Raquel Buscaino: Well, folks, welcome to Deloitte TECHTalks. My name is Raquel Buscaino, and I lead Deloitte's Novel and Exponential Technologies team – where we sense and make sense of emerging tech.

If you've been tuning into TECHTalks for quite some time, you know that every month we publish an episode that does a deep dive into a given technology topic area. It could be quantum in finance, it could be AR/VR or Robotics or space!

Well, today's episode is going to take a little bit of a different flavor because we're going to be talking about something that cuts across all technology topic areas – which is technology storytelling, and I think the role of storytelling in an increasingly tech focused world.

So, I have a fantastic guest here today! I have Kyle Forrest – who is Deloitte's Human Capital Chief Marketing Officer and Future of HR Leader – who's going to talk to us about what makes a compelling story? Why is storytelling so important in today's age? And I think we'll get quite a few tips and tricks along the way as well.

So, Kyle, thanks for coming on the podcast! It's really great to have you here.

Kyle Forrest: Absolutely. It's truly a privilege. I'm thrilled! To the audience: I hope you take away a few things today that are helpful to you as you think about where you're driving the world of work in your organizations, which, as Raquel said, is increasingly disrupted at a faster and faster clip by different types of technologies.

So, the stories we tell throughout that are critical to making sure that those technology investments are achieving their full potential; not only for the technologies themselves but the humans using it.

Buscaino, Raquel: Yeah. So maybe you can paint the picture then: We're at an unprecedented time, or maybe it's deeply precedent, I don't know right, but it feels a little unprecedented when it comes to technology. So, to your point, why is storytelling so important in today's day and age?

Kyle Forrest: Yeah, well, I'll actually start with your comment on unprecedented time. And I'm a huge science fiction fan, and there is science fiction from the seventies that was placed in 2022. So at every single point at this point onwards, all of the Science Fiction greats that many of us grew up on, we are living in the precedented times whether the predictions did come true or not. Right?

But why is technology storytelling so important now? And I think it is because of what you acknowledged. The variety of different technological changes that are happening at a greater and greater clip and in a much more visible way, with different sorts of human implications. So let's look at some stories from the last few months – many of which we touched on in our Human Capital Trends Report which Deloitte has been publishing for 14 years now. This year's report had 13,000 responses, 90 different countries. So, a global report. And it's a great pairing every year to folks who read our Tech

Trends report. Right? So where are you going in the world of technology? What do you need to think about? What do you need to think about in the world of human in terms of … and often in response to what's happening in technology.

But a few stories in the world today: What is an organization going to do to help workers unlock capacity? In the research, Again, across those 13,000 respondents, people said, 40% of their time is spent on things that are a tactical administrative non-value added -whether that's filing expense reports, completing performance management process, looking for knowledge. Right?

Buscaino, Raquel: Those are all my favorite activities, by the way!

Kyle Forrest: I love digging through different, you know, sites to say, where is the latest document, or who can tell me what this policy is and how to interpret it, right?

Buscaino, Raquel: Death by a thousand paper cuts.

Kyle Forrest: Absolutely. Whether it's a digital paper cut or a real paper cut.

Buscaino, Raquel: Yeah

Kyle Forrest: You know, at the same time like that. That is no different for the manager role. Right? And so what do you do? How can you unlock the capacity of the workers? And there's a lot of excitement about how technology might be able to help do that today.

A second story, then, is, What do experience requirements look like for workers? And we had a trend around closing the experience gap. Because there is data that would show (in our Human Capital Trends Report) that over the last few years, entry-level roles at companies, the number of years of experience required for the role and a job posting have been increasing. So instead of 0 to 2 years, it's now 2 to 5 or something along those lines.

Buscaino, Raquel: Interesting.

Kyle Forrest: And so one of our calls to action, there is, how do organizations redefine experience as the contextual application of skills? Right? It's no longer time in role, time at level, time at a company. And I'll dig into that a little bit more.

But then the 3rd piece, and to your point around the pace of change, the research that we did, we have, the ability to cut the data by workers and executives. 75% of workers said that they want stability. More stability. Because whether it is external forces to the world or to the company, internal changes to the company, a lot has been happening in the last few years, and the workers want more stability.

Other end of the spectrum: 85% of executives want more agile teams. Because how else are you gonna respond in a world that is dynamic and increasingly more dynamic right? And these two things are, are, they feel, in conflict, but they're not necessarily in conflict. And so we created a word this year! The word being "sta-gility".

Buscaino, Raquel: I love it.

Kyle Forrest: How do you help workers find stability by being agile, right? So how do you tell people the story of getting comfortable with change, adapting and adjusting your career and your skills, knowing that the world is dynamic and that's okay. Right? So this is a little flavor of some of the stories that we saw in the research that we published. It is all in response to technological changes that are happening in the world, that companies are grappling with. And then what's so important is, if you know that these are the stories that are external toward the organization, you have to as a leader, think about, how do I tell a story to my people? How are we going to guide you through this?

Buscaino, Raquel: Those 3 stories, I think, are… they're distinct, but they're also very connected in so many ways. The 1st one being unleashing potential. The second one being redefining what experience is. And the 3rd one, maybe I'll even broadly categorize as this balance of tensions and Sta-gility. Those 3 all intersect together.

I do think a lot of people are… We're told so many stories about technology–to your final point that you just made is– well, what's the message that I can give to my employees as a leader to help them navigate these tensions and these changes, and all these, you know different factors at play. So what would be one of your pieces of advice to leaders who are grappling with this change for how they can communicate to their employees?

Kyle Forrest: So when I talk to executives and they asked that question, I actually ground it on another piece of Deloitte research, which is 4 Factors of Trust, Ashley Reichheld, Amelia Dunlop, published in the last few years, and that research was prompted from the question of: How do you define trust?

And if I ask 10 people, I will probably get 10 different answers. But if I say, how do you define reliability? I'll probably get 10 similar answers: You say you will do it. You did it right?

And so, the 4 factors, they came up with reliability was one. Capability – delivering a high-quality experience – is a second. A 3rd was transparency, meaning "Are you using simple, easy to understand language?" Right? And then the 4th was humanity – like, "Are you communicating with acknowledgement of the moment in time?" Right?

So if I'm an executive thinking about telling a story to my workers now, in an age where it seems like the only constant is disruption, what would I try to do? I would say, number one, "yes, workforce, there's a lot happening in the world and in our company, and these are some of the factors addressing it."

Number 2, "Yes, we are investing in new technology and our goal in that investment is to help our company drive better business outcomes. And those business outcomes should be impactful for you as humans: new career opportunities, helping engage with our customers in new and different ways and helping them, you know, do things with their products and services whatever you're selling."

Number 3, "we know this is new. No, no one has done this before – we're all figuring it out together – but here's what we hope to achieve, and here's how we will engage with you and guide you along the way right."

Because I think, a lot of times, what happens is that messaging doesn't come in that simple of a way. It is instead, "hey, everyone, we have launched a new technology solution. Here's the training plan." And the people are like, "Okay."

Buscaino, Raquel: There is an art… There is a true art to simplicity that I feel like is lost so many times. And what you just said there, you know, no one's ever written home about a product suite.

Kyle Forrest: Yeah!

Buscaino, Raquel: People write comms because of stories that compel them and that they can attach to. And so the story around why we're undergoing on change and what it means for you as an individual and really bringing it down to that human lens, I actually think in a world of that's increasingly more tech focused – maybe the more artificial the intelligence gets, if you will – the more of a premium there will be on the human connectivity and the ability to really resonate with someone's soul and compel them into change and bring them along for the process.

Kyle Forrest: Absolutely

Buscaino, Raquel: You mentioned the 4 Factors of Trust, and I really liked the different 4 pillars that you walked through, especially the one on simplicity, and that one needs to double click more often. How do we make it real for people? Right? If you're a leader, how do you then make it real for your employees and help provide the impetus for change that I think many leaders want to.

Kyle Forrest: Yeah. It is such an important thing to take a high-level enterprise-wide initiative or communication and ground it in the daily life of an individual. It was actually one of the Human Capital trends chapters that we dug into was called "Motivation at the Unit of One". Because if there are any number of daily life things going on: My child is sick. It's summer break. I've got a new team member joining. I have a team member leaving. I've got a report due Friday at 5 o'clock. That is consuming the attention of the worker. They're not as interested to necessarily say, "Oh, great new technology solution coming!"

So as a leader, if you understand that, how do you cut through the noise, right? And the way you cut through the noise is storytelling, but it has to be storytelling grounded in something that is real and is not just intangible or theoretical or academic.

So, let's take some of the technology of the last couple of years – some of the AI and automation in the world for knowledge workers. So, if I were to go out to a knowledge worker and say, "All right, we've just invested in this new technology solution. Go use it!" That in many instances prompts a set of questions: How did you train the model? What data did you use? Who had access to the data? What outcomes are you expecting from our usage? Who's going to be monitoring this data model as it learns from my interactions with the model, right? If you achieve the outcomes you desire, what does that mean for me? Am I gonna – to the unlocking worker capacity question – If I get 2 hours back in my day, can I be more innovative? Can I spend more time with customers? Can I faster-speed a decision making, whatever it may be? Right?

So, you have to then think about, as you communicate, what is the story you're telling? And so if I were to then think for an executive, How do I now prepare a story? So try to anchor with something that says, here's where we're trying to head because we understand your pain points.

So, how do I tell a story to the salespeople that says "we're going to help you sell faster and close more deals. And by doing that we're investing in AI and automation capabilities that goes across our CRM application, that will pull the most recent data, touch points around your customers, the external knowledge about their business, and market dynamics and help you create a compelling pitch."

And maybe if you.. if that's the narrative that you've now created, create a 90 second video that helps bring it to life! Right? Do something that helps get people to imagine the art of the possible and the impact on it.

Buscaino, Raquel: I've also kind of thought… You mentioned if I now have 2 hours back in my day, that's 2 hours that I could then deploy for something that is a higher-order pursuit, something that should be really in line with whatever the "North Star" vision of the company is.

Kyle Forrest: Yep

Buscaino, Raquel: But unless I'm crystal clear as to what that "North Star" vision is, well, now I've got 2 hours where I'm kind of looking around, saying, "Well, what is my higher-order pursuit", and "what should I be doing?" And so I even kind of think right now. It's so critical. Like, now's the time to really get your "North Star" clear and communicated, because, as you're asking your people to elevate with their 2 hours of free time they should know exactly what they're driving towards with their higher-order pursuits.

Kyle Forrest: Absolutely! And the opportunity in this moment in time for companies investing in technology is to actually get very explicit to candidates in the market looking at roles and the internal workforce about "why are we investing in technology", and "what is the expected outcome for the worker?" Right? And how do I tell candidates in the market on day one, week one, month one, year one, we will help you learn to use the tool and as we deploy more capabilities over the course of the year, how we will continue to upskill and reskill you as the work continues to change, as whatever the technology is doing, and we involve that with the investment.

Even then, much more importantly, how do I tell that to my current workers? Right? Because they're the ones who are there in the moment of the technology deployment and trying to understand "What does this mean for me?"

Buscaino, Raquel: Interesting.

Kyle Forrest: Earlier, I had said we'll start with a little bit of like this knowledge-worker context, the whole dialogue relative to technological impact in the workforce has been going on for decades and there's this acknowledgement I think that also needs to happen of: what does a disruption cycle look like? And how do you also tell that story to the workforce? Here's what a disruption cycle tends to look

like. How do we acknowledge that we're in one? And how do we, as an organization, think we will lead through that, right? So that's leading with the humanity or the empathy of the moment.

Demonstrate that: Hey. Yes, things will change, but there's proven paths through that change. And what did it look like on the other side? New businesses were created, existing businesses evolved. People still had tremendous opportunities to grow and learn and engage in their communities, and you know and engage with their family and friends. How do you take the theoretical, the ambiguous, the uncertain, and you know one of our taglines from our Human Capital Trends Report was: How do you turn uncertainty into opportunity?

Buscaino, Raquel: We, as a society, always talk about what's changing. And we just outlined is, here's what's gonna stay the same. And I think that's a part of the equation that we don't really talk about too much is the things that never go out of style, or the 2 endpoints that really don't change. Really interesting.

I've got a question for you. You've talked about the 4 Factors of Trust and some of the attributes that make great leaders effective communicators, what do you think are some of the biggest pitfalls and mistakes that some people make in communicating a vision?

Kyle Forrest: I would say 2 or 3 pitfalls that I've seen is not actually understanding or having done the work to understand. "What is the pain point?" "What is the thing that you're trying to solve for by doing this?" And I can elaborate on that in a couple of ways. One, there are any number of technology vendors in the HR technology space – same thing you could probably say in others – where organizations will say: "There's no one at your company building this product who has ever worked in the function that you're trying to sell to. So, if you don't understand our world, how can you confidently tell us that you're solving a problem that we have?"

On the same side, if I am a business executive deciding, "Hey, I'm gonna go make this change in my function. And this is gonna be the benefit." Well, did you actually ask your stakeholders? Do they want that change? Right? Are you transforming for the sake of the function or are you doing something that's beneficial for the enterprise. If you were to ask the enterprise and they were to say, "no, don't do it." Would you not do it? If you've never asked the question, "do my end customers want this external or internal?", that's a miss.

I think another one from a pitfall perspective is actually them not saying, "all right, once this is done, then what?" Just implemented something – could be technology related, could not – 6 months from now, am I gonna say that was successful? How am I gonna measure it? Am I gonna understand that it might take me way more than 6 months or way more than a year? Am I gonna do the other really hard work that it takes to bring it to life other than just implementing a thing? Right?

Buscaino, Raquel: Our approach to AI has kind of changed dramatically over the past couple of years as well.

Kyle Forrest: Absolutely. I mean the popularity of personal LLM usage started in November 2022 and then has evolved ever since then, right? And where people were in early 2023 was then saying, "Great!

Using an LLM is going to be fantastic and it's going to solve everything!" And then over the course of the year, it's like, "Oh, no, no, wait, wait! Actually, if we go to broad strokes, it's wildly expensive, and we need to get much more targeted in our use cases, right?" And then the technology continued to evolve, of course, and 2024 companies were investing in very specific use cases. "How do I use this in finance, or HR or sales, or engineering", right?

And then the question became, why aren't my people adopting this at large scale? Right? And in 2024, Deloitte actually did 4 quarterly reports around State of Generative AI in the Enterprise and across all 4 adoption of the AI and automation technology tended to be one of the problems companies continue to deal with.

And I think a big piece of that was, "how do you actually tell the story to the workers. Why are you investing in this? How do you use it? Why do you use it? What's the outcome?"

Kyle Forrest: And I think many companies are starting to get around and saying "Oh, as I talk about technology, I have to say: 'Hey workers, we're gonna invest in an AI Academy to upskill you on how to use AI tools.'"

Buscaino, Raquel: Yeah

Kyle Forrest: "And we're gonna share stories of the savvy user profiles in the company, and how those users are working differently." Right?

I'll even use a Deloitte example. We launched our GenAI tool for workers to use. And this is something folks you can read about actually, in an HBR [Harvard Business Review] article. We did, using the 4 Factors of Trust. What was the trust of the organization for the tool when it was 1st launched, and then we took some specific actions.

We had savvy user profiles from different parts of the company to say, "here's how I'm using the tool. Here's how my work is changing. I'm working faster, better. I'm getting more time back." Whatever the story was.

We had like tech sessions. Come, learn about sidekick. How do we train it? How do you use it? Blah blah blah to build more trust in terms of what it was used. And then, on the back end of all that we saw trust increase, and usage and adoption increase. Right? But it took us to story tell to our own people, right? And be consistent. You don't tell story once, right? The story evolves. The story grows. The story expands, right? And so how do you help continue to tell the story over time?

And I think that's where maybe my final pitfall is. Even if let's say you've got the pain points understood. You've told the story for why you're gonna do this. If you don't keep telling the story, you're not gonna have the momentum when you're in month-9 or month -8 of this journey.

Buscaino, Raquel: I think that's such a real point. Because, yeah, if you have an annual leadership update briefing and you communicate the message once on there, that is not sufficient at all. And in fact, I would argue, you can't over communicate the mission. But I do think that is a pitfall that I've seen,

especially because the world is changing so much. I feel like the pace of change, it feels very rapid. And so if you weren't reminding folks where we're at in the story, and what you're driving towards, it can be challenging.

Kyle Forrest: Absolutely. And some of this is just as simple as saying, "What are the extra 3 to 5 min of time I want to use to share an update. How do I tell, in every quarterly all hands, here is a C-suite progress update on our technology journey."

Now, my next ask would be to my direct reports and the leaders in the organization, "Hey, as you've got your weekly staff meeting, talk about how you're using the technology. How are you working differently as a leader? Ask for your direct reports to share a story." Right?

These are small moments in time that build storytelling up and down the organization all around a common topic that the organization has been rallied around. And you can spotlight in different ways, too: In a newsletter. In a video series. All these different ways that augments it. All of a sudden your whole organization is full of storytellers! But they're not hard stories – It's just a conversation.

Buscaino, Raquel: That's an interesting frame. I don't know if I've ever really thought… You know, we kicked off this conversation, it was all about "Well, how how do you, as a leader, take on the task of being a great storyteller and communicator?" But what you just touched on is storytelling as an organizational discipline and a way of working

Kyle Forrest: Yep!

Buscaino, Raquel: And a way of communicating that's very natural, too.

Kyle Forrest: Absolutely!

Kyle Forrest: And so I think, as we were talking about some of the pitfalls relative to do you actually understand the pain point that you're trying to address, you also need to make sure whatever story you're telling is grounded in the realities of what is achievable.

Right? So you really need to understand both the capabilities of the technology but also human psychology and reaction to change into things to say "is this an achievable thing in the timeframe I'm going to try to achieve it"? Right?

So I would say for executives, as you think about like the storytelling outwardly. You also need to think about the storytelling to yourself.

Buscaino, Raquel: Yeah

Kyle Forrest: And to your executive team. And what is truly achievable. \

Buscaino, Raquel: Yeah, I mean, I love a crazy, crazy action thriller in the cinema as much as anyone else. But at some point you're looking at a movie, And you're saying, Oh, that's unrealistic, right?

Kyle Forrest: Yep

Buscaino, Raquel: Or at least these tasks should not be performed by your ordinary human being, and not a superhero. There's probably that level of reflection with the stories, too!

Kyle Forrest: Absolutely

Buscaino, Raquel: Because I do think we need to be realistic. There's this mix of how can I be both inspirational and set an aggressive target, or something that seems really inspiring will also be reasonable. And I think it's up to the leadership team to really strike that balance. Because only when it's struck do you really get the volume that you want from your people.

Kyle Forrest: Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

Buscaino, Raquel: I think we've covered so much on the podcast today from why storytelling matters, why it matters in an age of AI, some of the strategies that leaders can actively pursue, and the ones that they can try to avoid.

You know, if you had to leave our listeners with one final thought around storytelling in general and maybe one takeaway for them today, what would that be?

Kyle Forrest: I'll start with a takeaway. Remember who you were telling the stories to – humans! Humans love stories. Humans love to see themselves in the stories.

So put yourself in the shoes of your workers, think about the messaging you want to share, help see themselves as the hero along the way, and get them involved in shaping the journey.
That would be my takeaway.

And backing that up then, would be my one suggestion or action. Right? Think about how to tell a simple story. Whether that is the micro story of the status report in your in your meeting or the stories that make up our day. All of this is taking the implicit and making it explicit or said another way, turning common sense into common practice. Right?

So, folks, we're all storytellers. We all love stories. Hopefully, as we engage in technology, we're just using it to tell the stories about where we want our world to go, where we want our lives and our careers and our families and friends to go with us, and having some fun along the way.
Buscaino, Raquel: I love that. I love that. Well, Kyle, thanks so much for the conversation. I mean, I felt like I learned a lot throughout it. And plus, it's just fun to talk in a very human way, too. So, thanks for that!

Kyle Forrest: Absolutely!

Buscaino, Raquel: To all our tech. Savvy listeners out there. Thanks for tuning in. If you'd like to learn more about technology storytelling or our Deloitte Human Capital Trends Report. You can follow myself

and Kyle to stay up to date. Our socials will be listed in the episode description. Thanks for tuning in, and I'll see you on our next episode, and until then Stay Savvy.

Kyle Forrest: Stay Savvy!

Deloitte Legal Information

This podcast contains general information only and Deloitte is not, by means of this podcast, rendering accounting, business, financial, investment, legal, tax, or other professional advice or services. This podcast is not a substitute for such professional advice or services, nor should it be used as a basis for any decision or action that may affect your business. Before making any decision or taking any action that may affect your business, you should consult a qualified professional advisor.
Deloitte shall not be responsible for any loss sustained by any person who relies on this podcast.

About Deloitte

Deloitte refers to one or more of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited, a UK private company limited by guarantee ("DTTL"), its network of member firms, and their related entities. DTTL and each of its member firms are legally separate and independent entities. DTTL (also referred to as "Deloitte Global") does not provide services to clients. In the United States, Deloitte refers to one or more of the US member firms of DTTL, their related entities that operate using the "Deloitte" name in the United States and their respective affiliates. Certain services may not be available to attest clients under the rules and regulations of public accounting. Please see _www.deloitte.com/about_ to learn more about our global network of member firms.