

Michelle Ockers:

Welcome to Learning Uncut. I'm Michelle Ockers, and I would like to acknowledge that the podcast is produced on the lands of the Brinja Yuin people, and I acknowledge their connections to land, sea, and community, and thank them for the care of the country on which I work and live over the past 60,000 years. Today, we have a guest from Belgium, Matthias?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

That's correct, yes.

Michelle Ockers:

Welcome. How do I say your surname? I forgot to ask before we started recording. So give me a lesson now.

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Nauwelaers

Michelle Ockers:

Nauwelaers

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Yeah, perfect.

Michelle Ockers:

Excellent. What language do they speak in Belgium?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

It's Dutch. Well, it's Flemish, but it's the Dutch language, of course, with an accent on some particular words that we use.

Michelle Ockers:

Right. Well, I should be fluent with that, really. My father was Dutch, but we never learned Dutch in the home as I was growing up. So I'm sure he could coach me on the pronunciation. So Matthias, you reached out to me about having something you'd like to talk about, and I really appreciate that. You also mentioned you're a longtime listener of Learning Uncut. Is there a particular episode or guest that's really stuck with you?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

I don't really have a favourite episode or guest, but I distinctly remember the disruption series that you did a while back with people like Jane Bozarth and Clark Quinn. And that really inspired me. I think in general, Learning Uncut has taught me to look at learning and development differently. Also taking cues from other domains such as marketing. These were the episodes that really, really inspired me.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, that disruption series was something I did during COVID, right at the start of that big global lockdown when everyone was all of a sudden panicked about not having face-to-face classrooms and what do we do? And I was sitting there like the rest of the world, locked down in my little home office thinking, what could I contribute right now? And I thought, I've got a network and I've got a podcast. So I just reached out and I put out, I think one episode a day for about three weeks. Just talking to people about different approaches that could help L&D in that period. A lot of that's still relevant. I should promote that again. I will do that. Thanks, Matthias, for reminding me of that.

Matthias Nauwelaers:

No, thank you for bridging that period.

Michelle Ockers:

So we're going to talk today about your organization, who are an R&D hub in the nanotechnology and semiconductor space. Is that right?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Yeah, that's correct. Yeah, Imec is the R&D company in chip and nanotechnology, both on the production and the chip side itself of the design, et cetera, but also on the application of chips and nanotechnology.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. So who does the business serve then? Who's it for?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Well, Imec is unique in the sense that we bring together all of the players in the semiconductor industry, which means industry players, but also academia, governments. We work together with foundries, with fabs, with design houses, with material suppliers, with universities. And like I said, in this regard, Imec is unique in the semiconductor space.

Michelle Ockers:

That's really interesting. So how does the company make money then? Is it through the innovations in design and selling them?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Well, it's part in doing bilateral research with companies that pay us to do advance chip design or chip manufacturing. But also there are a lot of government funded projects that we do. We are still a non-profit company in Belgium. So yeah, there's different ways of funding and venturing. We also help startups that might benefit from our technology to take off and to scale up and to maybe turn one day into a spinoff of Imec.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, it's a really interesting space to work in. And a lot of these organizations that call themselves hubs, innovation hubs, industry hubs, they tend to be quite small. I was quite surprised to learn the size of your workforce, 6,000 people.

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Yeah, with over 90 to 100 different nationalities working at any given day at Imec. So yeah, it's been growing a lot since the six years that I'm now in. I started working at Imec in 2019, when we were with 3000 people. And in six years, it has almost doubled. So yeah, very challenging. Also geopolitically, of course, is the semiconductor industry is a very interesting space to be working in right now.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, absolutely. What geographies are those 6,000 people spread across?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

It's across the US and Europe mainly.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. So a fairly dispersed workforce as well and a largely technical workforce, I take it?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Yeah. We have a lot of people in R&D. Researchers, engineers, chip designers, you name it. So it's a very technical environment.

Michelle Ockers:

So what does the learning and development team look like? Where do you sit in that team and what does it look like in your space?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Yeah. So the Imec Academy team, the team that I'm sitting in consists of two parts. I mean, we have the talent business partners. That's also my role. And our role is really to identify the learning needs within Imec and translate that into talent or learning solutions. Yeah, my focus is, we each have our focus within the team. My focus is more on onboarding, on leadership development, on topics such as inclusion and sustainability. And my role within the team is also a little bit more an expert, being an expert in instructional design. So That's my L&D background in the team. And then besides that, we also have an operations team who really brings the learning solutions to our 6,000 people, putting it in our systems, booking training rooms, sending out communications. So yeah, it's a team of nine people.

Michelle Ockers:

So nine people total for a workforce of 6,000. All right. This is going to be an interesting conversation. So we're going to be talking about a leadership development program. I believe it's frontline leadership. So people who are first time into the leadership role, and they've come from an expert background for context. So what was happening with supporting those people into their first time leadership roles, people leadership roles, before you developed this solution?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Well, it's first line people manager, but also newly hired people managers from the outside in. So what we first noticed was that managers working in our clean room were actually the first to signal the need for structured leadership development. As we were growing, they felt that the things that were in place were lacking or were not sufficient in letting their employees grow. And so they were the first one we interviewed really to capture their needs, both the line management, but also their senior management. And it's actually those people in a very technical environment, more aching to a manufacturing environment in our clean room that brought up the need for leadership development.

Michelle Ockers:

So the clean room management leadership actually approached the L&D team and said, we'd like to do something with leadership development for these first-line and newly hired leaders. What did you find when you did the needs analysis, which is part of your role there? What did you discover about this group of people and about this transition to a leadership role for them?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Well, to put it in the bigger context of Imec as a growing company, which is what actually went in parallel with that, is that because we were growing so rapidly, it didn't longer suffice to be a technical expert as a people manager. And that's what they noticed as well. So employees' needs were no longer fulfilled if you only solve issues from a technical background, or if a people manager acted as a technical knowledgeable partner towards customers, so they needed to instil vision to create an environment where people could grow together with the company. also to align more processes. And it doesn't really help, well, you need more skills than just your technical background, if you want to build that Imec DNA, that Imec culture, as the company grows. So yeah, because of the size of our companies means that people managers also need skills such as change management, for example.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. And what did that discovery process look like? How did you go about figuring out who this group of people were and what they really needed?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Well, it's interviewing a lot of people. Like I said, from the line managers, just sitting down with them, having a coffee and saying, okay, how does your day to day work look like? How do you do you manage your employees? How do you structure your one-on-ones? How do you give feedback? How do you use the current HR processes for performance management, for reviewing talent and seeing where the gap is that they need some more tools? And actually from that, it also triggered the question like, actually we need a bigger vision on what leadership at Imec looks like. In the beginning, we were very ad hoc, hands on, like, okay, we'll put a training on hiring, okay, and we'll try to fill in the gaps as we go along. But it didn't really help me, we needed an overarching vision on leadership development on what leadership at Imec looks like. And so from that first pilot, which was consisting mostly out of classroom trainings, came the next mandate and that was creating a value-based

leadership model for Imec that translates our Imec values into specific leadership behaviour and expectations.

Michelle Ockers:

Right. So you started without a framework, trying to plug a gap, trying to help these people, their leaders get onto their feet in that leadership role, if you like. And out of that, doing a pilot there, you discovered that you needed to step back and take a much more holistic approach, maybe some sort of framework. You talk about a values-based approach. Tell me more about the company's values and how they were translated into kind of leadership values, if you like, or how they were used to shape what leadership looks like in the business.

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Yeah, so we, we have four values, which are integrity, passion, connectedness, and excellence. And the first thing was getting the executive board and the executive and the senior management online in line with what that really means in terms of behaviour. For example, integrity, we always begin with integrity, because for us, that's the showstopper, it begins and ends with integrity. And so that translated into a definition, we built our collaborations on trust and respect. And from there on out, you start having discussions, workshops with, like I said, both our executive board or senior leaders in the company, even technical fellows, because the technical background is still important in how we view leadership. It's also about technical leadership. And we started pinning down like, okay, in day to day interactions in the company, what does trust look like? What does respect look like? And from those interviews from those workshops, we were able to get to a framework of behavioural expectations on these four values. And this is the basis of what we then later called the people manager track where in the people manager track, the value based leadership model is highlighted in the beginning. Okay, so this is the framework that we're working on. And it actually within every module, the whole is highlighted. It's not that we cut the our people manager track into four parts and say, ok now, integrity as a leader. No, we try on the whole to instil people with that leadership vision and how that translates to day-to-day workings. And it's about skills, like how do I have effective feedback conversations with my people, but also how do I tackle the salary review process with integrity.

Michelle Ockers:

I really like this linkage that you've taken something that's fundamental to the organisation's culture, these values, and you've worked so hard to make them concrete and express them as behaviours. And then you've taken it that extra step to say, in this particular part of the manager's role, when they're doing this particular process, be it performance reviews or whatever it is, how does that behaviour then show up? So it's like this beautiful line of sight from culture all the way through to embedding that. So it truly is the Imec leadership framework. It's not something someone else could just pick up and have work in their culture. That's like deeply grounding that body of work in your organisation's culture and context, Matthias, how long did that take to do that work? Like just that, developing that values-based framework and making it so concrete.

Matthias Nauwelaers:

I think it took more or less a year to really pin that down. Yeah, to really refine it. I can look it up afterwards.

Michelle Ockers:

The key point is lots of conversations, right? Lots of exploration, lots of testing of your ideas. Yeah, it's fantastic.

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Yeah, and really trying to give feedback if you're having behavioural statements, putting it to different audiences, like, does this resonate with how you experience work at Imec? If we say this is integrity, or this is passion, how you instil passion in others, or how do you live your own passion? Does that resonate with how you experience working at Imec? And from those feedback conversations, iterating until you say, okay, this is it. This has actually gone through a lot of iterations and a lot of evaluations by different levels in the organisation. And then you feel confident saying, okay, this is the model that we will roll out. And I mean, we're doing a lot of communication about it as well, organising internal communication campaigns about the value. So it's not only in the leadership development that we try to instil that value-based leadership model, but for every employee at Imec as well.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, so who did you work with on that? Because really, would that be the work of L&D alone, that body of work around the framework and the values, right?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Yeah, so it has been a very humbling experience with how many people and how many stakeholders have chipped in. And I mean, we're enormously grateful for everyone that worked together with us on this track, on the model. It depends. The value-based leadership model is really about executive boards, senior leaders, but also first-line people managers, even just focus groups of employees helping us out. If you're looking at the people manager track itself, it's really dependent on in which part we work with the external training providers. We work with the whole HR stack of colleagues, whether it be recruitment, whether it be our rewards colleagues, internal communication, like I said, to really bring to life everything that we're doing. So it's, yeah, I can't thank enough people for making this work.

Michelle Ockers:

I wanted to ask you about what you discovered about the motivation, what motivates the participants in this program. So what motivates them? Not so much with the program itself, but how did you tap into what it meant to them to be stepping into a leadership role and what their motivations were and what maybe they were concerned about?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Well, we always say, I mean, being a people manager can be a very lonely, lonely role. And for some people you start within the team and one day you're their people manager.

Michelle Ockers:

It's tricky, right? It's tricky territory for people that transition.

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Yeah. And for a newly hired people manager is a whole new environment that they step into. And what we tend to do when we're completely out of our comfort zone is that we fall back on some reflexive behaviours. And for a lot of people, especially in a technical role, this means that technical expert again. So how can I be a people manager from the technical expert? And so we really tried to tap in to that feeling of discomfort, like saying, okay, but there's more to that. So we're not saying that your technical background isn't relevant. On the contrary, we see that you can manage people, coach people, lead people with vision from that technical background. So in that sense, they were reassured. But we tried to really instil some mindset shift like, you don't have to solve everything technically, you have to create an environment for people where they can grow. Yeah, most of them also, when we have internal promotions, they also had a manager who had that environment. So they mostly had positive experiences in being in an environment where they could grow. And now they would have that intrinsic motivation to create the same environment for people that they are leading.

Michelle Ockers:

Did you find that that motivation already existed or you had to nurture and grow that motivation through the program?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

I think it's not about motivation. It's about beliefs of leadership. I think everybody is intrinsically motivated to take up that role, but it's how you view leadership that needed some nurturing. A lot of times it's really still top-down leadership. I manage my people, I set direction, I tell them what to do. And we really, from the kickoff, we really tried to shift that into, no, this is more servant leadership. And you create that environment where everybody can be the best versions of themselves. And you are responsible for that, not for solving everything.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. And I guess if you're used to being the technical expert and the one who has thrived through your own knowledge, it's natural to want to solve everything and be the expert in the room so I can see the importance of that shift. So walk us through the learner journey. So I'm just on promotion to a new leader role, or I've just joined the company. What does that kind of that end to end at a high level, that end to end journey I'm taken on through the people, it's a people manager track? Is that what you call the initiative?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Yeah.

Michelle Ockers:

Through the people manager track. What does that look like?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Yeah. So the people manager track is part of a broader learner journey, broader leadership development approach. And it actually starts in the hiring phase. So when we're hiring people manager or promoting, we have assessment and development centres that really take a look at the competencies, the strengths and the weaknesses of people managers, or weaknesses, points for improvement, I like to say, instead of weaknesses. And from there on, they get a development plan, personal development plan that leads into their onboarding. And so that onboarding ties into our people manager track, where we have like a structured approach consisting of two parts.

So the first thing is what we call people manager essentials. And these are actually on-demand content. It's a blended approach with on-demand content and classroom training sessions, really focusing on key people processes. So how do I hire for my team? How do I conduct talent reviews? How do I do salary reviews, salary promotion and promotions, pay decisions? So these people manager essentials are blended because we really believe that that people need this in the moment of need, we can overload people in the beginning with, you need to know this process, you need to know that, and it is this is how you do this in this tool and that tool. But mostly people want to digest the content in the moment that they're doing the pay decisions or the talent reviews. So that's why we really took that on demand approach.

And next to the people manager essentials, we have our leadership labs, where we dive more into the skills part of being a people manager. And like I said, the kickoff is a two-day offsite where we really take people out of the work environment to have some vulnerability, to have that real network, because we really find that important, that that's something that they take with them throughout the track, but also throughout the rest of their career. That's a moment that really stays with them. And from that kickoff, we have four modules first being leading self. There's a lot of surprise for people that we start with leading self and like I said those beliefs about leadership. It's about others and about giving direction but really we begin with leading self because we feel that you need to put on your own oxygen mask first before you can start helping others. It's about like I said, exploring what I believe about leadership. It's about exploring what kind of leader I want to be and moving forward from that. It's about managing your own energy and time first, before you can manage others. So that's leading self, that's module one.

Then we take a step back or higher up. And that's about leading others where we really focus on the one on one relationship that you have with your direct reports. So how do I have effective one on ones? How do I give feedback? How do I have difficult conversations? How do I coach people? How do I have career conversations with them? So that's module two. And then taking again, a step higher up, we have the module leading teams, where we take a look at team dynamics, how do you create a governance process approach, how do you create a framework where everybody could be from meeting governance to dealing with conflicts within the team. So really having that canvas of how the team operates as a high performing team. Also detailing things about psychological safety. And then the last module before we do a graduation, celebrate that success, the last module is leading from the middle. So it's not only leading down or yeah, servant leadership, but also

managing up. How do I translate Imec's vision and strategy towards my team? How do I defend my team? how do I manage those competing priorities that sometimes might happen? But also, how do I connect my team with the outside worlds, with other teams within the company? With external customers? How do I give them the visibility that they need? And with those four modules, we believe that that they can create an environment where people can thrive.

Michelle Ockers:

It sounds like for frontline leaders, it sounds like a really comprehensive and well thought out program. And they're often a group that are not well supported or a little overlooked in the development process. You've called them labs rather than, I don't know, sessions. Was that a deliberate choice? I mean, I assume it was a deliberate choice. What was behind the choice is the better question.

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Well, it was maybe a deliberate choice in the sense that, well, both labs are a very important part of the work that we do. So, tuning to that technical background, but also it's a safe space where you can experiment with things with your colleagues. But then again, we also believe that the real work is done outside of the lab. So for us, we always say the leadership labs, or the sessions that we organise around people manager essentials, are not the most important thing. It's what you do with it outside when you come back. And so a lot of the time when we also, for example, between sessions, we organise interviews where we take people's experiences and say what worked well and what didn't work so well is really identifying also the barriers in the work environment. So what keeps people back or keeps holding people back from applying what they learned? And sometimes you find interesting discussions that need addressing in the work environment or in the leadership labs in the content that we're giving.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. Language is so powerful, right? And the way you've just unpacked labs, I really like that. And I wonder if some of our listeners might pick up that language as well, even in other environments, that place to experiment and equip yourself to go out into the real world and do something different. How long were these all these cohort-based sessions, the four modules, they're all face-to-face, I assume, or have you got any live online or it's all face-to-face?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Well, we have online sessions as well when we're trying to cater to our international audience. But as we're scaling up, and that's something we've been having a lot of issues with, the rapid growth of also our people manager community, is trying to find ways to tailor to everyone. We still believe that the most impact is had in a face-to-face session. Even, yeah, getting people from other countries to Belgium to also connect and network, which is not easily done when you just have a live or an online session.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes, yes.

Matthias Nauwelaers:

It's still, yeah, it's still the human to human interaction that you really can't replicate online. But of course, when we're dealing with on demand content, it's true. These things can be hybrids or fully online.

Michelle Ockers:

That network, as you say, is really important in building relationships across the organisation, both for newcomers to the organisation and for those who maybe have spent most of their career at Imec in a specific functional area. Particularly that last module was really interesting, which you called leading from the middle, which is really about connecting the team. and helping them to be part of the bigger organisation. I imagine the relationships that are built through bringing people together, particularly if you've got people coming from different areas together, that that's a really valuable, I want to use the word asset. It's something that's really valuable for people in leadership roles on an ongoing basis. How far apart are these four labs for most participants? Would they be spread over a year? So you're coming once every three months. Is it more contracted than that? What does that look like, the timeline?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Well, in the beginning, we really had the pushback from senior management, like don't overload our people managers. So we spread it out over two years, but quickly we got a lot of feedback from participants saying we're losing momentum. Yes, we want to have this more condensed. So now it's a one year track. And sometimes even for, we did international groups that are flying in that we even put them in six months time that that they only need to fly in twice for, also business and tying it to business meetings here at Imec. So yeah, people are really eager to have that quicker. And it also allows us to, after they graduate from the People Manager track, it doesn't stop there. I mean, if they went through that year, they also have a lot of ample opportunities to deep dive into other leadership trainings that we have in our open offer. They have the possibility to get a mentor or an executive coach. So that first year is the basis, but actually it takes longer than that in reality. But the leadership labs take place in a year's time.

Michelle Ockers:

Right. And you spoke a little about supporting people with some of the barriers or friction points to actually applying the behaviours to putting things into action back in the workplace. I mean, how do you go about supporting the participants with application? What does that look like?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

That's a good question. I mean, there's things that we do in the leadership labs, like the classical role plays, et cetera, and the interviews where we have cases and that we discuss within the group, how could you tackle this better or whatever. There's a whole toolbox that we're creating with conversation templates, one pages that highlights different ways of giving feedback, et cetera. It's trying to have more of a performance support in place based on the content. But it's also sometimes taking a look at our internal processes, like, okay, why is this not working? For example, we had one cohort where in the beginning, there was a lot of emphasis on the coaching

aspect, etc. And quickly, the senior leadership of that cohort gave back to us like, yeah, technical leadership is still the most important part and you're not conveying that message in that group. So that's also a barrier, of course, if you're talking about coaching and about instilling vision, et cetera, but you're forgetting the technical excellence part in where you start and lead from, that quickly can form a barrier in the work environment if everyone around you is mostly focused on the technical excellence part. So that's why we emphasised how you can lead from technical excellence. But yeah, it's communication barriers. I mean, you're trying to support people and managers in overcoming the barriers, but sometimes the barriers also inform the content of our people manager track, like say, okay, this is the way the reality is, and we need to adjust our content. It's very easy as an HR, as an L&D team to say, this is how good people managers would look like and behave. and totally disconnect from reality and try to push it. And the only result that you get is you throw away a lot of money and resources because you put people into trainings and you check the box, but actually they're not applying anything. So yeah, we're constantly iterating also in that space. Like what does being a people manager at Imec really look like?

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, that grounding in the real world is important for us. As much as we may want to shift culture, we have to meet the organisation and our people in the real workplace and the real world of work that they operate in and support them in that, right? Often your participants, their leader is an important part of supporting them to apply, to embed, to continue to develop their skills as a leader and their level of confidence as a leader. How, if at all, did you seek to engage their leaders to support them?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Well, I'll admit that that is a real challenge that we're facing. But from the start, we tried to in the very first iteration of our people manager track, we even invited the people managers of the participants in the kickoff. So that they were really sitting there and having a view of what they could expect, what the agenda would look like, and also having that first conversation. What do you expect from me in this track? What do I expect from you? How will I challenge you? How will I give back what I've learned? So really having that mutual commitment conversation. But this proved very quickly to be a practical problem. For example, managers who had different participants in different cohorts attending the same session over and over again, or also sometimes people, managers not showing up, which felt like some participants were left out. So yeah, we really tried from the beginning to involve them as much as possible, but we were facing some practical and again, some scaling issues. And throughout the track, we still try to do that. It is the responsibility, of course, of the participants to engage in conversations, but we give them the template. We say after every module, ok, take this back to your manager. You can talk about this and this. You can take a look at how they're doing and learn from them. We also are heavily involved in communicating about the content of the people manager track. So we have detailed intranet pages highlighting the different concepts of what we're giving so that at least people managers or participants know what the people are following or what content that they're getting. But in truth, yeah, there's still too little

accountability with these managers of participants who effectively support them in the learning application. But it's something we keep working on. It's something, yeah.

Michelle Ockers:

What's worked best so far?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Good question. Well, I really liked having them there at the very start, physically there, like, and showing up and saying, ok, we'll have this first conversation here and now and we'll take it forward from that. Not saying, yeah, we'll do that afterwards. After the kickoff, we'll have another meeting about this. No, really, in the meeting itself, let them sit together and report back to the group what they've discussed. So that accountability is visible to everyone. So that worked best, but it's not always practically easy to organise.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, the logistics can be difficult. How does the fact that you base the program around the company's values then support the application? I would imagine that if the participants people leaders are familiar with the values and the behaviours around the values, and they themselves are working on an environment that's consistent with the values, it drops some of the potential barriers. Has that been the case?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Yes, it does. Do you mean in terms of success of the track that we see?

Michelle Ockers:

I mean, in terms of the participants being able to go back and, you know, lead from those values in a way that's consistent with what they're learning and exploring and discovering about themselves in the context of the values that your whole leadership framework and program have been built around. You know, if the culture is consistent with those values, you would expect there would be fewer friction points for them to lead in a way with those values. You mentioned technical excellence before. Obviously, that's one of your values, and that's a really critical start point. But then you've got the integrity, passion and connectedness around that. And if it's built into some of the other processes in the organisation, you talked about, you know, your recruitment people being involved and maybe, you know, the performance management system being lined up with that, it becomes easier then for the participants to put these values into action if there's this kind of environment they're stepping into that's aligned to those values, you know, how effective has that been to support the participants?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Yeah, that's a very good question because in parallel to the development of the people manager track, we also redesigned their performance and talent enablement approach. And there we also try to instil these values and try to tie that process to the way we work, and the way people lead. And you also see that, because of the people manager track, because of the redesign process in parallel to that, we see more people with active goals, better outcomes of talent reviews with targeted talent

actions. And what also really helps is our balance scorecard, for example, the way we set KPIs can almost one-on-one be mapped with our values, with the way people lead. So we have balanced scorecards, categories that deal with excellence, with technical excellence. We have balanced scorecards, categories that are tied to integrity, to passion, to have a passionate workforce, et cetera. So tying that balanced scorecard, those behaviours, those values, all together in one toolkit, is really what is having a lot of impact.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. It feels like there's a whole series of pieces of work that are all aligned around this goal of embedding the values in the way people work and lead. Yeah, so it's part of a much bigger body of work, right?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Yeah, true.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah.

Matthias Nauwelaers:

And we also see, for example, in engagement surveys that we do also there, we have statements about how the values are being experienced, how people view their leadership. And it's also there that we see the impact of everything that we're doing around value based leadership, not just the people manager track, but everything that we're doing around our values. Yeah, a lot of positive evolution in the way people experience their work at Imec.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. How long ago did you roll out the first, well, the clean room pilot was really the start of it all. And then you had another year of regrouping after that. But when did you actually have the new leadership framework complete? How long ago?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

I think it was 2021 or 22, I think 2021.

Michelle Ockers:

So about four years ago, when did you first start putting participants through the redesigned people manager track, like the full level of labs and the essentials?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

That's 2022, yeah, since 2022. So it's been going about four years. And we're constantly redesigning because in September, the new version of the people manager track was launched. Yeah, every year, we're going through iterations and adjusting the way we approach the content, the formats, the target audiences that are becoming more and more diverse. So, yeah, but the first version was in 2022.

Michelle Ockers:

Right. So there's this continuous improvement that's underway. What do you do to monitor the progress, the success of the initiative and identify what needs to change?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

So the first measure of success is, well, not in a metric, but if more problems come to the surface. So that's what when you see that you're having success, because people managers are bringing up stuff, like I said, for example, in terms of barriers in the environment, the track and the value based leadership model lets people look at their environment in a different way and say, okay, what is still needed? If I want to create that environment where we have high performing teams, where we have room for growth for my people. And so that's when you first start to measure impact. If more and more troubles arise.

Michelle Ockers:

That's so interesting. It's like the safety programs, right. In organisations as a measure, if you actually see the rate of increase in reporting of hazards or incidents, that can be seen as a very good sign that you're bringing these things to the surface and creating hunger for change.

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Yes.

Michelle Ockers:

And so that really is what you're talking about there that your people leaders are looking at things differently and saying, well, you know, this aspect is not working properly for me to lead in this way. Let's work on that. So that's your first indicator. So you've got this little wave of issues coming up that then the HR or people and culture team, maybe, or senior leaders have to start addressing.

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Yeah. And then, of course, we have our more standardised learning and development metrics, such as participation rate. We have quarterly evaluations that we run by with the external trainers that we're using. But we also had a KPI at one point set because it was very difficult for us to identify the people who needed to be in the track because we were growing so rapidly. The people manager community was growing rapidly. How far do you go back in inviting people? And it wasn't really mandatory. So setting that KPI and year on year trying to attain that KPI of participation rate and how many people would go through the track also gave strong support from executive leadership that this is important. So that's also how we measured success. Like, okay, are we targeting the right audience? Are we getting the right people in? And how do they perceive and evaluate the leadership labs, the people manager, the essentials, the track as a whole? And how can we adjust for feedback if they're having feedback? But for me, what also is a real testament to success is that our senior leadership really views the people manager track as a vehicle for instilling vision. So we were having, for example, discussions on inclusive leadership as a competency for people managers or more general strategy on how we want to tackle belonging and inclusion at our company. And the first idea that they had, which was unanimously agreed upon, like, this should be in the people

manager track, because that's where the people are. And if we put it there, we know that we're building a culture of inclusion. And for me, that was like, okay, everybody knows, on this level knows the people manager track and knows its success. So yeah, for me, that was actually a very proud moment of like, okay, this, this is creating some change within the company.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. So it's sometimes difficult, I think, particularly with things like leadership development and interpersonal skills to link what we're doing with learning initiatives to business impact and to organisational impact. But then you're talking about building culture and the program being seen as a way of building culture, which is definitely about creating business value, making a contribution to building culture. Is there any other way you've been able to make any sort of linkage? And here I'm not talking about statistically valid causation or anything like that, but to be able to create, I just call it a line of sight, a roughly reasonable argument that the skills that we are building, that this development program is building these kinds of skills, and we are seeing the following happening in the business, and we think that the work we're doing here is making a contribution to that. So building culture is one of the ones you've mentioned.

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Yeah, yeah. And like I said, we see that also, the metrics that we tie to our performance and talent management approaches. So people having active goals, people having targeted talent actions, and people managers really taking the time to sit down with people and discussing their growth, etc. And as well in our engagement surveys, we see that the view of leadership has been positively evolving. So while I don't have a direct correlation between the two, I believe that this all ties into what we're doing also at the people manager track level and the value-based leadership model as a holistic approach to how we view leadership at Imec.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. So what have you adapted along the way since rolling out the track in 2022? What have some of the key shifts been that you've made and why?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

The first being outsourcing more because we were doing a lot of the work ourselves. So me and my colleagues, we were doing the kickoffs ourselves. We were sending the emails with the reminders of the assignments in between sessions ourselves. But at one point it became so big that we couldn't keep track of all the groups that we were managing. And so we needed to outsource more, automate more actually. So that's been one of the first challenges, like how do we roll that out? And then, yeah, scaling it up for an international audience that are dispersed, like you said, around the world in different locations. How do we bring them in? What we've also been trying to do, because in the first iterations, we really felt that the solution provided by our training provider was still not really an Imec training. It was more of an off-the-shelf solution. To align these people is a constant challenge, is a constant work that you need to be doing. Because, of course, they're trainers, they know their parts, but trying to really stick to your vision to leadership needs constant aligning with providers.



Michelle Ockers:

So you've mentioned that the facilitation is being done by external facilitators. Was the development also done by an external partner?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Well, in the beginning it was. I mean, we invested a lot of time to invite those external trainers over, having them walk around, interviewing people, giving them a lot of context. But when they presented their design, it just looked like what they do at other companies. And we were really disappointed. They really tried to sell it to us. And that's when we said, we're not just going to eat the food you serve, we're going to stand in the kitchen and cook together with you.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah.

Matthias Nauwelaers:

So that really meant co-designing, having scripts, almost like, and always keep discussing like, how do you see it? No, that's how we see it. And so there were a lot of co-design sessions that we organised. So it took a lot of effort from us because, yeah, we pay for these people and they're even not yet standing in front of a group. I mean, they're not even facilitating. It's a lot of desk work. But that really benefited the track, I believe. And like I said, it still needs constant realigning. We oftentimes still sit in with a session to see, okay, is this still how we discussed it? After giving feedback about a quarterly evaluation that we had, for example, or a co-design sessions, like, okay, did they really do, or did they really take in that feedback and are they applying? So, yeah, we're constantly still in the kitchen when cooking with them, yeah.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, making the journey together. So, Matthias, we've had a great chat. We've been talking for a while now. As we wrap up the conversation, what key pieces of advice would you offer others who are looking to support their frontline leaders to develop with programs?

Matthias Nauwelaers:

I hope that I conveyed the message that it's really about co-designing with everyone involved, so that it means aligning with the participants that you're trying to reach or the target audience, it's about reaching out to leadership, about external providers that might provide the training. And having that solid vision, what you expect of leadership and stick to it, how difficult that sometimes might be, it really helps to align all of these stakeholders. And also, yeah, be humble. It's never finished, the product. It needs constant iterating. It needs constant adjusting to the reality that people managers are working in. So yeah, that would be my takeaways from this experience.

Michelle Ockers:

Great takeaways, Matthias. And I think there's so many things I love about this body of work for such an important part of our workforce. People's people leaders have more impact on the development of them, their opportunities for learning and growth than anyone else, including those of us working in learning and development, as sad as that may be. So they're a key lever for development in our organisations. You've done such a comprehensive job with this, such a careful, well thought through, well aligned effort with lots of other partners internally and managing your external providers as well to make sure it's on point for what your people need, the culture, for the reality on the ground, for your organisation and the participants. It's such a lovely body of work. Congratulations.

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Thank you. Yeah. I mean, yeah, it's like you said, it's one of the key roles within companies. I think everybody remembers their best and their worst people manager in their career. So if you can get these people to thrive, I think the whole organisation thrives as well.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. So we are going to pop a link to your LinkedIn profile in the show notes, as well as a couple of resources that you've shared with us, including one, which I'll translate from Dutch into English, probably only the appendix. It was called a pocket guide to leadership development, something along those lines, but there's an appendix, which is a checklist. It's actually like a 50 page document. which is not exactly a pocket guide, but I think I'll just pop the checklist in English, as well as the full document in Dutch. If anybody wants to have a go, ChatGPT is very good at translating. So listeners, if you have a body of work that you think others might be interested in, like Matthias had, and approached me, please, please, please approach me to explore being a guest on Learning Uncut. Thank you so much, Matthias.

Matthias Nauwelaers:

Thank you so much for having me, Michelle.



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

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About your host, Michelle Ockers



Michelle is the co-founder and Chief Learning Strategy at Learning Uncut. She is an experience, pragmatic organisational learning strategist, L&D capability builder and modern workplace learning practitioner. She also delivers keynotes, workshops and webinars for learning and broader professional or workforce groups at both public and in-house events.

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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