

Navigating agile transformation with Alex Badenoch

Jeff Schwartz:

This is part of a series of webinars that we do at Gloat. We call this series Gloat Learn. Today's session is on navigating agile transformation with Alex Badenoch. Let me introduce myself and then I'll introduce Alex. And we have had a couple of really great conversations to prepare for today's webinar. I really hope you enjoy it.

So please, if you have questions, please share them, and I will do my best to capture them and find appropriate times to ask them directly to Alex. And then we will certainly aim to have some time at the end of the session today to hear some of your questions as well. So, very quickly you're not here to listen to me, but let me introduce myself so you know who the moderator is. My name is Jeff Schwartz. I'm a Vice President with Gloat. I've been with the team here for about two and a half years, which in startup years is a very long time for those of you who know the startup world. I was a Senior Partner in Human Capital at Deloitte Consulting for 20 years. I also teach at Columbia Business School, and I've written a couple of books.

One of them is over my shoulder, *Work Disrupted*. And last April I published a book with some colleagues at MIT Sloan Management Review and Deloitte Consulting on workforce ecosystems. So I've been very fortunate to have what I would describe as a front-row seat to what's happening around the future of work and HR transformation. But there really are only a handful of people who have the true frontline experience that the guest that we have with us today is going to share with us. So I'll give a very brief introduction to Alex, and I'll ask her to help share her background with us as well. Today's discussion is with Alex, who has had a long career, I would call it an illustrious and amazing career in major HR and transformation roles.

Most recently she was the group executive leading transformation communications in PPA with Telstra. And we're gonna be talking and really getting into that with her today. And she's currently working on a range of board advisory and consulting roles. And we're very pleased that one of those roles is working with us as a senior advisor at Gloat on what we are really trying to share insights on today. So that's who I am. I've given a very brief introduction to Alex, but Alex let's start with your story. And it's really a fascinating story and I think incredibly relevant to the people who are joining us from around the region and around the world. So if you can start and take a few minutes to talk about how did you get here? Like how did you get to the point where you were a group executive leading transformation and HR communications at Telstra, and now as an advisor and a board advisor and just help us understand your journey. I think that'll be very valuable for the people who are joining us from the world today.

Alex Badenoch:

Absolutely. When I grew up, I always thought I would be a practicing psychologist. And I've ended up on a very different path. And it was sort of one of those moments where I took a job and I started to be able to see some of the application of working in organizations with people in organizations. And that opened up just such an interesting pathway. And then you know, I have, I've kept growing my experiences by working across industries. So I've ended up working across everything from sort of chartered accounting to mining to technology to heavy supply chain and logistics and a couple of rounds in telecommunications. So I'd love to say that I had it all planned out, but the reality is there are probably a few things that got me from where I started to where I'm today.

One was curiosity. I think I've always had a huge curiosity to keep consuming and learning and growing. And that meant that I probably had a higher risk orientation to take some of the jobs that no one else wanted to do. I think that's a surefire way to accelerate your learning experience. And alongside that, I think I was lucky enough to have what many of us have and thrive on, which is just wonderful sponsors who helped me when I took on things that were well beyond my experience or my capacity and helped me learn, grow and hopefully most of the time succeed. Not always. So that's where I ended up, or that's sort of how I started and where I ended up, where I'm today.

Jeff Schwartz:

I love this story and it's so interesting. I mentioned earlier I wrote this book *Work Disrupted*, and I've been very fortunate to study some of these future of work issues for years. And we talk about 20th-century careers and 21st-century careers. And in 21st-century careers, we talk about portfolio careers, we talk about zigzag careers, we talk about the importance of curiosity, I think I can say with this group. You know, the importance of being sort of driven to be somebody who really drives themselves to learn. And it sounds like that's the kind of career that you've had.

Alex Badenoch:

Very much

Jeff Schwartz:

So far.

Alex Badenoch:

So far. Yeah. It's not over yet. I'm old, but there's still a little bit of room to keep growing. No,

Jeff Schwartz:

You know, I did a wonderful webinar about a year and a half ago with Lynda Gratton on her book on reinventing work in the age of the hybrid workforce. And of course, we talked with Lynda about the book that she wrote with Andrew Scott on the *Hundred Year of Life*, which is just a very powerful concept to think about, because that's just one example of a mental model that is relevant in the 2020s that wasn't relevant really 30, 40 years ago. And thinking about long lives and multi chapter lives. And I think part of what you're reminding us of is sort of what it means to do that. And that's a big part of what we're trying to talk about today when we're thinking about agile organizations and agile careers.

Alex Badenoch:

Absolutely. So, lemme

Jeff Schwartz:

Yeah, let me go on to, that's a little bit of your background and that is fantastic. You had an amazing portfolio of senior roles at Telstra and before you tell us what you did from a people leader perspective and a talent and HR perspective, can you share with us a little bit about what were some of the key business challenges that Telstra was facing over the last half a dozen years when you were a senior executive there that helped you frame thinking about talent and organizational strategies?

Alex Badenoch:

Yeah absolutely. And we might try and pop up a couple of slides if we can, Jeff, just to, to give some context. So if we flip through to the next one. So the context for change at Telstra was in a way fairly simple but equally pretty challenging. For the Australians on the line, you'll probably have a bit more understanding, but very quickly, Telstra is the incumbent telecommunications company in Australia. It was once government-owned and was then privatized, but some time ago the government decided to renationalize the fixed line network, which took out about a third of the company's revenue. So it's pretty substantial when you lose a third of what you had in terms of rethinking what size, what shape, it's going to be.

We're a telecommunications company, so we serve a lot of people. And while we got it right a lot of the time, sometimes we got it wrong. So we had customer experience challenges. When Telstra was originally privatized, it was floated off in parcels and put out to the Australian public to become shareholders in, so the majority of Australians somewhere in their shareholding own Telstra shares. So there's a huge amount of emotion around Telstra's performance and Telstra's share price in the Australian market, which wasn't where people wanted to be. So you had customer experience challenges, you had share price challenges and sort of financial cost challenges in the business. And while it's a business that has often done extremely well around employee experience and culture, it was declining and was a challenge in that space as well.

So we had the perfect burning platform of needing to respond to almost every single sort of component you can think of in terms of change drivers in a business. And you could choose to see that as a bad thing. I choose to see it as an amazing moment in time where all those things came together to open up a brand new conversation in the organization because doing what we'd always done was no longer a choice. And I think the strategy that ended up coming together had many components to it, whether it was customer experience or digitization or cost or portfolio management, but at the heart of it was our organization, our operating model, and how we engaged, leveraged, and deployed our people against the most important work that we had to do at Telstra.

Jeff Schwartz:

I appreciate it, and I'll drill down on this a bit more, but I appreciate that we started the discussion today about navigating an agile transformation. Obviously, we're interested in talent markets and skills. And we will certainly get to that with a whole discussion from the CXO perspective. I mean, I was gonna say a moment ago, it's like, wait, am I talking to the CFO? Am I talking to the Chief Marketing Officer? Am I talking to the Head of Sales?

Am I talking to the Head of Digital Operations? No, I'm talking to the Head of Transformation and people in communications, and we talk about this a lot, right? We talk about what playing a strategic role means, which is looking at the entire strategy in a holistic and integrated way. So one of the questions we have is how do you know you move the needle, right? How did you what you were measuring to move the needle?

Alex Badenoch:

Measurement was so important to us. I think it was important for a few reasons, because it helped with providing clarity to us as an executive team, but to a whole company in terms of what good was gonna look like, Jeff. I think sometimes you sort of embark on a journey and when it's not clear what success is gonna look like, it's a little bit harder to sort of maintain that momentum. So one of the very first things we did is put out a really clear scorecard and you know sometimes you wonder whether it's the right choice or the wrong choice. But we published it, we published it to the market, we published it to our people. So it was, it was

kind of like making a promise to all of our stakeholders about what we were committed to changing.

And it was fairly holistic, and we will bring it back to people and skills and talent because that's so important in underpinning it. But the measures of success were the organizational outcomes. So we had a goal of three to six net promoter score point improvement for the company. We wanted to increase innovation in our speed to market. Like every business, there are more competitors in the market, there's technology evolving at a rate that you couldn't have even fathomed a few years ago. So improving our time and quality to market as a large and sometimes clunky, big old legacy corporate was really important for us. And because we had a big substantial part of our business disappear we actually needed to re-position our cost base.

So take over \$2.4 billion in cost out, and that meant about a 25% reduction in workforce. But alongside that, we were committed to improving employee experience while we did those things. Which sometimes can be a bit tricky if you think about it, taking costs out and reducing your workforce, and improving employee experience don't always line up beautifully. But it was a really important thing. It was an important message to our people, but it's also an important message for how you set up the leadership mindset to think about transforming the company and not sacrificing any of the component parts that would set the business up for long-term success.

Jeff Schwartz:

No and hopefully what the people joining us around the world are appreciating is this portfolio of objectives and measurements around customer satisfaction, moving the needle on the net promoter score, increasing value, particularly around innovation and speed. Reducing costs. We're constantly restructuring costs for a variety of reasons including today, of course, AI and robotics, which is changing the nature of operating models and the workforce and doing that at the same time that you are looking at how you improve the employee experience and make some fundamental changes and advancements in the employee experience. So this leads to the sort of pivot question to sort of open up the discussion, which is okay, CXO, this is the important sort of transformation set of strategic

challenges. Where do skills and the workforce fit into this problem and solution?

Alex Badenoch:

Let me talk you through a couple of components and how that then relates to the outcomes we were looking to achieve. So if we start with the sort of bluntest component of it, cost, I think you know, we've all been through more restructures in our working lives because organizations are always reshaping and changing. But I do think it requires going forward a much more sophisticated level of thought about understanding the skill base of your organization. Not only sort of skills mix, but what volume at what cost, and being able to really sort of start to unpick what you've got and how you wanna shape your workforce so that it's very thoughtful about the cost because every single organization is dealing with three constraints, constraint around cost, constraint around people and capability and constraint around time.

And if you'll truly understand your workforce in terms of its skills its mix and its capacity, then suddenly you can think quite differently about how you might wanna shape it or augment it. Now, in our case, we also used agile, which broke our work up into different sorts of components. But first of all, it meant that we became really clear on our goals and objectives as a company, which is very useful. And I think that sounds like a silly thing to say. Surely everyone should be really clear on their goals and objectives as a company. I'm not sure we always are, and I think sometimes they're the aggregate of everyone's goals as opposed to a truly single company view of what the strategy is. With that clarity, we were then able to say, well, what skills and capabilities do we need to actually achieve those?

And we used Agile to flow the right people to work in a much more nimble way than we had historically, which starts to get at that whole piece around improved time and quality to market and innovation and actually employee experience. So the use of Agile lets you flex the application of the skills and capability that you've got in the workforce to the most important work. And it leads to some really great outcomes because generally your employees now are really clear on what the strategy of the business is, but also how they contribute to the strategy of the business. One of the things that does have an impact on employee experience is, do I know how my work contributes to the strategy of the organization? Cause It gives me a

sense of value and purpose and contribution. And that really tight alignment between company strategy and how people were flowed and allocated to work meant that well over 95% of people in the business really understood how they contributed to the company strategy, which is such an important factor.

The other thing we did, which actually Lynda Gratton wrote about in one of her books, was we separated the role of leader of work and leader of people because the leader of work becomes the person who demands the skills, who says, these are the skills I need. And the leader of people is the one who's curating and supporting and developing that cohort of people with certain skills so that they're available to deploy into the work that's needed and can take a far more focused and proactive view of how we keep growing those skills? How do we keep actually making sure we allocate people to the work where they're best suited or can best grow their skills? So you start to get that flavor of, Jeff, many of the components that were, or that are talked about in the future of work in terms of these very dynamic careers within a big corporate, but they're actually very dynamic careers.

But each of the components we were trying to achieve, whether it was time to value or reducing costs, we were able to work with a smaller workforce. So that also helped our cost targets. And that experience that people started to have about the clarity of the work, clarity of their contribution, and having a people leader whose primary job was looking after their experience started to improve the employee experience. So that whole management of workforce and skills deployment actually was at the heart of starting to deliver on those, those four areas that we were trying to tackle in terms of organizational objectives.

Jeff Schwartz:

There's a couple of words that you've used, and I want to go into them a little bit and there's a question that we have in the chat that I'll come to in a second. You've used the word dynamic, you've used the word flow, you've talked about people flowing to work, work flowing to people. One of the things that we've been looking at a lot at Gloat obviously is we look at talent markets and career markets and skills, and we see the world through the lens of flow.

And not through the lens of going from one static model to another. That's a major shift I think that we're going through. I think it's when you, when we say the word agile, we mean a

lot of things. Can you talk a little bit, I mean double-click on what is the difference between flowing people to work and flowing projects to people? You talked about helping people understand the strategy. And part of it is helping people not only understand the strategy, but what skills and work and careers are most in demand in Telstra going forward. So if people want to go in that direction, they know what it is and they have as much opportunity inside the organization as they do outside the organization. So talk a little bit about flow, and then I'll come to some of the other questions we have in the in chat.

Alex Badenoch:

Yeah, definitely. Part of my answer's actually gonna pick up on one of the questions in the chat because while sort of the objectives and prioritization starts with our annual strategy, the person in the chat has asked about QBR. So that is the quarterly business review. So that's actually the quarterly cycle that you go through to say, what are the biggest priorities this quarter that we need to deliver? And as an organization, we would come up with a very constrained set of critical priorities. Now those, what we did as part of that planning process, which in theory shouldn't be that amazing, but I actually think it is more disciplined than many of us have been in organizations, is as we plan the work, we would then say, to achieve this piece of work, it is going to need a multidisciplinary team of people with these skills and capabilities at these different proficiency levels.

And that would then actually flow all the way through to the cost of delivering that piece of work. So in the planning process, part of that was actually identifying the skills that would be needed to deliver that work and the costs that would be needed to deliver that work. Then we would start a process where the leader of people would go and fulfill the requests. So, you know, if I'm a leader of work, I've said I need five of this kind, three of those kind, four of that kind, and I submit that request and the leader of people says, well, I've only got three of that kind. So you can't have five, you can have three. And here are the different skills mixes. And yes, I know you like Johnny, but you're having Betty because she's actually a better skills fit to this.

So you end up with this, it is actually a marketplace. It is exactly that, where the leaders of work and the leaders of people are going through the negotiation round of fitting and flowing people to the work. And generally, the leaders of people will also be working with the people

in their chapter to think about not only what skills and proficiency do they have, but potentially what piece of work might be best also for them to keep growing and learning. And as a result of that process, it creates extreme transparency in your organization as to what the demand for certain skills are quarter on quarter, which ones are oversupplied, which ones are undersupplied. If you wanna shift and grow your career or acquire certain skills, which ones are really hot skills in the business? If I've got too many of a kind, how am I gonna deal with that? Can I retrain people? Can I reallocate people? Do I need to reduce people? And so it's this two-way process that isn't a separate process from running a business, Jeff. It is running your business, the management of skills, the deployment of skills is actually how most of us run businesses because very few things happen without the people behind them.

Jeff Schwartz:

I'm gonna pick up on part of the discussion, and then I'm gonna go to a couple of the questions here that we can see in the chat. It's interesting. We've been talking for about 20, 25 minutes and we haven't over-indexed on the role of jobs, which is very interesting because for decades our unit of analysis both for work and strategy and HR and talent really was what was the job and how do we build sort of labor supply chains around jobs. What you've been describing and talking about, the transformation agenda at Telstra, was the need for that to obviously to be agile. And you know that fundamentally what I'm hearing you talk about is the changing role of both business and people leaders.

And I love the idea of people leaders as market makers. I've often had discussions in the last couple of years about what's the difference between being an order taker in HR and talent versus being a market maker in HR and talent. And as you're describing, they're very different roles. By the way, I have more energy when I say market maker, but maybe other people have a different view of it. But do you see people as market makers and sort of what suggestions do you have for talent and HR and people leaders to think of themselves and what shifts do we need to go through to think of ourselves as market makers? I apologize we did not rehearse this question, but it seems to flow very much out of the discussion we're having today.

Alex Badenoch:

Yeah. I think they are market makers, but they're also market collaborators. It actually slightly different in my mind, the power in the process is actually the leaders of work and leaders of people having to have a very mature organizational dynamic of working through demand versus supply. And it does change the role of hr because for us, when I talk about people leaders, I'm not talking about HR people. I'm talking about roles in our organization that are specifically allocated to managing chapters and the chapters other homes of certain skill types that we have. And then the relationship between the leaders of people and the HR and talent teams becomes a really important dynamic one because suddenly you have what would've been once a business leadership role working deeply, actually much more in the talent and people space who a big part of their job is really knowing and understanding the skills demand.

So they have to deeply understand the business strategy, what the demand's coming like, what that sort of draw for human capacity and capability is. And then working very dynamically with HR with much more real information. There's a lot of sort of more theoretical workforce planning out there. This is real, it's happening quarter on quarter in terms of flowing people to work. And so the re relationship and the role of HR is very much to make sure that we are continuously learning, adjusting and augmenting the workforce rather than living in that world where you go from static organization to static organization. It's that the role of people leaders and talent HR as creating this very dynamic sort of quick-to-react and adjust organization. I think we can all feel how much that's already needed and how that's only gonna become a greater need for organizations out there. So yeah, I love the idea of a market maker, but actually for this to work, what you actually need is for everyone to be all in on understanding that the market for your human capital, the market for your skills is the most important market every organization has, and there should be a proper organizational process to plan it, manage it, and adjust it on a really dynamic and continuous basis.

Jeff Schwartz:

Let me try to summarize two questions that are in the chat, and then we're gonna come back to some other questions that I wanna make sure that we get to. There were a couple of questions asking you, Alex, if you could be a little bit more specific or granular about the transformation challenge at Telstra. I think you've given a good sort of initial outline. I know this story cause we've talked about it before, but sort of what were some of the sort of the nitty gritty challenges there?

And then I'll come back to a related question, which is one of the people listening to us today said, it sounded like this new dynamic process was very much leader-led and not necessarily led by the employees. I'm inferring something from the question. So I'm not gonna apologize. I've asked you three questions. Say something more about the strategic transformation challenge, something about the relationship between the work leader and the people leader. And is this leader-led? Is it led by the employees? Is it led by both? And I'll let you comment on the three questions.

Alex Badenoch:

Let's start with what the transformation was. This was a whole company transformation. So it was a business, as I mentioned at the outset that was facing a number of challenges, whether those be financial or commercial challenges, challenges on its share price, challenges on its employee experience and challenges on its customer experience. So we substantially restructured our business. We altered the operating model of our business. We made massive shifts to our customer products and services. We digitized the customer interface for our consumer business. So there was very little that was not touched, not transformed, or changed during what was roughly a four-year transformation journey. And we've set ourselves a set of metrics, a great customer experience against cost against employee experience to judge whether or not we had transformed in line with our intent.

But it is a little bit different, Jeff. I think when you often hear about transformations, it's either a digital transformation or it's a customer experience transformation. We were bold and we thought we'd do all of them at once. So that's the context for transformation. If I then move to the leader of people versus the leader of work it's, it's a very interesting dynamic. And we had

a dinner last night where I was talking about a similar question because a lot of people would say, well, in our organizations, people really value delivery. They like the people who deliver the work. So the leader of work would automatically be the more powerful or valued role. And I think that when we started on this journey that certainly was true.

I think we watched people very quickly want to take their best talent and put them in the leader of work roles. But the reality is that most of us had never lived in a world where there was a leader of work and there was a leader of people. So I'm not sure that we had fully thought through actually the dynamic and the importance of the leader of people. I think we intuitively know that people are important but hadn't thought through that role. And then suddenly you end up with an interesting tension because the leader of work has to be able to scope the work, has to be able to within reason be able to actually estimate the work, demand, the skills, all of that sort of capability. So they weren't divorced from engaging with the people, capabilities, or the skills.

They didn't have the people because a leader of work generally has no direct reports. They only get people flowed to them when they get work that gets prioritized and funded. And it was an interesting moment when people realize that because I think leaders of work have always thought that I controlled the people and the money and I control all the stuff that goes with that. But actually, it was their colleague down the corridor who was gonna be in charge of the things that enable them to deliver the work that they need. So I think it started out as an uncomfortable tension. And I would say that it matured into a really healthy tension of the role, the two leaders play. And it actually I think is a hugely powerful dynamic in an organization because the leader of people can't sit back and just think about the people.

I have to understand the work. They have to understand the strategy, they have to understand which people are gonna have the skills, the leader of work has to be far more thoughtful than they probably ever were in terms of estimating the work capacity they would need to deliver their work. Because suddenly it's very transparent. They've gotta ask for it, it's recorded. We see, you said you're gonna deliver this work with this people and this money. Did you do that in the quarter that you said you were going to do? So it creates a really strong sort of transparency and performance dynamic across the two. So my observation would be, and it look, I would say it's still maturing, is one's not more important the other than the other. But they both play really crucial roles by separating them.

I think the discipline, rigor, and structure of both accountabilities got a lot clearer, and became a lot more powerful. And we asked our leaders to collaborate in a really mature, sophisticated way. But when it works can be really powerful. But there were good moments and bad moments in that. And then the final question, is it leader-led or is it employee led? Well, a bit of both. It certainly starts predominantly employer-led because the first thing is defining the work. You know, I don't get to wake up tomorrow and say, I would like to do skydiving if my organization has those skydiving opportunities for me. So it has to start with a proper definition of the work. What are the opportunities? What are we gonna be working on this quarter, and what's the demand going to be now as we got more sophisticated, that increasingly evolved to the leaders of people actually having conversations with their chapters to say, what would you like to do next?

Is there any particular aspiration or type of work that you want to do? Or it might even be the guidance of saying, look, you've been working on this piece of work for the last two quarters from a career development and skills development perspective, and we really think you'd benefit from going to this kind of work for the next couple of quarters. So I would say it's dynamic. It's not one way, it is still more heavily employer-led. I think this is one of the opportunities to sort of continue to evolve and mature, is how do you make that increasingly a two-way dynamic? But it must always start with a clear definition of what work is available.

Jeff Schwartz:

So this is an amazing discussion, and you'll see we're both seeing the chat. There are a lot of questions. So I'm gonna try to use the moderator's discretion to ask some of the questions that we had and pull some of these questions in. The question of a work leader and a people leader, it reminds me, again, I'm a bit of a historian. So look, I mean, 50 years ago there was just a product operations leader, and that's what we did. And finance just kept count of it, and that was it. Right? And then I, it may sound funny to say it out loud, but we didn't really even have a customer focus 30, 40 years ago, right?

Or even 25 years ago in some businesses, the view was we're producing this product, we produced this service, people are gonna buy it. Our job is to manage a supply chain, get the product out there, and sort of push it into whatever channels were there. The reason I'm

highlighting this is today when we talk about the role of production, the role of operations, the role of innovation, the role of customers, role of marketing, and this dynamic role of people and skills and talent it sounds strange to some to say well, how do these pieces fit together? But it's a much more integrated portfolio than it's ever been before, and it's moving at a different speed than it was before. So let, let me ask two other questions and then we'll pull back to some of the specific questions.

How unique was the challenge and experience that you had at Telstra? A massive customer focus, a massive cost focus, a massive innovation focus, and a massive employee experience focus. How unique was that experience? And what are the few things that you put at the top of the list, thinking about how people leaders work with other members of the executive team on the kind of challenge, was it unique? What, what can you generalize about it? And then let's begin to think about your approach to how executives should approach this kind of challenge to bring together operations, people, and strategy as part of our major transformation initiative.

Alex Badenoch:

Sure. I think on one hand, many of the challenges, I think anyone on this call or anyone who works in a business will have experienced is most people have lived in a world where cost becomes a challenge or digitization needs to be accelerated in your business. But I think the thing that made it really unique was a moment in time where all the drivers of both organizational performance and organizational change came to the fore almost at once. So if you could look up in a dictionary, what does a burning platform look like? It would've said Telstra. And that's a wonderful opportunity because I think sometimes as long as things are kind of okay, it, it's easier to sit in what you know than really reimagine a new world. And I think that was a uniqueness of the opportunity is the context created a willingness, a desire, a need for holistic organizational change.

And because of that, it led to a board, a CEO, and an executive team who are kind of all up for it. They were all up for a challenge because there was no point debating the need to change. That really wasn't going to be an option. So I think that was just such an extraordinary opportunity for a lot of people who ended up being part of that period of time. But for me personally, I think what became really clear is that the most important catalyst to change that

we had was our organization, its operating model and how we leverage the power of our people. And I know a lot of organizations talk about that, but when you actually go into their executive rooms, what they're talking about is the finances or the operational metrics or, or those components.

I have never seen anything like it where there was real true engagement, understanding, and belief that operating models and leveraging the power and capabilities of our people in a fundamentally different way was gonna be the unlock. It was going to be the charge that delivered substantial change to this organization and as a consequence of it, even though we were reducing our workforce. And it was really tough. I mean, we were going through extraordinary change at a rate most of us probably wouldn't want to very often. But so many people got behind it, so many of our employees got behind it. There's a pride, there's a determination to drive the outcomes in the workforce. So I think it was a unique and special experience. In terms of sort of, what are my thoughts for executives facing whether it's this scale or not.

There are probably a few things that I think really stand out in terms of what makes or breaks this sort of transformation. And the first is commitment. You know, a commitment that you actually really do wanna make substantial change. It's not just window dressing, it's not a comms strategy. It's deep in the heart of the belief of the leadership team that this change is required. And I've said to you that we built our scorecard and we published our scorecard to market. That is a deep commitment. Because you've just laid yourself there for the world to see what it is that you're going to deliver. So the first one is commitment, and the second is clarity. You know, when I look at what worked, what didn't work, that plan on a page, the very simple four pillars with very specific measures and metrics, which enabled my team in the transformation office to actually have a really clear plan that was managed, measured, reported, and tracked over that four year period was integral.

You know, I think a lot of people think that agile transformation is sort of loose. It needs to be more disciplined, more structured, and more thoughtful than most of us have ever done before. So I think that clarity of what you're gonna do, how you're going to do it, and making it transparent and trackable all the way through. And the final piece is sort of the three Cs, starting with courage. I think to really change things, you have to lay yourself on the line a bit as a leader, whether it's the CEO who had to have a huge amount of faith in what that plan

was and what we were saying. It's easier sometimes not to have the courage as an HR function, having the courage to get involved in the conversation about the finances, about the planning processes in the company, and about the technology in the company.

Once you're a senior executive your job is to manage the company. It's not to sit in your own sort of single lane view of your function or your capability which probably goes to the heart of where the world's going on skills, which is a single skill trick will not be good enough. Most of us will have to have many skills and keep adapting, growing, and augmenting them across multiple careers as we go. But again, that takes courage. It's easier to stick in your lane, it's easier to do what you've always done.

Jeff Schwartz:

So I appreciate that connection, clarity, and, and courage. So let me ask the ultimate question. I'm gonna combine a few of the questions in the chat, and then I'm gonna ask you a concluding question if I can. I'm gonna combine three of them. One is how do you see the change that HR needs to make in order to enable agile ways of working? The second is is the term agile overused? Is it worn out? And how do you keep the energy up around a concept like agile? And then again, I'm gonna pile on because I'm trying to bring out different perspectives from the people joining us around the world, and I really appreciate them, and I love this question.

Which is constant change in organizations is proverbial, the only constant is change. We've all heard that, but should there be a point of stability after a change process, how long is a healthy period of stability before you start the next major change in the organization? So the role of HR in agile, is agile losing its meaning and stability versus change. How do we make sense of this? Are we in a whitewater world or are we just trying to get through the rapids and get some stability and go on to the next one? I'm not gonna apologize for the complexity of the question because I think it reflects just the really wonderful perspectives that our audience today is bringing to the conversation.

Alex Badenoch:

Absolutely. So let's try and walk work through them. You know, agile isn't ceremonies and sort of these little events that happen in organizations. To me, agile is completely rewiring your organizational structure. You need a different scaffold. You need a different infrastructure to hang agile off. And I watch a lot of people try and implement agile ways of working on a traditional structure, and they actually haven't got to the heart of the way you need to rewire the way your business works to get value from agile. So org design and operating model work is absolutely at the heart, and it is the underpinning platform to a successful agile implementation.

So there's one, two it redesigns the roles of people in the business. So HR needs to be deeply involved in understanding how roles are going to change, everything from generally in an agile organization that sort of deep layer upon layer hierarchy disappears, right? So how do you actually structure roles which have much larger spans of control? What does that mean for career development? Because once upon a time there were 10 layers in the business. Now there are three layers in the business. There's the split of leaders of work and leaders of people. You know, none of that makes sense to how I grew up in my career. So HR is helping people navigate how a new world order will come into play from a career development, from a progression, from a reward point of view, and then from a learning and development and a change management point of view, HR needs to be there, every step of the way because you don't make this level of change without huge amounts of support for skills development and new ways of working.

We sort of would do things like roll out agile for close to 20,000 people in one go and sort of pull them through that training. There are some questions about coaching and scrum masters in the chat as well. We built our own coaching academy to deploy coaches into teams as they flipped into agile to give them support. This is a really powerful HR and people ecosystem that makes it work or not work. So HR is not peripheral, HR is not on the edge. HR is leading it, designing it, delivering it, and making it work. So HR's role is pretty important for what it's worth.

Jeff Schwartz:

Let me ask one last question. It's a two-part rapid-fire question, and they're both unfair questions. One is, there is this question about how much change is enough? Does an organization need to get to a period of stability? By the way, I have a very strong point of view on this, which I will answer, I will give mine after you speak. And then one of my favorite quotes, and I love quotes, is Albert Einstein said a century ago that you can't navigate a new world with an old map. And what you've been talking about with us today really is about new maps for new challenges. So a little bit about that change question, but what are the top three questions you know in rapid fire that people and business leaders should be asking themselves that you've learned the hard way with your colleagues at Telstra. Like what are those top three questions that you think they need to be asking themselves to make progress, to have an impact and to really get started in a way that points them in a successful direction?

Alex Badenoch:

Yeah. Look, it goes a bit to my comments before I really do think taking the time to be really clear on what your company strategy is, not the collection of many, but what is your whole company strategy and what will it take to be successful? Is it a new design? Is it new technology? Is it the skills and capability of your people? You have to be clear on that. And then it goes a bit to the change question, Jeff. I mean I would love to say you can press pause, ask the world to stop, and let us all draw a breath. I probably tend to believe that change will happen in spite of you, and it's happening every day. What is beholden on leaders to do? And what executives should be asking themselves?

Are they building an organization that actually is adaptable to change and moves away from our traditional world where we resisted change and held onto the way we were until we couldn't resist anymore, and then we have these horrible transitions which are really painful? Or do you build a dynamic organization that can actually constantly adjust and evolve? And then to the question about constant change, your people aren't taken through these horrible phases. It's just something that happens live and dynamically because you're responding and you can deploy people, you can deploy skills, you can do those things. Now I don't have a utopian vision of this, but I do believe we can get to a place where work is fluid. Flowing people to the work is a fluid process. It's not a restructuring process.

It's not a message change process. So if people are designing change, are they building a truly flexible dynamic organization that is set up to deal with any change as opposed to building a static form to deal only with a moment in time? And I think that is a fundamentally different way of thinking about how you design and enable organizations. If you think about COVID, Jeff, like all of us suddenly had to deal with something different. I can tell you we were able to respond really well because our organization was more dynamically set up to be able to go, oh, well, conditions have changed. Gotta do something different now. And we were able to repoint people without the big restructuring. So the things that leaders should be thinking about are sort of that clarity and whether you are building a resistant, resilient, adaptable, fluid organization that will be able to morph as the world changes rather than a static one that will have to continue to go through horrendous rounds of change, which aren't good for the business, rarely good for the customer, and never good for your people.

Jeff Schwartz:

So let me do two things. Alex, thank you for joining us on Gloat Learn. You've been very generous and you've allowed me to sort of grill you a little bit in the conversation and keep up the energy and I cannot tell you how much we appreciate that. I appreciate the entire conversation and I think where we ended on this discussion of the dynamic organization, which is a major theme and a piece of research we're gonna be releasing from Gloat in the next few weeks, next few months. And the difference between being an organization that goes from one static state to another, and one as we in Gloat talk about, our mission is to put organizations and people in motion and organizations and people are in motion.

That's who we are. We are people, people are always moving. We're flowing between our work lives and our personal lives and our communal lives. We're going from one career to another career to another career. This concept of flow is really central to that. And then putting it in the context of as you role played for us, if I could put it that way. The role of a people leader who's always focused on the context of the overall business, the overall organization, and the interplay of strategy and transformation and customers and finance and people. That has really been a theme of our discussion today. And I'll end it again with two very quick comments. One thank you. I lived in India, Nepal for a long time, so I salute the divinities within you and everybody who's joined us. And I'll end with one of my favorite lines,

which is in a world that's constantly changing we need to be making bold moves and taking on new ways of working. And you've shared that with us today and we appreciate it. So thank you for being with us. Thank you all for joining us from around the world and good luck to the Australian women's team today in the semifinals. Thanks everybody. Signing off. Thank you. Cheers. Bye.

