



# Hear+Beyond

## Accelerating Australian Business

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SEASON 1

## Tara Brady on lessons leaders can learn from Star Trek

**HOST: Rae Johnston, Multi Award-Winning Australian Journalist**

**GUEST: Tara Brady, CEO Accenture Australia & New Zealand**

**Rae:**

Hi, I'm Rae Johnston. And in this brand-new podcast series from Accenture, I've been lucky enough to talk to Australian CEOs who share their take on our nation's recovery. From Dr. Larry Marshall, a CEO of CSIRO to Anna Bligh, CEO of Australian Banking Association. I've had access to the sharpest minds at the heart of leadership during a time like no other. If you're into innovation, business, human behaviour, sustainability, and enjoy speculating about the future, you're going to love this.

**Voiceover:**

Hear+Beyond. Accelerating Australian business.

**Rae:**

In this episode I'm joined by Tara Brady, Accenture's market unit lead across Australia and New Zealand. Originally from London, Tara moved to Sydney last year, bringing 25 years of experience transforming organisations in the UK and Europe. In Australia, Tara now represents Accenture on the Business Council of Australia, the Australian British Chamber of Commerce, and is the executive sponsor of the Local Skills to Succeed program, which helps disadvantaged young people build skills and confidence. Prior to his time at Accenture, Tara was CEO of Southend United Football Club and served five years in the Royal Navy. When Tara's not in his day job, he can be found training with the next generation of fighters in Redfern's boxing rings. Welcome Tara. Thanks for joining me today.

**Tara:**

Thank you very much and thank you for inviting me, Rae. It's good to see you.

**Rae:**

No worries. Good to see you again. So you haven't been in the country for very long.

**Tara:**

No.



**Rae:**

Which means you arrived during the pandemic.

**Tara:**

Yes.

**Rae:**

What was that like?

**Tara:**

Well, it was an experience. So I came in August. I left a country that was really challenged with the whole COVID, the lockdown, and culturally challenged with the lockdown as well, because the disciplines just weren't there that you've had over here. So first of all, leaving there and arriving here was almost a culture shock in some ways. But then I had to get through the quarantine, which was an experience. And I was coached by people over here so I can get up to speed with the Australian culture as quick as possible. One was to read *The Lucky Country* by Donald Horne. One was to watch *The Rake*, which is the *Rake* series. And one was to watch *Australian Dream*, which regardless of your views, but it was still at least I understand the topics. So I suppose the *Rake* took up most of my time, because it's five series and had a lot of time to kill in the quarantine. And it's probably was the most enjoyable. I did enjoy it.

**Rae:**

So you got a crash course education on Australia by just watching TV.

**Tara:**

Through Richard Roxburgh. I found him great.

**Rae:**

So you've noticed differences in the way the pandemic has impacted the two countries. But what about in business? How do we do things differently here?

**Tara:**

I've been pleasantly surprised. The UK does seem, and I've only been in the UK so - obviously I've worked globally, I've worked in US, I've worked in other parts of Europe, but I've always been based in the UK and predominantly financial services. So there's a way that obviously UK do things compared to different for the rest of world, but there's clearly a way Australian people do things differently in their business community. One of the things that I've noticed here is just the community is much better. It's easier to network, engage, accommodating, transparent. It's a nicer feel.

How do we do things differently? Because of the need. And we'll come onto that in a second. But there's more of a burning platform for change in the UK, particularly with the economic crisis in the last 10 years from banks, the retrenchment of financial services, European banks going back to Europe, US banks under the Trump era going back to the US. We've had to change. We had to do some dramatic changes. You see a lot of the fintechs coming into the UK. So there's been a huge need for transformation. Coming to Australia, there isn't that tough environment. We are a wealthy country. We benefit from great raw materials in the ground that are sustainable for a long time. So we have those benefits to be more, sit back and make decisions about what we're going to do.

We're not always the earliest adopters. We're not always the first to create and be innovative, but it is much more open about change and the discussions around it. So it's different. I'd say for myself personally, I find the challenge is unique in so much that I'm dealing with organisations that are fairly healthy compared to organisations that are really struggling in the UK. With healthy organisations it's more about strategic thinking, how you can grow your platform rather than dealing with the firefighting of here and now. So it's been an experience.

**Rae:**

So Tara, do you think that as our natural resources run out in the future, they're a finite resource, that we might become a little bit more bold in the way that we approach business?

**Tara:**

I'm not sure if it's bold and the finite resources, it's a long way still before they become finite. That's part of the challenge. Changing now, I think we should be more around why we need to be more today, regardless of the natural resources. I think natural resource is a great wealth to build off, to invest in thinking and ideas and creativity and back up some of our innovation. So I'm more about what can we do today with the resources, the natural resources and the wealth that we've got.

At the moment, I feel we're very dependent on imports, particularly in core areas such as pharmaceuticals, look at now with the vaccine. I'd love to see us more advanced in not just medicine, but technology as well, so we are the leader in some of these fields. So the rest of the world are buying from us. If we look at something as simple as the natural resources, there's still something bizarre in my mind that we send the nickel and the lithium around the world and it comes back and we're buying electric cars like Tesla. There's something bizarre about that.

We're one of the few countries in the world that has all the resources and the wealth and the know-how to actually execute it ourselves. We just need the investment and will and motivation to build these things. We could be the leader in these areas. So it's just a great opportunity for the country.

**Rae:**

We are seeing these manufacturing plants just sitting there empty. We're seeing skilled workers ready to jump in.

**Tara:**

We've got all the resources. We've got all the skills. We've got all the investment. It's just such an untapped opportunity. I know coming from a country that doesn't have that it's challenge, really challenge, and really struggling at the moment. It's exciting times.

**Rae:**

What do you think needs to change to make that happen?

**Tara:**

Well, you mentioned the bold. But I think, it's a collective backing from not just business leaders, but from the government, from the people. We still only have leadership in corporate particularly only pulls from the degree educated group of people, which is, I think less than 25% of the country. 75% of untapped talent that we don't even go after. And it's not just widening the net to bring those talent in and explore, but it's also educating, making it accessible for technology for those people to want to come in. It's a much bigger challenge. So it's about having the motivation. It's about having the collective community, the sort of broader ecosystem. So business and politics and then the talent to back it up. We've got it all. It's for us to do.



And the reason I keep harping on about other countries is because they haven't got it all. So they are scrapping a bit to find solutions. Talent probably would be the one I'd say is the one right here and now that we need to step up on. If I may do quote an analogy, if you watch the film or program, the TV series Star Trek.

**Rae:**

Yes.

**Tara:**

In it, James Kirk, and all officers have to pass something called the Kobayashi Maru. Kobayashi Maru is effectively a simulation where you can't win. So you're in your captain's seat and the enemy are coming towards you. You can either fight them and you'll lose your ship, or you concede and then you give in to the hands of the enemy. So it's how you deal with the situation. This is a no win, but on the flip side they're monitoring how you manage it.

Captain James T. Kirk can't deal with no win situations. So the night before he cheats and changes the code on the software. So he then wins the game because the game has been cheated. Now, where am I going with this? The point was, he went out of the game. The game that was in front of him. He stepped out of the game and made his game bigger. He was saying, actually, "The game is just to win. Not to win within the narrow rules of what's put in front of me."

And if you think of particularly where I've come from growing up, and I hear others over here, who've gone through tough economic backgrounds and a working class, they don't have those opportunities in front of you. If they just play the straight games, if they work hard, sometimes they still don't get the opportunities. It is unfair. So they do have to do more. So what we need to do is give them those broader opportunities so they can excel. They can hustle a bit, they can break little rules, push boundaries. It's those people that break through, you'll see some real talent. Is those that we want to attract. And how do we get them?

**Rae:**

I love that analogy. Tell me about your reflections on the Google Digital Economy report. What did that include?

**Tara:**

Without coming across as the know-it-all potman, I really am not. But when I look where we sit in the world in some of the league tables, and if you look at the Economic Complexity league where I think 87th behind El Salvador and Kazakhstan. If you look at the recent Accenture Strategy data that was done on technology take-up and digital, I think we were 35 out of 36 OECD countries for take-up. We were 50% behind on cloud adoption, just to the average of the OECD. I mean, if our technology tech was the average of OECD countries, I think the productivity was in double digits, about where we are today. So there's huge opportunities in front of us.

Now, I'm not pointing out those facts to say we're bottom of the league table, how bad are we? It was more about, look at the opportunity in front of us. Imagine being a wealthy country with all this in front of us, with this opportunity, what could we really be? We could be a great power.

**Rae:**

Absolutely. We've already seen throughout history. We are early adopters of technology in this country. So to up that acceleration would just make sense, right?



**Tara:**

We're early adopters because we have the wealth to buy. We are first to market, effectively.

**Rae:**

We just like new gadgets really.

**Tara:**

Yes. It's new, let's have it. But wouldn't it be great if we actually were inventing it ourselves and executing on some of our ideas and thinking, and the investment truly was behind it. Not just government, but from the business leadership. It backed up some of the things that we believed in, it would be great.

**Rae:**

How can we be using more digital technology to drive growth? And how will that help us compete in a global market?

**Tara:**

I think digital, when I look at something like simple as financial services, digital immediately brings efficiencies. Fit for purpose, reducing of cost base and speed to market, which is fantastic. But it also brings much more data management, data analytics to understand what your customer experiences are, supply chain improvement.

So it isn't just about efficiency and cutting costs. It's also about revenue growth, new products to market can go quicker. It's really a whole step jump in operation. I've seen and I've spoken to a lot of the CEOs over here, we are - going back to the OECD - we are behind in some of the areas, but the path is easy to follow. There's many people in the world who have already done this. So the catch-up I don't see taking long, but I do feel it should be starting now.

Some of the CEOs I'm talking to, it's not around so much ambition, it's about the ability for them to execute on what they believe is right. So it's them putting investment behind, it's them having their shareholders backing up, having the talent within the organisation to be able to support what they're trying to achieve. That talent's got to be educated. That talent's got to come from pools that we've not necessarily looked at in the past. So it's a real coming together of how we can achieve greatness for our country. And I say "our" as in I've now been adopted as Australian.

**Rae:**

We've adopted you.

**Tara:**

That's the feel for it. I'd like to think I've been adopted.

**Rae:**

I think it's fair to say that you have.

**Tara:**

Thank you.

**Rae:**

It's difficult to talk about uptake of your digital technology without addressing the fact that we do have a significant digital divide in this country, between people of different socioeconomic backgrounds, depending on where people are living, whether or not they have access to the internet or devices. How can we address the digital divide to support more inclusion and diversity?

**Tara:**

And I think it's more than just digital. We're narrow to just focus on digital. I think it's technology. I think it's education. It really is the broadest mix. So how can we educate, bring more talent into the workplace? When we look at just the basic stats of people who've got a degree in this country, it's only a quarter of the country today has got a degree.

**Rae:**

I don't have a degree. Do you have a degree?

**Tara:**

I don't have a degree either.

**Rae:**

There we go. Two people without degrees.

**Tara:**

Let's high five for that. So when you look at the businesses, particularly corporate are looking at a pool of 25%. They're not looking at the other 75%. Clearly there's talent in the other 75%. How do we go and capture that talent? And it's difficult. We mentioned earlier on around what the UK are looking to propose for doctors or medicine in the UK. No longer needing a degree, moving to an apprenticeship type version, which would immediately broaden the net for people who can join. I don't want to quote - he's one of my favourite writers - but George Bernard Shaw, the conspiracies of laity, they're even talking about dropping Latin from the language, because Latin benefits people who've got a more private education, they've learned Latin at school. Struggling with the vocabulary of your own country, then having to learn different languages, it's very difficult. So the fact that they're thinking about that, which is great.

**Rae:**

I think that's amazing.

**Tara:**

Because what will do is dip into the talent pool. Clearly there's talent there, but we just we've ignored in the past.

**Rae:**

And we haven't embraced the different ways that people learn.

**Tara:**

Yes.

**Rae:**

Being a doctor, for example, I'm not a doctor. I don't want to speak on behalf of doctors, but it is such a hands-on role and it's such a customer facing role. So to learn how to be able to do that in an apprenticeship setting makes so much sense.

**Tara:**

When you first read it, "Oh, hold on a second."

**Rae:**

Hold on.

**Tara:**

People aren't going to be educated to operate on me. But realistically, as long as they are educated to the level required for the role, does it matter where they come from? Does it matter their route to achievement? So it's those type of things I think we should focus on. But talent particularly for Australia for number of reasons will be a big challenge going forward.

**Rae:**

What are the characteristics of good leaders, especially in what we're going to call challenging times?

**Tara:**

There's a number of attributes and characteristics of good leaders. I'm sure we've all read the books. If there's three that I would stand out as key attributes for a leader.

One is empowerment, one of the things I always say about a good leader is, is the person that where people follow. So it's not having the badge or having the status or the title. People just follow you because you're leading by example and you're empowering others to go with the flow. I'm a big fan of empowering others.

The second one is accountability, own your decisions, own your actions. When I think of when I first joined the Royal Navy at 16, I was in the Navy for five years. The GI said to me, "There's three key principles of leadership". He said, "Don't blame others, don't be a victim, and don't be offended". Now I know it's in the context of just being on a parade ground, and I know that they're sensitive in some areas. But it gave me a sense of resilience. Also, he led by example. He'd just come back from the Falklands. I just always remember thinking, he never uses excuses. I really liked that. Every time he made a decision, even if he got it wrong, he stood by it. I was impressed. And actually very quick to make a decision again, on the back of a wrong decision, just to get the right decision.

Then the final one is empathy, probably my weakest one, actually. Because we do need to move into more diverse to bring in other views and strengths. I've got a simple vantage point from my background. I struggle at times to understand where people are coming from and it's really important. So we've got to learn, not just talk and be open and share, but have empathy to understand what their vantage point is and the challenges they've got.

**Rae:**

It's a process as well. Isn't it? And it's recognising where your weaknesses lie as a leader. To know that you're not always going to be perfect in those three elements, but it's something that you can continuously be working on.

**Tara:**

Yeah. When I say empathy as a leader, I think we all should be more empathetic amongst each other. I think it's something that we should work on. I'm openly saying it's a weakness for me. So it's not just the modern day leader. It's the people who are following as well. It's for everyone.

**Rae:**

I'm sure it's different for everyone as well, because those qualities that you need to have, they need to feel authentic too, don't they?

**Tara:**

I think we mentioned this before, Rae. Another George Bernard Shaw statement is, if you think in My Fair Lady, the play that he wrote and it turned into a film, it was about a flower girl who was poor and it was about a lady who was wealthy. His statement was, the difference between a flower girl and a lady wasn't how they behave, it was about how they were treated. I just thought all the way through, it is true because we do treat people differently based on how they behave and how they are.

Now we've just gone through recognising that people are different, then you've got to adopt, you've got to change with it. So by creating different levels for different people, it's not necessarily the right thing. Everyone should have certain principles of trust, integrity, should be resourceful, should have a thirst for knowledge. These are the things that are important. If they don't have that, then it's more about the person rather than about the background where they're from.

We get into a deep subject here in terms of talent. But I'm really passionate. I'm really passionate. I found when I came out of school with no education and at 16, and then the Navy, if anything saved me because I had nowhere to go, it was a structure and a discipline I needed. It was a learning I gained from it. Coming out of it I felt strong enough to take on the world. If I hadn't have had that, I don't know where I would have been. Just the basic things. We mentioned this before as well about, but basic things like vocabulary, I really struggled because I didn't have the solid education that others had. So it's quite exhausting. At the end of the day I'd be tired just understanding people's words. I think they're all important for great leadership.

**Rae:**

Something else that you're passionate about is sport.

**Tara:**

Yes.

**Rae:**

So I do want to talk to you about sport. I'm curious, what can business leaders learn from sport? They feel very different from each other.

**Tara:**

Well, if you don't know, I'm not trying to plug it because it's 20 years old. I wrote a book called Rules of the Game with my dad.

**Rae:**

You can plug it.

**Tara:**

I'll plug it. It's probably sold out now, but it was looking at business compared to war, politics, and sport. Each is different. There are certain leadership principles that are across all of them. I mean, trust is a massive one. Leading by example is different in sport than maybe it is in business. It's all learning from each other. It's very hard to compare like for like, but they've all got basic principles. Then there's politics and there's war. I read and has been quoted many times recently that over here, business leaders are seen as more trusted and respected than the politicians. There's a lot that we can all learn from each other.

**Rae:**

Absolutely. So one final question for you, Tara, you are here on Hear+Beyond. I'd like to know what your beyond looks like.

**Tara:**

If I'm talking for Australia and the business community, I think we should recognise where we are today. It's been some great achievements, particularly with COVID what's in front of us. We're a wealthy nation, which is fantastic. We're a healthy nation. It's great to be living here and it's really enjoyable. But we do need to start thinking about excelling in certain industries. We do need to back up our creativity with some investment. It's more than just having the ideas, it's executing on those ideas with strong investment from all of our ecosystem. Not just businesses, but government as well. And we must step up our digital footprint. If you look at most of the organisations, I still feel we're behind. Most of the industries we're behind and going back to the OECD Accenture data that was done recently, even if we were 50% OECD. So we're average, we'll be upping our productivity by 11%, which is phenomenal.

**Rae:**

Yeah. Wow.

**Tara:**

So we've really got to step up. So it's investment two fold. It's investment both in the ideas, but it's in the execution of talent and the digital to back it up.

**Rae:**

And what about from a personal perspective?

**Tara:**

Well, from a personal perspective, I suppose two things that come to mind. One is hoping it's going to stop raining! I've been here six months.

**Rae:**

It's La Nina.

**Tara:**

It's a great place for sun and sea. I've just seen a lot of rain. But once the rain's cleared and the borders are open, I hope to spend more time looking around the rest of Australia, which just sounds lovely. I'm excited by seeing all the beauty of Australia.



**Rae:**

Well, hopefully you get to travel very soon. Thanks for joining me, Tara.

**Tara:**

Thank you, Rae. Thank you for inviting me.

**Rae:**

Don't miss the next episode of Hear+Beyond where I'll be joined by more prominent leaders to hear their take on the future of Australian business.

**Voiceover:**

Hear+Beyond. Accelerating Australian business.

**Rae:**

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