



**Small Firm  
Big Impact**

PODCAST POWERED BY CA CATALYST



CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS™  
AUSTRALIA + NEW ZEALAND

**\*\*DISCLAIMER: This is a direct transcript of the podcast audio and may not be grammatically correct\*\***

EPISODE: 8 - Agility through disruption: upskilling for the future

JS: John Schol CEO, Malloch McClean

MB: Dr Marcus Bowles Managing Director and Chair, The Institute for Working Futures

FH: Felicity Hill Director, Greenlion Limited

---

JS: Hello and welcome back to the CA Catalyst Podcast, "Small Firm, Big Impact". I'm your host John Schol, chief executive at Malloch McClean.

It probably won't surprise you that 77% of CEOs are concerned that key skill shortages could impair the company's growth and that they are actively looking to best minimise any impact of skill shortages. As a CA today, we live in a world that is constantly evolving. We're becoming increasingly globalised and interconnected. Regulation continues to shift and technology is only going to become more embedded in our everyday lives.

These changes, although disruptive, do present opportunities. So what are the key skills required to best equip yourself for impact in your firm, with your clients and your community? With me to share their expertise and knowledge is Dr Marcus Bowles, who is the chair of the Institute for Working Futures, and Felicity Hill, director of Greenlion Limited. Marcus, Felicity, welcome to you both.

FH: Thanks, John.

MB: Thank you.

JS: Felicity, what is your role at Greenlion?

FH: So, I'm a director at Greenlion. The name doesn't immediately spring out, but it is an accounting firm. The reason we have quite a different name is so that we do stand out from other firms because I do believe we operate quite differently. And as a director, I sit alongside my clients and I help them achieve their goals, whether that's financial or personal. We set goals when we begin working together and then we set a series of steps to enable us to get there. So finance is a part of that, but it's definitely not the main focus.

JS: And how many people work at Greenlion?

FH: We've got 15 in our Greenlion core accounting team. We've got a couple of sister companies that sit alongside and they've developed out of needs that we've discovered our clients want, services our clients want, and they've been created out of that.

JS: And what do you consider the key skills expected of an accountant in your business today?

FH: Right now, in our business today, it would be empathy and an ability to relate to people. We've gone obviously through a lot of change in the last 12 months or so and the ability to relate to people, to understand what they're going through and to provide a shoulder to, not to cry on so much, but to lean on. Those key skills help with it.

JS: And Marcus, can you briefly describe the work that you do at the Institute of Working Futures?

MB: So basically, the Institute for Working Futures has been around for just on 30 years. And our whole role is to really forecast where workforces are going into the

future, preparing them and helping mainly corporations and professional bodies become more responsive to the needs of the future work.

Basically, also then backing into the education system. I spend a lot of time obviously doing research in universities and part of universities, but we also contribute significantly to where curricula and learning needs to change.

JS: So can you just tell our listeners a little bit more about that 30 years of research and what that actually means today?

MB: I guess the most important thing is that – and we didn't arrive at where we are now without a clear understanding, obviously hindsight is great – but the things that we've been working on have been focused on... I'm a systems theorist. So my PhD is in technology change and organisational design, which when I came out with that shiny new [idea] towards the 1990s, it was something that really didn't look like it was going to create any work at all. But we started working with corporations like, in Australia, Woolworths and Simplot and Qantas and other big brands about really just how misaligned the supply of skills were to where their jobs were moving.

And so then I started working on predictive models and we started to then come together and started to realise everyone thought they had unique differences. We started to see that between 70 and 80% of all of the skills, competencies and now what we call capabilities were consistently the same between organisations and levels of work and different occupations. So we started to see that there was a pattern to where skills were emerging. If you can predict that pattern, then you can actually help organisations respond before it is required.

JS: So Marcus, a lot of chartered accountants are now using the Capability+ model through the CA ANZ website. Can you tell us a bit of background around how that originated and the science that goes in behind it?

MB: I think the big thing about Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand [CA ANZ] has been that they've always been looking ahead of the curve, looking to where the profession is going, not just what it's doing today.

So [CA ANZ] really looked ahead, and across Australia and New Zealand, they did research into what [does] the future accountant look like. We helped them with that research and the Institute for Working Futures pulled together a lot of global insights.

The World Economic Forum described accounting as the most vulnerable profession to technology change and that it would be a redundant profession by 2028. So people started to think maybe, as a good accountant does, that the numbers didn't stack up to what was being said.

So the research that we did and the analysis that we did was really focused on not just what an accountant does, but where are the roles of accounting going into the future. So the capabilities were developed to reflect the real world not only today, but where work would be emerging, and where accountants needed to show those capabilities and make them obvious to the people that were hiring them or employing them to actually be able to do the work that they needed to have as, particularly, large corporations, but also, for small businesses.

The big thing now is you'll just be able to see the profile of capabilities. You can go in and self-profile against your own role and see how you're holding up against what would be the industry standard. But you can then use your profile to compare yourself to future roles or to other roles that you might want to step into for career purposes.

So, for any organisation, I've got a large telecommunication company, they put all of their people through those profiles, so they actually know where everyone is up to against core capabilities. And it's not only about the individual and tailoring a solution for their own development, professionally and from a development point of view, but it also gives them a workforce audit. So they know how ready their workforce is for the future in terms of accounting and finance.

JS: Look, the Capability+ model is something that we've used at Malloch McClean since the beginning. I've used it myself. I found it really, really interesting both to benchmark myself against what I perhaps should be doing, but also against what other opportunities are out there, and it's worked really well for our team and our performance coaching and our performance appraisal processes. It's a wonderful tool.

Marcus, what are you seeing as the key skills expected of an accountant in today's public practice landscape?

MB: Well, if you're talking immediate short term then the major ones that we're seeing coming up on the radar are exactly as Felicity said, it's really that empathy, that ability to connect with the client, the customer. The other ones are really the adaptive mindset.

So things aren't running the same as they always have been. You need to be able to personally be more resilient, persistent and curious; looking at better ways to do things than you have in the past. And the final ones really are the ones that we probably forget a bit about. And that is that we need to actually understand data. Data has become more prevalent, not only because we need to be more responsive and deliver a better customer experience, but we actually need that data to give enriched decisions.

JS: So, Felicity, would it be fair to say that we want our team to look beyond the numbers and use those soft skills, which are really quite hard. And what do you think are the most impactful skills that you've been able to teach your team over the last 12 months?

FH: As Marcus mentioned, the adaptive mindset. We are living in a constantly changing world and I think if we cast our minds back to when COVID first hit our shores, and the lockdowns and what we experienced there, things were changing

on a daily if not hourly kind of basis. So being able to be adaptive with the environment that's happening around us, I think that's a really key competency.

JS: So we're seeing technology evolving. We're seeing business models innovating and regulations continue to change. And then there's the outliers like COVID. So Marcus, how do we build capability into our team and into our people to be able to cope with what's coming next?

MB: I think the big thing here is that it's really hard to say to someone that it's been happening before, because COVID looks like a unique situation. What's happened with COVID is it accelerated the underpinning things that were already occurring – 'things' being a technical term for massive disruption and the competition that really is now... with technology and the changes that we're seeing with the Internet. And, actually, new technologies are bringing competitors to our doorstep.

So we don't think about that. We think about us being able to take our services to our client, using the technology. But in actual fact, what's happening is we're seeing new platforms, new ways of servicing clients, and accounting, in particular, is a major area where that's occurring. So what we need to do is we need to look at the capabilities that we are uniquely building as a company. But we also need to deal with what you're calling the soft skills.

70% of all job profiles really are going to be about that complex problem solving, that critical thinking, the collaboration, the adaptive mindsets, the empathy. Those are the things that we need to get right because that's what tells us we've got an agile, high-potential workforce.

JS: So Felicity, do you think that we can teach those soft skills like empathy to our team?

FH: Personally, no. I think that it's something that develops over time. I think that it depends on life experiences. I think if someone joined your firm and they didn't have

an empathetic mindset, I think it would be very hard to train that. I don't think that one's really teachable.

I think it's able to be built on and for people to grow and learn, but I think that you need to have a certain base when coming into the workforce.

JS: And Marcus, are you seeing individuals building and creating more empathy in connection with their clients?

MB: I think Felicity hit the nail on the head where the big thing about a lot of the soft skills is they can't be taught, you can only learn them. I don't think people really understand what that means. It means that two things are really important. As employers, we have to create experiences where people can actually get exposed to things such as empathy, really true collaboration, where they cognitively understand the difference between pushing communication and actually cooperating. And these things have to be learnt, and a lot of it's got to happen on the job and in real experiences.

And the second thing is, that's why employers hire for it. They are the single most expensive, hardest things to develop and they take a lot of bloody time. So what we have to do in the hire process now, and this is what we're seeing, is those skills come to the fore, because we just don't have the time and cost to develop them in a highly disruptive world.

JS: Can't be taught, you can only learn them. What a great phrase. Let me ask you, Marcus, what do we need to get people to unlearn so they can learn these new soft skills?

MB: That's a difficult one, I think the most important thing to understand is we need to change the education system that stresses discipline-based technical knowledge over the fact that someone's motivated and able to apply it to get a customer experience that's worthwhile.

I think that statement alone is about an end-to-end view of what you're learning rather than just learning industry discrete facts, and understanding the experience of education. In other words, what we can learn through being involved with other people that are getting educated, is as important as what we've been taught.

JS: So perhaps some of those key performance indicators and those key misses that we're seeing in team members need to change?

MB: Absolutely. We need to reward not just as much, and I know this is going to be hard, above the line, but maybe if I put it as a balanced account, we need to also make sure that what's under the line – the tacit knowledge, the emotions, the cognitive understanding, the motivation are equally as rewarded.

JS: And so as a leader listening to this podcast, how do we then go into our work and actually try and implement those sorts of thoughts into our training processes?

MB: Understand that every investment that you're making in this area is actually dealing with 70% of the people problem that you'll face if you don't, and that this is what's giving organisations real competitiveness. It's not about the size of the organisation. I work with an organisation that took a deliberate approach to really call out and to emphasise the customer service relationships that were being built by a few people in their organisation.

They were a regional [firm], they had five people and they had about 10 contractors who [were] coming in for part-time work. And when they actually started to emphasise the relationship side of what their work was about, they actually built a very competitive business in their region, because they just couldn't replicate that service with a platform service from somewhere else in the world. It really provided some sort of foolproof approach to what they were doing in terms of the future.

JS: So Felicity, what sort of training did you bring into your team to help them get futureproofed and get them ready for what we're dealing with today?

FH: I think we approached it in two different ways. One: Accountants are no longer backroom people, they need to be out in front of clients. I think the more that our team are out there in front and joining us in meetings, the more they learn and the more they can develop those skills alongside us.

We have an outsource team here, which takes care of the number crunching. And I think that looking at the skill sets our accountants need going forward, if we hire people and then expect them to sit in the back room and crunch numbers, one, I don't think we're going to keep the kind of people that we need for very long because that's not necessarily their desire and what they want to do day to day.

But I also don't think it's going to nurture and bring those skills forward that we want from our team.

What do you measure to work out whether your team does have the relationship skills and the empathy? Is there some sort of net promoter score? Is there feedback with the rest of the team? Is there 360-degree feedback? All those things need to be metrics that we look at in our modern firms as opposed to just the traditional [ones] of the write-ons and the charge-ups and all that sort of thing.

JS: Tell me a little bit more about the 360-degree feedback. Have you implemented that inside your business and what were the key learnings?

FH: We have, and we need to get better at it. As with everything, sometimes 'business as usual' kind of gets in the way. But if we're expecting our staff to have really good relationship skills and be empathetic, how are we as the directors, the leaders of the business? How are we performing on that front? And are we actually practising what we preach? And I think that we can have our own ideas but we need to make sure that outside our sort of headspace, that both our clients and our staff are seeing that from us.

I think it comes back to that old saying that it comes from the top, and if we're not measuring ourselves or measuring how we interact with our staff, then how are we expecting that to flow down through the organisation?

JS: Marcus, you mentioned earlier that employers are increasingly looking for enterprise skills: both problem solving and communication skills, collaboration and the ability to innovate. What are the primary areas of growth you see coming for chartered accountants in the future?

MB: I think it's at all levels. And again, drawing on what Felicity said, that the biggest thing we did when we mapped the future of the accountant is you've got to move out of processing, you've got to move out of that simple rote-based compliance and processing of forms in tax areas and other areas.

Wherever it can be automated, it will be automated. Wherever you think you might have a competitive advantage, no matter how small or niched you are, you will not. The technology changes in the level of automating that's occurring now really suggest the highest order areas where accountants can work is really as that partner to major transformation projects in your companies.

You cannot lose the closer you get to the customer. In other words, if you're focusing everything that you're doing on the customer experience and really being that partner, being the invaluable guide and to be the adviser to that person on their transformation, whether it's an individual or company, then that's an important place to be and to stay.

And I think that's the really important message: your technical skills are critical in how you do that, but if you can't forge that relationship and if you're nothing more than just processing things for the things that you're getting, then you're highly vulnerable.

JS: Do you think, Marcus, that chartered accountants have to change the lens on what value is in the client's eyes?

MB: 100%, yes. I think if that hasn't already been the question that's been asked and, if nothing else, this podcast could ask you to do that. Because the value equation isn't what you deliver, it's the end-to-end value proposition that you're offering that customer.

It's nothing different from any other business. But I think if I'm listening to Felicity, you're hearing again, and again, this message of being out of the office, being away from the numbers, asking the question about what these numbers mean. But not just for a product or a service you're delivering, but about the end-to-end relationship over time.

JS: That is highly valued by clients. Felicity, now that you have gone to outsourcing, you're having many more meetings and not just with the principals of the business, that's actually your team getting involved in those meetings. How do you now measure your value?. Has that changed over time as you've grown the skill set of your team and yourselves?

FH: Much to everyone's disappointment, we still do timesheets and I think that they do have a real value in there. And that is to simply remind you of the work that you might have done. I know that sounds a little bit simple, but separating annual accounts, for example, to any other work that we do for a client, and then when we come to look at billing, have we captured that? What value have we added to the client and therefore what it's worth?

So the timesheets provide an ability to record projects, record work that's done, but it doesn't necessarily provide a mechanism to show what the client should be billed.

JS: How do you deal with the billing of clients? Do you do it upfront? Do you just value price, or are you pricing or invoicing in arrears?

FH: We have a variety and that's because it's what suits the client best.

I think, traditionally, accountants have given away a lot of value for free. They'll charge for the annual accounts but they'll have a conversation over the phone about how a property should be purchased, but not necessarily bill in terms of what value that they've given that client within that conversation.

So we have a multitude. We have monthly fees, which encompass a range of services that we've agreed upfront. Anything outside that would sit as a separate project and a separate fee. We have arrears... that we have a relationship with the client where we do the work and it's billed in arrears. And then, for some work, we quote upfront and then bill it either in milestones or as the project's complete.

JS: That's some wonderful insights for our listeners. Number one, don't try and bundle everything together. If something sounds like a project, you make it a project.

And I suspect a really good way to do that with clients, is when they're asking you a question, to actually say, "Hey, this sounds like a project," because they'll probably agree.

The second thing to do is to stop, pause and re-engage with the client. So don't give away all your value in a conversation or a couple of sentences, because they probably deserved more than that. Because if the problem was easy to solve, they probably would have done it themselves.

And what I'm hearing you say is that you've managed to train your team to be able to do a similar thing themselves, in the same way a principal would do.

FH: Yes. But what we have done is put the processes and systems in place to make that easy for them. If we simply had a traditional 'time on the clock' type mentality, I think we'd leave a lot of work, a lot of value on the table that we wouldn't be able

to bill for. But enabling, giving our team a process that they can work through to make it easier for them to see where they've added value is really important.

JS: So, Marcus, what are you seeing in regard to chartered accountants having the confidence to sell to their clients?

MB: Yeah, I think that's a really good question. Because in actual fact, one of the areas that they're not selling is actually an area that's really important, and so there's an issue relating actually to the confidence that people running the projects have that they're going to run to budget.

And it's one of the areas where certainly Felicity talked about, you sell time and sometimes they don't charge for it. But this is a major area where accountants are actually very reliable people to be able to give a confidence index, whether a project is going to deliver to budget and on time.

And that's a major area of opportunity. It's a major area where we're seeing accountants increasingly being able to access new services and new clients, with my corporate clients who are running major transformation projects all over the place. They don't want an internal person saying that they're confident that it's going to deliver, they want someone externally. And it's not an auditor, it actually is an accounting and a tracking function. It relates directly to the confidence that the people have that it will deliver on-budget, on-time in full.

JS: Marcus, that's a really interesting insight. And I'm sure you got plenty of others when you researched what the future accountant looks like for CA ANZ. Can you tell us a bit more about that?

MB: I mean a number of the things that we did when we were doing the research showed that it's not as simplistic as just looking at technical skills. If you want to actually be able to be futureproofed and have a resilient career, and particularly have services that are worth money for people to buy from you, or to provide it into

a not-for-profit, then you need to go beyond the technical, the usual tax, the insolvency, the corporate finance and all the rest of it.

But there's three other domains that are equally important that we were looking at. And that's for instance, the personal domain, the business domain and the leadership domain.

On the personal domain, that's all the things about you and the unique attributes that you have. And really, it's about cognition. And why that's important is because you have human elements of services that are never going to be – well, they may never be – taken over by technology and automation.

So while we have AI and while we can have big data crunching and all the rest of it, we still need to have ethics, we still need to put critical thinking and judgement over the top of what we're doing. We need to be skeptical. We need to have an adaptive mindset that remodels what we're trying to do for the future, and we particularly need to consider culture. So that's really where that personal domain is being very strong.

JS: Felicity, it sounds like Greenlion really has shifted from processing to strategic advisory. How important has that personal space been for you and your team?

FH: I don't think we could have done it if we didn't have strong personal skills. The integrity, the critical thinking, the adaptive mindset, those have been absolutely critical to move from that processing realm through into advisory.

JS: And Marcus, if I just take you through to the leadership domain, can you tell us a little bit more about that?

MB: The leadership domain really is the one where everyone thinks leadership happens as you have more experience and you move up the career tree, if you like, and your status as a chartered accountant, for instance, would improve. But in

actual fact, leadership starts very early. And a lot of what we used to think as leadership is, is in actual fact capabilities that all the workforce need now.

But what we isolated in the leadership [domain] is, really, the big thing leaders need to do is have a vision for the future. They need to be able to be future focused. So when they're driving for results, they're not just focusing on the results, they are really thinking about the outcomes for the customer or the client as well.

Not everyone needs to be an extrovert and have charisma to be a good leader – and particularly in the spaces we're talking about now with new business models in the digital age.

And we need to build businesses that are not only innovative, but able to be agile. They need to respond quickly as not only disruption occurs, but as our needs from our customers change.

And a big point [in the leadership domain] was risk and governance. Just as a pointer, risk and governance was the one that everyone said was *the* single most important, and will never be anything but [the] number one or two, non-technical skill area when we do our results and surveys.

And it turned out risk and governance was a critical factor for a very small proportion of particularly senior leaders in large corporations. But it's actually the personal factors, like empathy and being able to make a connection and make critical judgements, that rated consistently higher than just the act of governance.

JS: I like what you said there about leadership as capability. And Felicity, it sounds like you've connected the vision that Greenlion has with those of your team. Can you just comment around how you did that for our listeners?

Felicity Hill:

Thinking about leadership and when you think about a traditional accounting firm, you sort of think of the leadership sitting at that top end of the pyramid. What we've done is flipped it on its head and talked to our team about being leaders within the community. And I think that takes on a different lens than thinking, sort of, as a leader within the firm, because you can only reach that level when you get to a certain point. If you're a leader within the community, you're a leader right from the beginning of your career.

JS: It's so true. Chartered accountants really are difference makers and we need to look beyond the numbers to educate our team to help our clients to the next level and create success in their lives. And I guess that really touches on the business domain.

MB: Yeah, I think it really does. I think that where the business domain, if we think about technicals as the fundamentals, you must have those. But when we talking about the 70% of the profile for any role of any accountant in the future, we put the personal, business and leadership together, the personal is really about knowing yourself.

The leadership is about driving it forward, looking over the horizon and making sure your organisation as well as the organisation you're delivering to is moving forward.

But business is where the rubber hits the ground. So that's where we got the communication, the collaboration, problem solving. Really the strong focus on the customer. And then the deliverables relating to what we would call the digital acumen and, particularly, the business and data analysis.

It's really where you're starting to drive decisions based on fact. It's where you're starting to build a collaborative relationship where you're seen as a trusted adviser. All of these things go hand in hand together. It's not this two-dimensional view that we had in the past about the accountant as processing data or numbers to come up with a solution that is short term and very narrowly focused. If that's what you do, it will be automated. We're talking about a very rounded profile.

And that's why when Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand developed the profiling tool Capability+, it profiles all four of the dimensions. Because there's an enormous number of people out there in the profession who don't realise they have certain capabilities that are essential for the future, because they've never stopped and assessed them. They've never been asked to prove them and they've never had any evidence to show that they have them.

And that's why we're doing the full profile. Because all of that profile – the technical, personal, business and leadership – gives you not only the things you need to know about yourself, but it makes you incredibly employable and valuable if you can express your strengths against all of those four dimensions.

JS: Felicity, you talked earlier in the podcast about training your team, double teaming them, getting them into situational learning. If you've got one piece of advice for our listeners out there, how would you make a start bringing your team through?

FH: I think the really simple way is taking your team along to every meeting you've got. Making sure you are double teaming it. A lot of people would say straight away, "Well, I can't afford to do that, because that's my engine room" and they would say "the cost on the job".

My argument to that is outsource. I cannot stress the benefit of that enough. It enables you to focus on your clients far better than having the engine room within your team.

The second thing is in terms of the cost on the clock, when you're double teaming it. I don't think you can afford not to, in terms of bringing your firm along to the future, in terms of creating value for your clients, creating value to hold on to your clients. If you don't do it, I think the cost is far greater.

JS: Do you think that some of the chartered accountants out there listening to this podcast are thinking, "That's a long way from where I am now." How soon do you think they would start to see the benefits of investing in their people and doing that double teaming?

FH: It is a long game. It is a long game. It's not going to happen overnight. But I think if you do want to be in a firm in five, 10 years' time, you can't afford not to, would be my comment on that. If you don't want to be in a firm in five or 10 years' time, I'd sell it now because I think your value is going to decrease substantially if you don't bring your staff along on that journey.

If you can have your staff going out, conducting meetings without you or training up junior staff in that business advisory, then I think the value there is far greater than just retaining staff.

JS: Marcus, talking about technical, which I guess is what we all as accountants know and love, do you think that that will always be there and that there will always be a need for the expertise that we've built up over our careers?

MB: When we're talking about the soft skills and the broader capabilities, we're talking about the horizontal at the top of the [skills] T – you've got to cross your Ts. But there's always that swing lane, that vertical, where you've got a discipline specialisation and that's vital.

I think the big thing about that is that we took the discipline as the basis for looking at a career and building a future for people. We need to actually get away from that.

So we have courses that delivered discipline-based knowledge thinking it's completely discrete and not picking up on the personal and the business and the leadership aspects to capability of the future. But some of those are the most valuable that you can have, and [they] differentiate you from other people who've

only got the discipline-based skills. So we're not devaluing them, we're saying expand on them.

JS: So bringing this all together, Marcus, in those four domains, is the road ahead for chartered accountants bumpy or is it smooth?

MB: I'm not an economist, so I won't try... or a weather forecaster. But let me say that I think that the research is really clear across all industries and all organisations we're working in. I think the biggest thing is to understand that accounting is a traditional profession if it stays in its swing lane, and [if it does that] the discipline is really going to become a redundant profession.

I think people who are professionals trying to sell that service, doing rote number crunching and highly processed activities will have a short lifespan in the sense that technology and platforms across Australia, New Zealand (we know platforms like Xero are world leading), because they do that processing very simply.

And as we move forward, we've got companies that are actually employing accountants looking for more from that accounting profession.

So here's a couple of really salient examples, I think. One very large telco that I work with is now, when we talk about value, creating profiles that cover full capabilities span – so soft skills as well as technical – for everybody in their organisation. So over 40,000 people will have a profile.

But the organisation actually is reporting the soft skills as a future ready score, that tells how quickly they can adapt and respond as change occurs. Because soft skills tell you how fast we can adapt, how fast we can learn, build collaborative relationships, but keep a focus on the customer.

So they're reporting that to the board and the dashboard. And that actually has a shareholder value. So we're not only talking about serious investment in people for

the sake of investing in people and, "God, it's a cost", we're actually talking about building human capital. We're about putting it on the bottom line and we're about putting it into the shareholder value.

The other side of the equation is where we now have someone like PwC which, for a few years, [was] recruiting people without degrees to come into internships. But what they looked at rigorously was the ability of those people to do things particularly in the personal domain like empathy, like critical thinking, adaptive mindsets.

And what they found was that over an 18-month internship, they were getting better results for people who then learnt the technical skills afterwards or during that placement. So very much what Felicity was talking about in terms of situated learning and problem-based learning. That gives you a much better fluidity, if you like, and application of the technical skills because you understand why you're doing it.

If you learn them in isolation, a lot of the graduates who were coming into PwC simply couldn't respond quickly enough. Again, what you were talking about earlier, John, they had to unlearn a lot of things to then become very useful for what PwC wanted to do.

So the message out there is you can get the technical skills in a number of different ways. But if you don't get it with the learnt experiences that build you as an individual with an understanding of how you emotionally connect with the customer, and to have greater understanding about how to apply solutions and problem solve, then really what you've got is a toolkit that's very limited in the future workforce.

JS: Just building on that Felicity, what do you think is the next step for Greenlion and what are you trying to achieve with your team with the skills and capabilities you're trying to instil in them?

FH: In the ideal world, the next step would be to take what we've learned and help apply it to other firms. I think that that's probably really valuable. Accounting firms are quite good at, traditionally, reinventing the wheel, and I think that we need to be better at collaboratively sharing the ideas of what's worked and what hasn't. But I see that as really taking the profession to the next step and sharing these ideas in how we can all move forward.

JS: Dr. Marcus Bowles, Felicity Hill, thanks so much, I really appreciate your time. Have a great day. Thank you.

FH: Thanks very much.

MB: Thank you.

JS: Thanks again to Dr Marcus Bowles, chair of the Institute for Working Futures, and Felicity Hill, director of Greenlion Limited.

My key takeaways are that soft skills can't be taught, they are learnt. So situational learning for your team is so important. You simply can't lose the closer you get to clients. Invest in your own capability. Timesheets remind you of the work you've done. And think about the four domains – personal, technical, business and leadership. And, most importantly, understand where you are right now, and where you want to be in the future.

And the best tool to use is the CA ANZ new Capability+ model. And as I stated earlier, I've used it myself, I've put my team through it.

It's a great tool and I'd really encourage you to use it.

CA ANZ has developed this Capability+ model to guide our work, shaping and strengthening the accounting profession for the future. Search "Capability" on the CA ANZ website if you'd like to give it a go.

The next episode of "Small Firm, Big Impact" is all about ESG. Share the conversation as I chat with Darren Scammel, former President of Chartered Accountants Australia New Zealand, and partner at Grant Thornton, and Antz Rohan, director at Fairground Limited, about the most effective ways accountants can add value and have an impact in the environmental, social and governance spaces.

But in the meantime, don't forget to head over to My CA and join the CA Catalyst community and check out the fantastic resources that your membership with CA ANZ gives you access to.

It's also worth heading to the CA Catalyst section of the CA ANZ website where you can find practical resources like case studies and playbooks.

And of course, there's also the library and the tools and resources hub, with plenty of practical information and great insights to support you in practice. And lastly my personal favourite, LinkedIn Learning, which is free for CAs and is tailored to your personal learning needs. This has been "Small Firm, Big Impact". I'm John Schol, speak with you again soon.

[ENDS]