Call to Action/Problem statement: Shell, much like any other IOG is navigating its way through digital and energy transformations. Our Subsurface Data and Digital (SSDD) workforce are from highly technical backgrounds such as geology, physics, engineering and software development such as developers, architects or data science. The challenge we are constantly facing is how we stay ahead of the curve and ask ourselves: What are the skills we need for the future in unpredictable times? What skills do our staff need today and to set ourselves (and themselves) up for success? Will our strategy be to build, buy or partner to develop our subsurface technology? What skills do we need for the future, and with the potential for future re-organizations, how to set staff up for success irrespective of the internal job market?

Situation:

In Mid 2023 a role was created for me to combine my experience as a technical contributor and leader in technology development, deployment and adoption coupled with my recent MA in Leadership.

The SSDD Leadership Team knew there were gaps based on feedback from staff and this was an opportunity to address these and do further valuable research.

Some of the assumptions and feedback at the start were:

- Staff were fearful of obsolete skills e.g skilled data managers replaced by offshoring, Automation and Machine Learning
- Staff were fearful of upcoming re-organizations and to what extent they would be impacted.

This last point made me question, not just the technical skills staff need but the transferable skills staff required irrespective of their internal job outcomes and to ask not just What they need to know to achieve the results, but How and Why?

While this was a valuable starting point, it was critical to ask more questions to get a more thorough understanding of the problems we were trying to solve and not just those common to the watercooler or being discussed overtly.

Extensive research was conducted over 3 months during 2023 to understand the current skill set of the SSDD organization today, the way staff currently develop themselves and what skills and support is needed for the future.

Process:

I wanted to understand:

- What skills they already had, how they acquired them, what motivated them to seek out upskilling opportunities and by what mechanism?

- Was there a cultural, geographical or organizational overprint based on location and if so why?
- What do they already know and have in abundance (and can probably share), but also where might they need support today and in the future as they navigate some of the fears from our assumptions?

Quantitative research was conducted through surveying the 300+ staff (45% response) and covered general questions about demography and staff personal development habits; Leadership skills such as leading and managing teams; Technical skills including Domain, Data & Digital; and their business and professional skills

The survey data gave some broad insights to **what** skills they developed and was followed up with 25 x 1 hour structured interviews across a range of experience levels, domain experts and geography to gain more qualitative insights about their past roles, the skills they built, how they spent time upskilling and any ideas or comments they had.

Findings:

1. Aging workforce - in terms of experience, cost and knowledge - over 60% with over 20 yrs experience in the industry (and will likely be retired within 10 yrs)
2. 80% of staff take on Leadership roles – project, actual and natural team lead yet 35% don't follow or do anything proactively
3. Feedback on the interview process itself was astounding: All staff interviewed felt valued, listened to and that act alone inspired them to take more personal action – very different to a workplace development plan session – more about this later

Analysis and Execution: Rooted in technology development and adoption, a Design Thinking Agile approach was taken to analyze the data with and decide what sort of program would benefit the most staff in the time available.

As a result, the key output (alongside some targets to improve connectivity and knowledge sharing of teams) was a 3 layered **Leadership For All** program shown

below.

1. Leader Labs cohorts were by nomination aimed at those requiring the most support. The 6 month program comprised small peer coaching cohorts sharing experiences and challenges and facilitated leadership knowledge discussions.
2. The ‘astonishing’ feedback from the interviews highlighted the fact that staff do not feel listened to, so coaching training using the GROW model was delivered with the aim of role modeling coaching habits in leaders focusing on curiosity and listening.
3. All staff from individual contributors to community leads attended in person experiential workshops to look at personality types and ultimately became more self aware of one’s own style and that of others including team members and stakeholders, improving ways of Working.. Ten sessions were delivered to 300 staff in US, Netherlands, UK & India with average rating 4.7/5 on all courses.

💬 "That was the first time I've ever learnt about strategies that I can actually put into practice at work, and I found it extremely useful"

Learnings:

- **Ask the right questions**

If I’d used only the assumptions and initial rationale for the role/project, Leadership support and intervention would not have been addressed, yet was the biggest part of the program with the biggest impact and improvement in ways of working.

Coaching is fundamental at all levels of the organization yet often only senior execs are privileged to experience it. Changing the Team Lead behaviours to Ask not Tell is difficult to embrace but with coaching practice and role plays a number of leaders improved

their leadership effectiveness, confidence and ability to motivate and delegate through this.

What questions should you ask your organization? Where do your staff need support? What skills are needed and what are missing? more importantly - How do you gain and sustain them?

- **Data-driven decisions**

Qualitative and quantitative data was used to highlight gaps in the support staff needed and enable a program to be signed off. This was used as evidence to the technical detailed staff that we are working based on data - something they do in software development constantly.

Agility in our development and deployment of the program as we incorporated real time feedback and changed the reach of the program increasing the impact and number of staff to successfully experience the program.

- **Successes**

Technical staff spend lots of time upskilling on technical and digital skills, often, those already good at communication, storytelling and stakeholder engagement are already doing it well organically. But what about the rest?

Do you feel your staff are falling behind and they don't value the story telling skills or communication or stakeholder skills to embed changes of behaviour needed to adopt or embrace digital transformation.

A blend of technical skills AND understanding personality skills makes Teams work better and are motivated towards a single goal. Ask yourself how you achieve that and why it is important to the team? If you have technical staff and are expecting them to lead teams - what support are you giving them ahead of that role?

We all seem to know WHAT to do it, but not sure HOW. By doing this we have created our own 'HOW' based on our own data.

Rachel has over 20 years as technical expert and leader in geoscience technology in the Oil and Gas industry and in 2019 won a scholarship to Henley Business School to complete her MA in Leadership. Since then she has driven technical teams to build in leadership strategies and tools to improve effectiveness within teams.

Contact Rachel if you want more details on this project or on how you might approach challenges faced in your technical organizations.