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IT'S LEARNING.
JUST NOT AS WE KNOW IT.

Two-Part Podcast Series: The Lifelong Learning Revolution

This podcast series features:

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PODCAST 1

Host: Remember the scene in The Graduate when a swaggering older man, Mr. Maguire, gives a young, confused Dustin Hoffman a hot tip?

"I just want to say one word to you, one word. Are you listening? Plastics!"

Host: So what's the equivalent for today's new grad?

Ulrik Christensen: Rather than calling it "plastics," I would actually call it "plasticity."

Host: That was Ulrik Christensen, co-founder of Area9 Group, an adaptive learning company. Plasticity isn't an industry. Our brains are plastic; we can keep growing and learning as adults.

Ulrik Christensen: A necessity to be plastic.

Host: Ok, so we have to keep growing and learning. Not just for fun and enrichment, but to survive in this age of disruption and acute skills shortages. Here's Shea Goapul, Founder and Executive Director of the Global Apprenticeship network.

Shea Goapaul: Seventy million youth are registered as unemployed, but amongst that sort of unemployed there's also what we call the "NEET," which are young people who are no longer looking for a job, so they're not in education, they're not in employment, and they're not in training. Those numbers are really, really high.

Ironically, 46 percent of employers are saying that they can't find the talent that they need. This is what we're calling the skills mismatch.

Host: And the challenge is that matching skills will become harder as the demand for skills is rapidly and constantly changing. Paolo Tosolini is the founder of Tosolini Productions, a digital agency based in Seattle, Washington that uses emerging media like virtual reality.

Paolo Tosolini: We work in technology, so we assume when we start working, right away, that things are going to change. So, we need to evolve and whatever we studied maybe a year ago or two years ago, it might not be necessarily applicable in the future. When we hire people in our agency, I'm looking for two things. Is this people a well-rounded person that can adapt to change? And the second, is this person somebody who can actually deliver a project?

Host: Ok, so adaptable and collaborative. But surely in the age of digital, we all need more STEM skills, right?

Rob Seamans disagrees. He's Associate Professor of Management and Organizations at NYU's Stern School of Business, and researches how AI and automation will alter jobs. So which other skills are ascendant?

Rob Seamans: These are sort of skills around empathy and creativity and judgment, the things that make humans very human.

Critical thinking, learning, engaging with whatever the problem that you're faced with, using a critical thinking mindset to think through that problem, identifying perhaps things you might need to learn to address that problem, then moving forward to address it.

Host: Funny, no mention of STEM skills. Here's Armen Ovanessoff, Principal

Director at Accenture Research.

Armen Ovanessoff: We need to instill higher-order cognitive abilities. Reasoning, active learning, critical thinking. We need to do that for all learners. We must not keep connecting them only to STEM subjects. So de-linking those complex reasoning and higher order cognitive skills from STEM subjects is a very important first thing.

The overemphasis of STEM rhetoric sits in stark contrast with the underemphasis of a range of skills that we've seen actually really increasing in importance across every single type of work role. Creativity and socio-emotional intelligence. Things like empathy.

Host: That's true for STEM workers themselves, Ovanessoff's research team found.

Armen Ovanessoff: We looked at science and engineering workers, for example. Highly analytical. And for them the skills that have increased most in importance over the past 10 to 15 years have been creativity and socio-emotional intelligence. They're having to communicate their findings, present in creative ways.

And now that we recognize the importance of creativity, people are trying to encourage the number of arts and humanities graduates. They're measuring the output of institutions and systems, when actually what's really important is what's happening to the individual learners. So when we say creativity is becoming more important, it doesn't mean that we necessarily need more ballerinas and trombone players.

Host: Now that's a shame. But seriously, Ovansesoff thinks we need a complete educational overhaul,

moving away from teaching knowledge and a fixed set of skills and toward ever-evolving clusters of skills that people of all ages must master.

Armen Ovanessoff: People have been talking about lifelong learning for a while now, but it feels like a lot of it has been lip service, and I think now absolutely we're feeling the urgency. the truth is that adult education and training is woefully inadequate in most of the world.

We need learning to be provided in more convenient and flexible ways, in bite-sized chunks that can work around our work lives, our commitments. Actually, our research shows that workers want to learn, but it's just not made easy to fit around and finding the time to do training around work and life is one of the biggest challenges.

Host: We know from emerging neuroscience that there is an optimum way for adults to learn, whether they are mastering a new software program or figuring out how to manage angry customers. It's called experiential learning, and it's based on doing or simulating situations rather than passive notetaking or listening.

Host: Paul Zak, a neuroscientist and CEO of Immersion Neuro has spent years figuring out how to engage distracted modern adults. Here's what works:

Paul Zak: Use things like storytelling, use conflict, use emotion, use personal engagement in the audience so that now I have an emotional stake in the information.

It's embracing the power of emotional connection. So all of these things are what the human brain evolved to be really good at.

Host: We evolved to crave stories, yet most adults aren't natural – or willing – autodidacts. That's where company culture comes in.

Paolo Tosolini: If you have been working in the same position or the same company, maybe, doing the same things for too long then suddenly a request for changing a process or introducing some sort of automation might be scary. For example, if the culture in a company is let's grow together, let's enable you to do what you're doing better by constantly introducing new processes or new technologies to make the work better, then suddenly there is less of this sense of a complacency, I'd say.

As the founder of my own agency, I have to live the values that I would like my team to live themselves. Right? Just yesterday I was roller-skating and I started listening to podcasts, like yours, like TED Talks. To me, every possible time available, that is down time, I try to devote it to learning.

Host: Governments have a role to play too, especially to develop apprenticeships, says Shea Goapaul.

Shea Goapaul: The examples of Switzerland or Germany, these are what we call the gold standards of apprenticeship, and so they've been developing these programs over 150 years. The employers are engaged, the financing is shared between the employers, the federal government, the state governments, etc.

And it works extremely well.

Host: And not just for blue-collar workers.

Shea Goapaul: There are plenty of apprenticeships in banking, in the insurance sector, in the tourism industry and in the IT sector, in media.

Host: Does each generation need its own skills training program? Allison Horn, Managaing Director, Learning and Leadership at Accenture, doubts it.

Allison Horn: If I were to bring a group of ten millennials into my office here and ask them all how they prefer to learn, what learning strategies they think works best for them I can promise you I'm going to get more than one answer.

So for us, learning is a very personalized journey, and we are in a world where one size fits one.

Host: For Ovanessoff, experiential, personalized, and lifelong learning isn't just the way to close the skills gap and adapt to the economy of the future. It's a way to keep feeling vital – to keep dreaming.

Armen Ovanessoff: I'm a few years older than 40, and I still don't know what I want to do when I grow up. And I suspect a lot of people feel like that, and I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing.

Host: You have been listening to Accenture's podcast, The Lifelong Learning Revolution. Join us for Part 2, where we explore successful skills-training programs.

PODCAST 2

Host: In the first of this two-part series, we touched on the skills gap (it's big), which skills will be in demand (human ones), how adults learn best (by actively participating in on-the-job and immersive experiential learning), and how companies and governments can support us all as we become lifelong learners.

For this episode, we wanted to find

out: What are some features of successful skills training programs? Here's a closer look at the lifelong learning revolution:

First, some reassuring words about the future from NYU professor Rob Seamans.

Rob Seamans: Productivity is increasing thanks to robotics. And so we might expect that similar effects will play out as firms start adopting artificial intelligence.

Popular media loves the scare stories, that robots will take all the jobs, but it's just not true.
We could look at past examples of the adoption of ATM machines and banking, led to an increase in the number of bank tellers.

Host: Consider how medical professionals will be trained with augmented reality technologies, for instance.

Rob Seamans: You can imagine a technology that allows the younger, inexperienced surgeons to sort of visualize what's happening inside the body.

The technology really just sort of frees me up to focus on stuff that's a lot more valuable, like saving a patient's life, for example.

Host: Or simply caring for patients, as Ulrik Christensen, co-founder of the adaptive learning firm Area9 Group, points out.

Ulrik Christensen: Very few people want to get comforted by a robot if they feel sad. And in many cases, a very important part of a nurse's job is to actually get information about the patient's feelings and the softer things that we can pick up on things that a

machine can't realize.

Host: Informed by cognitive science and neuroscience, Christensen's company has developed time-efficient, effective training programs for physicans studying for their board exams.

Ulrik Christensen: The most encouraging outcome of that is that the people who sign up, after they've passed their board exam, which is a major deal in a physician's life, who sign up for continuous voluntary training afterwards is sky high. They're actually even paying for it to say, "I want to stay current because this is the method that works for me as a physician to keep my knowledge current before the next time I need to prove proficiency."

It's the first time we've given people the chance to do it voluntarily where there's not an extrinsic motivator. That's a very, very encouraging finding.

Host: Programs like these are not your mother's e-learning platforms, which basically slapped course syllabi online. Here's Kathleen Mullaney, VP of Careers at Udacity, an online platform that provides "nano-degrees" for in-demand skills.

Kathleen Mullaney: If you enroll in a Udacity Nanodegree Program, you actually get our guarantee to get feedback on each of the projects that you complete by a person.

When you graduate with a Nanodegree program, you actually have a portfolio of work that shows what you can do.

Why people come to Udacity, and why Nanodegree programs have been so popular, is that we give you a path and it's motivating because we're taking out the guesswork.

We're trying to prepare people for

work, and it's the same at work, right? You don't just get to move on with a barely passing grade at work. You have to actually complete the job that you were assigned.

The thing that people report back most is what they've gained from a Udacity program is that they know how to learn now. It's not so scary, that you know if they start a new job and they need to learn a new framework, that's fine they'll do it.

Host: Mullaney noticed that once people have mastered new skills, they need to work on something else: The confidence to adopt the identity of someone who has those skills.

Kathleen Mullaney: What I found was that people had a really hard time acknowledging that they now have this new skill set. Like people would say, I'm an aspiring programmer, I'm a waitress but an aspiring programmer, or, like, I'm a novice programmer.

Host: It's a good tip for job searchers: Own what you know.

Accenture, with it's more than 430,000 employees, has had to train at scale while keeping initiatives learner-centric, amidst rapid transformation across the industries they serve. Here's Allison Horn, a Managing Director in Learning and Leadership Development.

Allison Horn: So we've been on a massive up-skilling journey with our technology workforce and now it has expanded well across Accenture to build new skills and new ways of working,

And, in just a few short years, we've seen massive progress, in the hundreds of thousands of people helping them shift from where they

were yesterday to where we need them to be tomorrow, and that's been done through a combination of digital learning assets, hands-on applied learning through different projects, classroom intervention, really taking a very blended approach.

We don't necessarily separate the concept of work and learning at Accenture, it is all very much intertwined.

Host: Learning also shouldn't be separate from fun, says Anders Grondstadt, President of the Grondstedt Group, which develops "next-gen learning" systems for corporations.

Anders Grondstadt: We bring in the best of storytelling, Hollywood style narratives, driven learning as well as gamification and, more recently, virtual and augmented reality. We're using the approaches, the software, the hardware that works so well to keep us engaged in the entertainment space and put it to use for corporate learning, to create simulation-based and game-based, story-based learning experiences.

Host: His company has created a game for Walmart to teach associates to become managers. Users pick their avators and start experiencing the life of a Walmart department manager.

Anders Grondstadt: Initially, you start off in the grocery section, you load up your cart, take your products to the store, start stocking your shelves and if a customer walks within 10 feet of you, you have to stop and ask if you can help.

You have to balance the demands of fulfilling your various inventory tasks of stocking shelves and things like that with customer satisfaction skills of helping customers. And you're being scored along the way, there's a customer satisfaction score and an inventory score that illustrates this balance.

And it's such a sticky and addictive experience that when we've been testing this in focus groups people don't even want to put down their phones and tablets. It's something that they claim they would like to play even outside of work hours at home.

Of course the bar is set very low because corporate training today is just god-awful, really everything you can come up with is usually better than the PowerPoint style e-learning and class learning experience they have these days.

Host: Fortunately, it's clear that "these days" are quickly receding. We can all get ready for better training and learning—for the rest of our lives.

Thank you for listening to Accenture's podcast, The Lifelong Learning Revolution.