills. But it's not all about technical skills with data. And as soon as anyone opens the app, which I encourage everyone to go and do, it's really fascinating, and it is a fun little app to use. As soon as you open the app and start doing the self-assessment, you're presented with four different categories in the self-assessment. You want to talk to us about those four and why they were all important, why they're there.

Luke Warwick:



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The categories of learning, I think it was really called out in the app itself. I'm just trying to remember the exact titles.

Michelle Ockers:

I'll read them off, I've got my assessment here. The first one was behaviour, which is broken down into a number of categories, then mindset, relationships and skills. Only one of those is actually about technical skills. The others are about working with others around your mindset, your confidence, your mindset around experimentation and the behaviours, what you actually do.

Luke Warwick:

Totally. And it was extrapolated out to our upskilling program. This much is about skills and technology. The rest of it is around behaviour, culture, the mindset, the mission you touched on already. And then the relationships you build inside your firm to then grow that out. And so the buckets I think are really around what drives a positive change, comes down into those pillars. And if the app itself has ... I would call magic in the back-end because I'm not the technical person behind it. It will then train and provide guidance on how you can grow each of those pillars during your upskilling part of the app.

Luke Warwick:

The app itself is more focused on awareness of what is out in the world and what you don't know. And going back to my earlier comment, the known unknowns are always better than an unknown unknown, because it leads you to know where to target. And in our internal plan, this was around building the awareness and desire for more. That's the purpose that they serve. And the four core pillars I think just support that across the board in terms of a change transformation program.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. I did a Learning Uncut episode, oh, a long time ago now, it was within the first six months of Learning Uncut. So about two years ago with a lady called Dr. Anne Bartlett-Bragg, who is amongst other things, she is a practitioner but also a researcher with Sydney University. And she'd been working on a digital literacy framework and certainly network skills, participatory mindset was all part of that. I'll link back to that as well, because I think there's some interesting parallels between the skills that you've pulled out in her digital literacy framework, which was based on a whole stack of research. And those behaviours and the mindset are just as critical as the technical skills, right, essential to have the confidence to actually apply the skills.

Luke Warwick:

Yes, totally agree. And possibly even more than the technical themselves is the mindset, and mission and the desire to go off and change what you do day to day.

Michelle Ockers:

And it's not just about being confident to experiment, to roll your sleeves up and learn with the technology, but also how you collaborate with others around technology. That's a really strong element in that assessment process.

Luke Warwick:

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Yes, and a huge element in any transformation when it comes to data skills or even digital skills more broadly is that collaboration effort. We don't work in an environment that allows the silos anymore. We work in an environment that requires constant iterative building and the iterative development of anything, whether it is an app build, or as simple as a slide deck. We know nowadays that just creating something by yourself no longer is appropriate. It's about back and forth collaboration to get to the outcome. And it's all about collaboration.

Michelle Ockers:

There's a couple of nice other additional features in the app, which I was pleasantly surprised by. You talked about the gamification. What does the gamification look like?

Luke Warwick:

The gamification for us was really around the scores and getting that to the surface. I think as I mentioned earlier, we tried to build the culture of digital bravery and being able to say, "Actually my score wasn't great, but here's how I'm choosing to address and adapt that to get a better score." And that became very visible in our firm and through our internal sharing portals. We really encourage them to share their stories, talk about what they were going to do differently. And just anything they noticed that perhaps wasn't known to them before.

Luke Warwick:

And I will keep coming back to the knowns, because when you don't know something, you would never think about it. But this brings it to the surface and makes an individual realize that, oh, actually I'm not as digitally savvy as I thought I was, but I can be if I do this, this and this. And then this builds your awareness and desire to step into kind of deeper upskill. And that's where our Academy program came in to provide that service to the 80% to 100% of our firm.

Michelle Ockers:

If I'm just using the app, how do I increase my score? Do I just go back in next week and redo the assessment, and because I know what the questions are like I can get a higher score? Is that what it is?

Luke Warwick:

No, the questions change. You can't game the system. But you're right, so each week a new assessment will come through the app. And what you were encouraged to do is through that you build your own plan, and based on what you want to achieve you can have a kind of a top level plan where I want to do 40 minutes of learning each week, and then try and upskill, improve my score, or perhaps lighter touch, maybe 10 minutes or so each week. And the aim is that through that experience, and you're just touching on content and articles and videos from different places all over the world to upskill in general digital skills. And then you come to that assessment and you get another go and you can improve it. I believe, and I can't say this completely spot on, but I think you can improve by up to 60 points each week.

Michelle Ockers:

Right. I'll see how I go with that then. I'm feeling motivated, I've got to say. That's for the individual, there's data being generated that's driving motivation, helping to point them to where they might want to focus their skill development. In terms of using the data that's generated out of the app at the back-end, the aggregated data, who's using that and what are they using it for?

Luke Warwick:

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In terms of the PwC story, we had anonymized data just to show general trends. We didn't track anything at individual level. It was all about just seeing where the trends were in the scores, where perhaps people sat across the business to kind of get that first look and feel. For the individual app that's out in the market right now, we don't track individual scores. It's more about how you can track yourself. And so for instance, you wouldn't be gamified against another person because there's no way to link their profiles. It's really competition with yourself.

Michelle Ockers:

Right. Let's just focus on the internal PwC data then. What sort of questions were you asking of the data? What sort of insights were you wanting to gain from the data coming out of the app as the PwC staff completed it?

Luke Warwick:

Obviously we were looking for people to start it and then slowly improve across the course of the financial year. But what we really wanted to see was the actual softer side of it, were people going to take their scores and share them and talk about their story and what they personally wanted to do. Because it's all well and good providing the skills and providing the support and training. But if people aren't open to the learning, it's very hard to break down the barrier. This was really about bringing it back to the surface and having people to share it so that we were actually tracking a lot on with the metrics in our sharing sites about people's stories, their experiences, and anything that brings light from the app itself. We're going to encourage that sharing. And so that's what more we were tracking. The data was more about number of completions. We wanted everyone to at least touch the app, have a go, the typical Australian to then give it a red-hot go.

Michelle Ockers:

It's about engagement adoption with the app, but really fascinating that what you were really interested in was the sharing behaviours as part of that learn work share, and the cultural shift that that was generating.

Luke Warwick:

100%.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, very nice. Let's take a look at the Academy then. As a team, do I have to wait for someone to tap me on the shoulder for my partner to say, "Hey, our whole team's off. How do I get involved with the Academy?"

Luke Warwick:

It was a bit of a mixed bag actually. Again, our different lines of service have different identities and different approaches to how they do this. The majority of people, like you said, it's the meaningful team, we would structure and schedule that. So at point in time, say next week, Michelle and I working the same line of service, and the same team working on the same projects, we're going to go through this Academy. But our consulting business has slightly different approaches to work, and they did a kind of an opt in. They got a broader mix of people coming together, not from just one team, still aiming to keep teams together, but it was a bit more varied.

Michelle Ockers:

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And it was, we talk about the post COVID world or the mid COVID world in a moment. Pre COVID, you were saying it was two days in person. What did people do in those two days? What sort of learning experience were they taken through?

Luke Warwick:

In those two days, the pre COVID world that I hate to say, it was that you were grouped into tables with people who would know each other but not be best friends. They're not people who work every day, just bring a bit of a breadth of knowledge. And the core parts of the first half of the day is around, like I said, the fundamentals, their structured data. How the data works in our firm, the way in which you construct the data for the best outcomes. And then the skills they're going to learn, and really the approaches they're going to take to take data, cleanse and wrangle that into what's meaningful. Visualize it, analyse it, and then build valuable insights. And what story can you tell with that data on the output of this is most important element of all of it. The skills are core to the outcome. The actual outcome is how do I create a valuable data insight for my client or my internal team.

Michelle Ockers:

And you're saying a lot of it was case study based. You also talked about the ideation journal. Talk to us a bit more about that ideation journal. What was that all about? How did that work? What was the expectation of people during the two days and then coming out of the two days?

Luke Warwick:

It's actually a really good point. I think anyone who does anything day to day, you have ideas pop in your head. You walk past them, you go, "Oh, actually that would work in this situation." We do it for our home deco. We do it for our home renovations. We do it for ... Same thing for our innovation, and the culture we want to drive. Whilst I'm going through this case study for manipulating data to visualize some kind of insight. I'm thinking, actually, there's this client I'm currently working on. And what we're trying to do is show and insight through this way. And they actually want to understand a deeper view of their internal accounting business.

Luke Warwick:

I actually think I can take this and build something that's going to really delight that customer. And so I can put that down in my ideation journal as an idea that I'm going to follow up on, and this talks to the outcomes that we talked about earlier. On day one outside of the Academy, I'm going to go and do that, because I know there's value to it. And I know it's going to bring a delight and value to the client as well.

Michelle Ockers:

We can do that in a notebook, right? If we're a participant somewhere or we're having an immersive experience, we can carry around a notebook. Or if we like to take notes digitally, we can do that. Did you provide a specific format? I mean, how did you just ... or was it just a case of, hey, keep your notes somewhere as you go through and spark ideas.

Luke Warwick:

A little bit of both, you don't want to create a regimen where they have to do a certain way. And so I think, again, pre COVID was almost a bit easier because we're in the room, you're prompting through facilitating to bring out the ideas and say, "Oh, you should write that down, it's a great idea." Post COVID became different, a bit more structured. And we can talk about that when you want to move on to post COVID.

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Michelle Ockers:

Let's do that now. What happened with the program when COVID hit in March?

Luke Warwick:

We had a nice long pause whilst we regrouped, and we had our L&D professionals working their socks off. And we turned the skills component into e-learn. So a set of five chapters on e-learn content, aiming to achieve the same outcomes of the skills component of the Academy. And that gets paired with what we now term an innovation workshop, and that's really the application. And so you do your ... I think plus or minus whatever, 12 hours of learning through skills, and it is heavy, but it's engaging. And that's your prerequisite to going into the innovation Academy. And through innovation Academy, through using the case studies and the hands-on datasets and all the different tools that they want to use, that's where it really comes to life.

Luke Warwick:

And so the innovation ... the ideation journal comes up in that flow. And that's where it becomes a bit more formal because this is a virtual setting now, we are on a Google Hangout, we are talking, the breakout rooms are now virtual breakout rooms. And the ideation journal, we use Google Jam Board. People could still be making their own notes as well, but what we try and do at the end of the session is collate a list of the ideas together to share the outcome. So team A has gone through their Academy. It was this many participants, this many ideas generated and this much excitement with a picture. And we're trying to get that flow as we go through the academies now virtually.

Michelle Ockers:

Which format do you, or is the organization finding more effective, the face to face, or now that you've got this digital format. I think given the choice, if there were no constraints, which would you use and why?

Luke Warwick:

Personally I'm always a face to face person, because I'm a full extrovert, I bounce off people's energy. I like the ideas that come together as you are face to face, and you get aspects of that through the virtual world, but I'm not everyone. There are people out there who actually love to be behind the screen, it's their safest space and they will engage more in that environment. And so I think it swings and roundabouts, it's ... there's both positives in both. I think the business case of a virtual setting is a bit easier because it's chunked down. It's not two days out of the business back to back. The e-learn is self-paced, you can do it in your own time. And then it's just, I say just, it's a half day workshop, the innovation workshop. It's a bit of a less of a barrier to overcome to come to two days when it's spread across say a week.

Michelle Ockers:

But time and efficacy, so the investment of time versus the efficacy are different questions, right. It's just interesting, I think there'll be a lot of playing around with this and investigating and figuring it out as workplaces, physical workplaces open up again in coming months / years. It's something I'm very curious about. Is there anything else you wanted to add about the Academy before we take a closer look at accelerators?

Luke Warwick:

I'm trying to think. No, not yet. I think if any comes up I might pop back to it.

Michelle Ockers:



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Okay. Fantastic. How does the accelerator program look? You're saying it's 1% to 3% of the firm are targeted. How are people identified for accept to the accelerators?

Luke Warwick:

And this is where we probably differ around the world actually. Again, accelerators is a global concept. All our network firms are adopting the accelerator program as well. And they are all adopting it slightly varied to suit their own needs. In Australia what we did is we did a nomination process. We put out an application portal and we said to everyone in the firm, "Hey, this is awesome program, great thing to be part of, come and be additional accelerator."

Luke Warwick:

The application was a kind of a three-stage online application. There's some questions they have to answer, some behavioural mindset quiz questions they have to answer. And then they had to submit kind of digital asset and it could be anything. It could be, "Hey, I've created this amazing app and it's going to change everything." Or I've just done this visual, a visualization of what I can do or what I think is valued out of this program. And so we saw everything you could imagine in a digital kind of ... because again, it's a broad term, right? We saw some great examples. And so from that we create a short list and then they would be admitted to the program and then we kick off with the lift-off session.

Michelle Ockers:

It was people who were motivated and interested and it meant something to get through the selection process as well. There's already some sort of something special about being accepted for the program. And it wasn't just restricted to top talent or people at a certain level. It's kind of quite democratic in a way it approached access.

Luke Warwick:

Very much an open application, because what we didn't want to do is just have the same individuals who attracted all the time, who we know are high performers. We wanted to see what was hidden. That was a real target outcome for the program, more generally is tapping into what's out there that we don't know about, breaking down those silos of innovation. And so there might be someone who's in a really maybe left field role, but actually their core skills and the mindset they're going to bring to it is so powerful. Why ignore that? Breaking down those barriers, making it open to everyone. Making a bit of a campaign to get those people to apply as well was really important to us.

Michelle Ockers:

Once I'm accepted, what happens then? What do I go through in terms of the learning?

Luke Warwick:

Initially you get kind of a welcome to the program from your own leadership. So we try and make it very meaningful for each individual. So you were in assurance, your Assurance leadership welcome you, if you're in FA, ditto. That's kind of really key in the permission element and the ... you go into this and you are going to be our change agents. And that was set up at the front.

Luke Warwick:

And then in a pre COVID world, we did a two-day face-to-face event. So everyone around the country flew to Sydney for this immersive event, all around them as individuals. And we talk them through both what the role was going to entail. We had the leadership there to talk about why PwC is investing in these individuals to go and be these change agents. Our then

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CEO, Luke Sayers came and did a great kind of video on what this means to him personally, to really build the personal side of it all. Then over the next two days, they do kind of skills training application around agile ways of working, data storytelling, visualization, stuff that they get in the program in a detailed way but we want to bring out the bigger picture and the excitement as well, really focusing on excitement and engagement in the two day face to face.

Luke Warwick:

Following that they go off and they do what's called an intensive kind of period of learning. And again, that varied by business in our firm. Some did maybe a couple of days of intensive learning, others did maybe two, three weeks. That was to give them the head start on their online kind of learning program.

Luke Warwick:

That intensive learning period, regardless of whether it's two days or three weeks, is where they really get to hands on with the online programs. We used to provide Udacity to a team to do it with that, because we bought our own custom curriculum with them. But the outcome for an individual is that he earns nanodegrees. I'll come to that in a minute. The intensive period is just getting the head start. And they came together in the communities too. So say it's a team within financial advisory, they got together in a room in a building somewhere and work together to build that initial community, because community element of digital accelerator is really is the power behind it.

Luke Warwick:

Then you go off and your weekly structure, depending on what client work you're on, it's structured to suit that, but generally it was three days of engagement work, so your usual BAU stuff, one day of community time. And that was where you started to give back to your people like applying the skills, volunteering their time to different projects around the firm, and one day purely upskilling. And so I think I mentioned before the core of the program was around achieving the business analyst nanodegree, that would be able to do minimum requirement, you had to do that. And that could take anything from four weeks to three months, depending on individual things.

Luke Warwick:

But then from that point you choose your own adventure. And this really comes into individual choice. I might have a real passion for data analytics, and I want to go and learn SQL and databases and all that fascinating stuff I have no idea about. Or I'm going to go learn about AI or machine learning. And again, you do another full nanodegree in that component too, and that forms the program for that individual. And so throughout that, they are learning whilst applying day to day, but applying also in this community hours. So that's where they're going to work with their colleagues say as Academy graduates or even just people who are interested to know more.

Luke Warwick:

And what we've started doing more recently is showcasing the outcomes of our digital accelerators. We're now into our cohort three, I think lifting off in three weeks time. The accelerator is in cohort one, now done so much core stuff. We're just now showcasing and bring them to surfaces, to show what is possible and what is exciting around the firm.

Michelle Ockers:

Fantastic. And I assume the stuff that they're doing is going into that marketplace we talked about before as well.

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Luke Warwick:

Happy ending.

Michelle Ockers:

You mentioned nanodegrees, talk to us a little more about what a nanodegree is, the value of nanodegrees and using nanodegrees.

Luke Warwick:

Nanodegree is actually a term that came from Udacity, who is our provider. It is an external facing credential that me as an individual through the accelerated program can gain. It's not a PwC thing. It's not something only internally visible. It is something that if I left the firm tomorrow, I take with me. I can say on my LinkedIn profile, I have a nanodegree in machine learning.

Michelle Ockers:

Very good. We had an episode where we talked about Westpac's use of micro-credentials not so long ago actually. It's not quite the same as micro-credentials and workplace based micro-credentialing with an external partner. But in a similar way you get a qualification, a little qualification that you take with you and you as the individual can own, and it's evidence of your skillset. There's a clear value to the individual in that as well. Is there anything else you want to share about the accelerators? And maybe in terms of, we talked a little bit about their role, what does it mean to be an accelerator? How attractive is that? What's the value of being an accelerator?

Luke Warwick:

The role of accelerator is an interesting one, because again, that varies slightly around the globe and the application. In the US for example, as an accelerator, you left your role completely, you became an accelerator, and that was your role for a minimum two years, I think they called it tour of duty. In Australia we were really conscious about keeping our people close to the business and keeping it close to client work. We didn't want to step away completely from what they're already doing, which is where I took that split week model to three days a week they are still doing that BAU role, albeit with an accelerator lens.

Luke Warwick:

They're bringing something different to the table, but they're still doing their core work, that one day a week is the community element and then one day of upskilling. The role of them then is really that Trojan Horse back into the business, that change agent network, the disruptors, the innovators, and we can use all the buzz words on some, but the real thing is they're there to drive the behavioural change we want to see more broadly. You think about the combination of accelerators Academy and everything else together now. Accelerator is at 1%. They're there to support the masses through Academies to drive that cultural shift of innovation be the culture of experimentation, that's probably an even better way of putting it, just to embed that into the DNA of the firm. Because that really is where ... that's the sweet spot in all of this, that's where we want to get to. Culture of experimentation, innovation just happens naturally. It's not a forced construct anymore. It's just part of who we are.

Michelle Ockers:

What I'm really loving about this conversation, Luke, is that we didn't set out to talk about learning culture, but this is a brilliant example of building a learning culture in action. And I also love that it's a really great illustration of the fact that learning culture is not owned nor driven by Learning and Development. They are part of it, but it's a much bigger story. And there are many more stakeholders, many more people involved in truly creating an



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environment where you are spreading knowledge across the organization, applying new knowledge, innovating. It's just such a great living example of a learning culture.

Luke Warwick:

Totally agree. And this wouldn't have happened without the core expertise of L&D people. But you're right, it's the whole kind of experiential construct requires to make this a cultural shift.

Michelle Ockers:

Talking about outcomes then, how has the digital skills lifted? Clearly they are going to have to uplift it with the program at this level of intensity. How many people have go through? What impact - what's been the impact on performance? What are you seeing in terms of results for the business?

Luke Warwick:

This is a really good question, and probably we've taken a bit of a delay just given everything with COVID, we probably won't ... We were targeting to be 80% to a 100% completed by academies by the end of last financial year, of course it didn't happen. I think we're sitting in currently 60% completing traditional Academies. With our accelerator program, we're in cohort three. And we haven't really talked about the post COVID or the during COVID world for accelerators. That's been equally shifted to the more dynamic, more kind of spaced out less of an upfront piece. We're now thinking about the metrics.

Luke Warwick:

I think we actually went into this knowing we needed the change and knowing we needed the outcomes. It was still a leap of faith. We weren't linking it to hard-coded, we needed to achieve these dollars by this date. It was, we know we need to change, to remain relevant, to remain capable, to remain competent. Now we have to think about how do we show that, what are the metrics, what are the leading, what are the lagging, et cetera. What we are doing internally is we're pushing people just to the innovation side of things, changing your day to day, tweaking it a little bit. Because even an hour saved once a week for one individual, that piles up. But then you put into that sharing component and the innovations by the lab, the hour a week suddenly becomes 70 hours a week. It's about recapturing the value of our people, and then that just becomes the new platform for growth.

Michelle Ockers:

The innovation marketplace would be a good indicator of what's actually happening in the organization. Do you have any feel for the number of innovations or the value of the innovations in the marketplace, has that been looked at?

Luke Warwick:

Yes, totally. And so probably worth mentioning the marketplace just allowed is actually going to be a global construct as well. What we've launched now in Australia will eventually become the Asia-Pacific hub for innovation. It's currently still Australian based. And I think we're sitting on roughly 300 solutions that purely Australia made. And I think it's about four and a half thousand solutions globally, that we are vetting to increase that further. And what that sits on currently is a productivity saving that is just amazing.

Michelle Ockers:

Brilliant. And that's the kind of impact we're looking for with something at scale like this globally and the kind of indicators that things are changing in the business. Let's reflect a bit on the experience and the lessons learned and the things that maybe we can seed for

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others who are looking to build digital skills in the organization to be thinking about. What was some of the highlights? What were some of the things that have gone really well with the solution and why have they gone well?

Luke Warwick:

Probably linking back to that 77% that I brought up right up front of people who are willing to learn, that came out with spades. In our experience, people jumped into this feet first, hearts open, minds opened and just wanting to see what was possible. That was a personal highlight. And that really is the product of all that hard work of our L&D people, our training team. The internal change management should never be overlooked, because this is a heart change program, all coming together to make it possible for you or I to walk into an Academy, see what could be possible just through data analytics skills, and on the outcome be supported to go and change that day to day. Personal highlight is seeing the subtle but immediate impacts with our people coming out with boldness.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. And were there challenges? Were there things that didn't go the way you thought they were going to go with rolling this out? And how were they addressed? Obviously the COVID thing and having to do that big shift around the programs, that's the obvious one, and we've talked about that. Apart from that, were there any other key challenges and how were they handled?

Luke Warwick:

I want to go with COVID challenges a tiny bit.

Michelle Ockers:

All right.

Luke Warwick:

Just because I was blown away by our internal people's ability to pivot so quickly, the virtual setting, both for the academies, but also for the accelerator program to make that still meaningful and still hands on experience in a virtual setting, blew my socks off. Because I was the one on the end of the phone having palpitations about having to pivot all this. But in terms of other challenges, I think it's that mindset piece and the kind of learning culture piece that we'd already spoken about.

Luke Warwick:

That was a slight hurdle to overcome because we're trying to build something for a whole firm, which is made up of businesses that have unique identities. We were doing a lot of trial and error in getting a strategy that works across business, but also works within business at breadth and depth. And so that was back and forth. The challenge initially, but what it came to light was building a guiding coalition of business representatives from each of those areas who really knew the ins and outs of their internal business to help guide both the one firm approach, but also the individual line of service approach to make it the most meaningful. We had some slight variations in deliberate execution, and which personally I don't want to happen because in my mind we had to keep true to the program. The program was the program.

Luke Warwick:

And so I had to go through a little personal journey to realize that actually it's not about the program, throw it out the window. It's about the individuals and their experience going through this upskilling program. And so humbling to have to kind of take that lesson on

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board myself and see their challenges work out. And the positive outcome is a better program for everyone.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. I like that phrase you used, guiding coalition. It's such a nicer phrase compared to things like working groups or steering committees, right?

Luke Warwick:

Yeah.

Michelle Ockers:

I particularly like the word coalition as part of that. Is there anything you'd do differently next time, if you had to do this again?

Luke Warwick:

Probably more of that guiding coalition upfront, I think you should never underestimate the power in building that narrative in the early stages, and getting people behind the idea before you're trying to execute. And one thing I've noticed in global meetings is territories that haven't had the opportunity to build a kind of cross-business group has struggled to get traction, and had to go back a little bit. And so definitely has to be that element, the buy-in. I think it's simple, it's the buy-in, it's the permission of those areas to let their people and let themselves jump into something like this, because it's huge. I guess this is the biggest upskilling undertaking PwC has taken in maybe 15, 20 years.

Michelle Ockers:

That balance between what is the same and where do we need to allow for some customization, some tailoring, some adaptation, or where can we ship language even in a way that resonates more effectively across more of other parts of our business.

Luke Warwick:

And just really pulling out to the change management side of things and construct required to make that happen. Again, I've had friction in conversations which has yield really positive outcomes. But if you hadn't had the hard conversations, it wouldn't have happened.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes. I understand what you're saying. Do you have any other tips you'd like to give to people who are in the early stages and grappling with how to improve digital skills in their organization?

Luke Warwick:

Probably learning from PwC experience, really focusing on the data skills, because that's really one thing that's going to be constant across industry, across territory, across country. Everyone's going to be touching data more and more, no longer can you get by just having business insights function. Business insights are now everywhere. What we did was democratize their skills and that's the recommendation I give out to anyone. When it comes to additional mindsets and digital change, you need to go to culture or giving it a go, being allowed to fail. I know we keep talking about permission to fail culture, but reality is that has to be the way, because if you don't give someone a chance and the permission to go and do something and mess it up, they won't do it again and do it well.

Michelle Ockers:



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Constructs like labs, ideation, building those into the way people work. I think that puts a different spin on it to say, it's okay to go and fail. It's a different thing to say it's okay, go on fail, to say, it's a different thing to run experiments. It's a different thing to try things out, and see what you can learn from them. I think the language we use around it can either attract or repel, and again, it's cultural, right? Some organizations are more risk averse than others, so I think people have to find the language that works for them.

Luke Warwick:

Completely agree. My personal background is organizational change. And I discovered a book called Lean Change Management, and its roots are in experimentation. And I've carried that with me throughout all of this, is you can get a culture of experimentation that leads to innovation, that leads to the loss of fearing to fail as well.

Michelle Ockers:

I'll include a link to Lean Change Management in the show notes as well, so much goodness for people to dig into. And I really encourage people to go and take a look at the digital fitness app from that link in the show notes, because it brings the whole thing to life, and there's some skill development that we can all do thanks to PwC sharing that. Thank you so much for sharing that story, Luke. It's a really impressive example of a comprehensive approach to digital skills uplift across the organization, which I think will inspire many people. We're going to put a link to your LinkedIn profile in the show notes. If anyone wants to reach out to Luke to continue the conversation, to ask any questions. Thank you so much, Luke, for taking the time to share this piece of work and your insights with us today.

Luke Warwick:

Thank you, Michelle. Great to be here. Thanks for having me.



ReThink Learning – A Message from Michelle Ockers

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About Michelle Ockers

Michelle Ockers works with business and learning leaders to realise the untapped potential of learning in organisations. She is an organisational learning strategist and modern workplace learning practitioner. Michelle works with organisations to develop and implement transformative organisational learning strategy, and to build the capability of their learning team. She delivers keynotes, workshops and webinars for learning and broader professional or workforce groups at both public and in-house events. Michelle also mentors learning professionals at all career stages on career planning and professional development.

Michelle received the following prestigious industry awards in 2019:

- *Australian Institute of Training and Development Dr Alastair Rylatt Award for L&D Professional of the Year – for outstanding contribution to the practice of learning and development*
- *Internet Time Alliance Jay Cross Memorial Award – for outstanding contribution to the field of informal learning*

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