Podcast: Episode 22: AI Skilling and Closing the Skills Gap

Moderator: Dr. Andy Packham

0:05

AI isn't waiting for job descriptions to catch up.
About 7 out 10 employees say that they're using AI now, but only about 40% of those are really satisfied with the training they've got. And while pilots are everywhere, we've all seen the statistics. Roughly 80-90% of those pilots improve a concept today aren't going to make it through into scale.
Production adoption is outpacing capability and there's a gap, but that gap can be closed.
We've seen it. We've seen significant business outcomes when you bring AI into scale production.
One of our customers, the time to do due diligence has halved. In another clinical review, initial clinical reviews have been reduced by 88%.

So in today's discussion, we're going to talk about how skilling turns experiments into outcomes and those outcomes, the outcomes that you can report to your CEO.

I'm really excited.

I'm joined by **Justin Slade**, Director of Business Strategy for Partner Skilling at **Microsoft** and **Vinutha Rao**, Senior Vice President, part of our digital business here at **HCLTech**. And I'm **Andy Packham,** Chief Architect for the Microsoft ecosystem.
So Justin, if we if we kick off with you, maybe start by just, you know, telling us a little bit about that role you have and how you think about skilling as something that's critical, especially with AI.

Speaker: Justin Slade

1:36

Certainly Andy, thank you for the invitation.

It's great to be here today. Vinutha, Thanks for the invitation.

Specifically, Andy, my team empowers the Microsoft part ecosystem through what we call strategic data-driven skilling initiatives that accelerate business outcomes.
We've aimed to deepen technical capabilities and foster continuous learning.

I don't know that's going to be a subject topic that we want to dig in today. We anchor all our skilling on our Microsoft Cloud GTM solutions or what we call solution plays and we align that to our partner, what we call the Microsoft AI Cloud Partner program as well.
Our team's mission really is to deliver role based skilling that elevates partner performance, drives innovation and ensures readiness for the future of AI and cloud transformation.

Moderator: Dr. Andy Packham

Thanks Justin.

2:28

Vinutha, same question, tell us a little bit about your role and where you see the priority around skilling.

Speaker: Vinutha Rao

2:36

OK, thanks for the invitation.

My name is Vinutha, and I lead globally the talent development for the digital business of **HCLTech** additionally shouldering the responsibility of transforming the current workforce in the GenAI era.

So talent transformation is one of the key aspects every organization is driving, but it's at **HCLTech** people strategy being the centre of our business.

And this is one of the key charter which is of highest priority for the business.

And today in this technology-disruptive era, I think I can't say that this it can't be more than any other priorities in the business.

Moderator: Dr. Andy Packham

3:21

Yeah, I believe that.

I think, you know, just follow me.

You know, I know the amount of investment that we've been making in, in, in scaling and I know, you know, the number of hours that we're all expected to put into, to put into training.

What are the challenges though that you see with actually, yeah, with everything is moving so quickly.

How do you how does how do you keep up with something that's moving at lightspeed?

Speaker: Vinutha Rao

3:49

Right.

So when I specifically if I take it up on the AI GenAI today, while there is so much talk about eliminating few roles and jobs, but I think overall if you look at it, it is reshaping all the roles, you know, irrespective of which domain that you are in when this journey is happening, I think challenges are multiple fold.

I think the first and the foremost, the IT is moving faster that one can imagine and getting everybody to accept on the reality.

The reality that is there is dramatic change and aligning to the rapid pace of, you know, getting you getting acquired new skills is first and the foremost challenge in my view, getting everybody on board and saying that what worked yesterday is not what's going to work tomorrow.

Second important challenge, we do have to have this balance, striking a balance between what is needed today for the business what versus what is required for tomorrow's need is a continuous challenge as an organization.

And this extends not just, you know, educating people and bringing them onto the, you know, board, but also actually giving holistic exposure to them, not just from skill, from technology perspective change, but also from business transformation and point of view.

So going hand in hand, educating everybody as how the business transformation is happening along with the technology changes is another challenge that we are constantly facing.

And apart from that, most common challenges today is that when our partners are going through the transformation and when our workforce is trying to adapt to the new changes, the demand supply gap is a constant battle.

So it's another important challenge that we're trying to constantly address through meticulous planning.

Our planning cannot be what fall when it comes to even skill development.

That has to be in a very agile fashion where we look at business priorities, today's need, tomorrow's need versus 6 months down the line, what is required and the planning needs to go along with that.

Why we do run the business as usual today and when the technology is disruption, disrupting your information around how you can actually leverage different content from different part, you know platforms and you know how you can curate personalized, customized journey and induces in the flow of work.

You know, when an employee is working, you need to induce a learning and how you can actually induce more and more customized and personalized way is another challenge that we are constantly looking at it and trying to solve.

Adopting obviously all the best of technologies out there, best of methodologies and process.

And as we actually go through the journey of skilling, I think there is a constant challenge as how do you actually give the domain perspective?

Because when an today it's no longer about having one technical skill, you should be able to kind of collaborate with other industries, actually keep on adding what we call it says adjacency skills.

So that's another, you know, challenge that we are trying to kind of mitigate.

Now, how do we bring in business context, domain context so that the decision ability is more and more at the lower end of the workforce because that's the need of the art today with AI transformation happening.

So I can go on and go on, but I think I'll just pause here.

Moderator: Dr. Andy Packham

7:40
No, I think the list of challenges does.

Speaker: Justin Slade

7:43
Yeah, that was great.

Moderator: Dr. Andy Packham

7:44
But yeah, that's why we do that, isn't it?
But, you know, the focus that we all have is actually on our customers.
You know, this, you know, this is not about something that's internal.
It's about making sure that we deliver the right, you know, the right outcome for our customers.
So Justin, you know that statistic of so many proof of concepts not getting through.
How do you see what you do and working with partners actually driving that metric to something that you know certainly a lot lower than 80 or 90%, a lot more success.

Speaker: Justin Slade

8:22
I think, Andy, I think that's a great question.
So if I was just to replay that back to you, is it, how are we, how, is, how is Microsoft and our partners helping to close the AI skills gap for Better Business outcome for our partners and and our customers?

Well, specifically my team's roommate is to help enable our partners to be successful with their customers.
So I think you know, what we're doing is, you know, the collaboration we do on defining our skilling plans that deliver against the partners specific business goals that span technical sales, pre sales and skilling needs.
That ultimately drive success for their customers is paramount to how we see success with our partners in AII.
Think some of the things that we've been doing around Co-design and Co-delivery is skilling content is really important. We need to understand what your business objectives are in relation to the goals that you're setting for your business and your customers.
And then we work together to Co design and Co deliver our skilling content.
And I think you know we've got examples of that and Andy, what we've been doing with HCLTech, we did a Co-creation around a fabric initiative not so long ago.
You know this Co creation ensures relevance to real world business scenarios.
You know, I skilling isn't just a check box anymore.
It's actually I like to position as a as a strategic growth lever for the business.
So by anchoring our skilling on real big business, real world business scenarios, this builds relevance for your learners that openly has a downstream positive impact for your customers as well.
More tactically, you know, hackathons are designed not to just the skill the learner anymore, but to build to help build as well.
They're a great way to help move skilling from something that's static to something that's dynamic with real-world business outcomes.
Ensuring skilling content is inclusive with localized multilingual delivery and that meets accessibility standards is also a great way to ensure that skilling lands with our partner learners and ensuring feedback loops are in place that the partnership can continuously optimize the skilling for, you know, greater is efficacy and business impact.
It's also really important. And then also incentivizing and recognizing skilling is always a great motivator for our learners too.

Moderator: Dr. Andy Packham

10:59
Yeah, Justin, what I find really interesting is actually the way both of you have spoken about the business skilling as a business outcome rather than the number of hours or the number of certificates.
I think, I think we've, we've dramatically moved on from where we kind of, we created, you know, people who knew

the technology.

Now we're talking about we're creating domain skills, we're actually helping our customers jointly solve their problems.

So, I think that shift is really, really interesting.

So Vinutha, that I mean a similar sort of thing.

How do you see, you know, that working with partners drives value for our customers?

Speaker: Vinutha Rao

If I have to retreat the question, how are we actually working with our partners or is it, yeah, customers, sorry.

12:02

Yeah

So as far as you know, the entire transformation is concerned today, while we talk about talent transformation, I think it's about talent transformation doing at scale.

I think as you already mentioned, we are strongly leveraging all our partnership and I think the need is more than ever before because accelerating the talent transformation is a key thing that we are looking forward for from our, you know, partners like Microsoft.

It's not about leveraging only learning platforms today, right?

You know, it's all about how do we jointly set up the labs with our partners as well as with our, you know, customers in, you know, quickly being able to do different innovations, being able to do different pilots and test out and see what can work out in the journey of transformation.

When we talk about again transformation here, it's about business transformation, which will have the either it could be for experience or it could be for the efficiency or it could be just for the growth.

But either ways, it's all about how do we do it in a fast-forward manner and the speed is, you know, much more than what we went through.

I would say in the past being ahead of the curve when the technology is changing every day is another big challenge. I think jointly coming up with different solutions, being able to actually hack as he talked about, you know figuring out what are the possible changes that can hit us is most important thing that is looking at road ahead than the Road. that you are in today is another key aspects that we are working both with our partners as well as with our customer.

And what is required from our partners or the customer point of view is to really have an accelerator or framework. I think that is where we are heavily invested in to build in-house platforms or accelerators that can give acceleration in terms of business transformation when the technology is changing everyday.

And here is where we are actually jointly looking at how do we bring in the governance part, especially in the area of AI.

And you know, the ethics part is very important.

And we are bringing in that also together in the joint initiatives, joint go-to-market strategies and you know, building joint collaborative content, be it for learning, be it for, you know, our solutions or the framework.

So that's how we are collaborating.

Speaker: Justin Slade

14:27

Andy, can I just build on what Vinutha said?

Yeah, I, totally agree with what she's saying.

I think the big shift here is skilling.

Skilling now is, isn't, isn't purely focused on the foundational anymore.

It's, skilling is now more focused on driving high-value business outcomes back to that strategic growth lever concept.

So how do we use skilling to accelerate win rates?

How do we use skilling to deliver innovative IP?

How do we use skilling to build channel capacity and capability, competitive advantage and revenue growth?

That's the really exciting thing about skilling that the shift that I've seen in the last couple of years where when I joined the team four years ago, we were just solely focused on certifications.

And you've seen the transformation that this team has gone through over the four years.

We are now building skilling that is focused on not just technical roles, but focusing on sales, sales roles, We're focusing on pre sales roles.

It's what we like to call holistic skilling.

So I think AI is just fuelling this, not just the business transformation, but it's also fuelling the transformation how we

think about skilling as well.

And that's, that's really exciting.

Yeah, as I said, skilling is just no longer a check, a check box.

It's an intentional strategic lead for AI transformation.

Whether you're enabling partners, scaling internal teams, or driving customer success, the future skilling today needs to be always on, AI powered, outcome driven and deeply personalized.

Because one way to drive great engagement with your learners is to anchor it on the role.

What's important for that particular role to be successful, Successful for the partner, successful for our customers?

Moderator: Dr. Andy Packham

16:24

Yeah, completely, I think.

Yeah, I mean, we're, we're doing some training at the moment around dentic AI.

There's a hackathon tomorrow.

It's an opportunity for me to sit in and actually hear the ideas and, and learn.

So it's, you know, it isn't, it isn't just sort of a traditional skilling modality anymore.

It's a lot more deep in in many areas.

So Vinutha comeing back to you.

What's your vision?

I'd love to hear your vision for the future.

What's it going to look like?

Yeah, well, Justin said, I mean, with Microsoft, we've gone through a dramatic shift in four years with with AI and stuff.

What do you see? What do you see the next four years looking like?

Speaker: Vinutha Rao

17:13

Right.

And so I think there's a job to do, which is future proofing the workforce, which is a key vision, like how do we actually take along our workforce and not drop somebody behind.

So that's a key version as an organization that how do we rescale people and rebuild workforce for the future or possibly it's not even a future today, it's about today and tomorrow.

That's the first thing.

But if I have to look at, you know, as what has already been told, today's killing is not just an optional element or is good to have feature.

It's about how do we actually look at the entire business, you know, point of view, you know, how do we keep sustain our business and grow our business in the world of technology disruptions and landscape of skilling.

So when it comes to visioning in especially specifically from skilling point of view, we need to unbox the talent that we have today and augment with what is required for future.

And the, you know, what we are trying to do is to look at how do we augment, you know, in line with the future roles that are in my emerging today and what are those skill gaps which are coming up and how do we bridge that?

That's key.

You know, I would say a goal that is ahead of us today as killing team from the organizational point of view is to really, really make our employees not really secure their jobs for the future, but also give the value adds to our partners without disruptions while we continue to do our business as usual today.

So that's a key, you know, vision from the, when I, what I'm trying to do is to really connect the skilling to the business growth, business agility as well as business continuity is something that we are very, very, you know, aligned to when we design our skilling program.

Moderator: Dr. Andy Packham

19:20

Justin, I mean, your, your vision for the future.

What does it look like in a few years?

Speaker: Justin Slade

19:27

Well, I think first thing will be it's very much powered by AI and we're we're exploring various concepts and models at the moment and how we can drive more engagement and efficacy around through AI for our skilling.

I think what my team has been championing with with AI inferred in this is this model called credential to deployment

skilling that enables all partner roles like not just technical roles, but sales roles, pre sales roles and delivery teams with tailored learning path we've.

You know, we've intentionally looked at how we can get skilling more deeply involved in the business.

So things like consumption LED skilling, which is actually a skilling modality designed to help accelerate time to value for our partner customer projects where we work directly with the delivery team where they may be a skilling deficit can come in.

It's almost like just in time skilling, we come in and we help we, we, we deliver a targeted deep level 304 hundred training for that delivery team to either unblock where there's a skilling deficit or help accelerate time to value where there's a need to get into market faster.

I also think, you know, skilling is becoming, you know, we need skilling to drive more measurable business outcomes, which I referenced before.

So, you know, net new agents, for example, the hackathons that we're running at the moment are designed to surface up new IP that can then be commercialized.

We are looking at how we can drive more pipeline, how we can convert more pipeline of opportunities through pre-sale scaling.

I think scaling needs to be more than just certification growth, designation growth and specialization growth within the Microsoft partner programs incredibly important because it opens up incentives and new investment opportunities.

So it's like, as I said a couple of times, you know, skilling is no longer a support function.

It's that growth engine.

And I think the concept of continuous learning is going to become incredibly more important.

And I think with AI, that's going to really come to the fore over the next couple of years.

Speaker: Vinutha Rao

21:48

You know, it's very true that today we are talking about AI tool users, but I think you know, when you look at the future, it's about how AI, you know, creating the AI problem solvers, right?

So because you are not just bridging the gap between the technology and the humans, but also the machines, right?

So you it is beyond the tools, it's about equipping teams to design, deploy and scale the entire AI solutions and amidst the team collaborations, which could even come with a machine.

So it's about, you know, beyond how to use AI, it's about how to solve AI.

And how do you work along in this new transformative work?

Moderator: Dr. Andy Packham

22:35

Yeah, continue for me, continue learning.

You know, rather than discreet, you have a course.

But you know, for me, sometimes I need to get into a conversation to better actually prompt and say, you know, put something together for me that's going to be 20 minutes so that I can get into this conversation quickly and do that in real time live.

I think it shifts the way that you think about this from, you know, discreet to continuous from focusing on focus on the certificate to focusing on the business outcome.

So, yeah, Justin and Vinutha this has been a brilliant, this has been an absolutely brilliant conversation.

I really appreciate both of your both of your time also.

Yeah, thank you to the whole production team.

They do a lot of work in the background making sure this all happens.

So, just to wrap up, I think if AI is a fundamental shift, then we need to fundamentally shift the way we think about using AI.

And we've mentioned some things that are really, really key.

I think we need to be, we need to be tying skilling to KPIs, real business outcome KPIs.

We need to be rolled, not generic.

We need to go role-based, not act generically in training, train, train with real, you know, with real-world scenarios, with real-world tools rather than kind of up in theory.

So the hackathons, the access to labs is critical.

And then importantly, I think from, you know, something I think I've learnt is it's less about figuring out how AI works, but figuring out how I can use or we can use AI to work.
So like I said, Vinutha Justin, I think this has been a great conversation.

I've really enjoyed it.
And you know, I'm kind of excited about how we keep this partnership going and really start to embed AI in training as well as, you know, skilling for training.
So thank you very much.

Thank you, Thank you.

Speaker: Justin Slade
24:37
Thank you, Andy.

Speaker: Vinutha Rao

24:38
Thank you very much.