

Podcast 6: Digital Transformation in Higher Education with Rob Smith

START OF PODCAST

Amit: Good morning. Good afternoon. Good evening, listeners. This is Amit Pawar and welcome to the Edutech Talks podcast with Amit and Sam. Hi Sam. How are you doing today?

Sam: Good evening, Amit. I'm doing really well. Thank you. I've had a busy day flying to Auckland in New Zealand visiting customers, visiting partners, having the kind of digital transformation conversations that you and I both enjoy having with our customers and with our partners. So, it's been a busy day. Thank you.

Amit: Excellent. I've had a similar kind of day meeting with customers, both K-12 and Higher Ed, which we'll come to in a minute in this conversation today. But it's been great to kind of get an understanding in Singapore and in Malaysia with customers really getting behind the digital transformation of their institutions. And I'm now getting asked a more advanced questions about what the platform can enable, including automation of processes. So, there's a lot of this whole conversation or automation that has grouped everybody. I think there's this whole thing around robotic automation process, RAPs, that a few consulting firms have been talking about. So, there's, been a lot of questions around that and how our platform helps and we definitely can and maybe that that'll be a topic for another podcast, but it's been great to have that conversation.

Sam: Look, there's nothing like getting in front of customers and hearing the challenges in their organizations to really think about how solutions can come and help out in their position, right? And I read a great blog that I kind of adapted and re-blogged at the end of last week around a school in the US where a deputy principal for a district had actually taken our tools -- power apps, Microsoft Flow, SharePoint online and Microsoft Teams -- and actually completely automated and digitized the process of taking a student reading records, , that were traditionally down and recorded in books and folders and automated that through the use of a power app embedded inside of Microsoft Teams. And it was just an awesome example, I think in the education space of an educator seeing how they could automate and digitize, a traditionally quite time laborious process but in doing so opened up all of that rich student data to the learning support teacher aides and so forth, who could access it at any time, before without needing to access, I guess historically what would have been the teacher's notebook. So, a good example perhaps of that sort of automation that you're talking about.

Amit: It is, and that's exactly the conversation that I've been having. So, you know, so for those who are listening and have not discovered this gem of a product in the Office 365 platform, it is Flow. And the other app is actually PowerApp, which is the platform capability to create these apps. So, perhaps a demo of this in a future podcast or sorry, a discussion about this in a future podcast will be great. But let's think about the other aspects of what's happening in the education platform. And I know you and I've been discussing a few things around Teams as Teams evolves into a bigger, better and more education friendly platform. So, do you want to give listeners a bit of a roundup of what's new around Teams that we announced recently?

Sam: I certainly will, and I guess we have podcasts at a couple of times and featured Microsoft Teams and just the incredibly versatile platform that it is. And in fact in that example from the teacher in the US that I just shared , she used all of those tools but had the front end for the teacher, the interface, they're all within Teams. So, she was using a bit of PowerApp Teams, embedded PowerBI reporting inside of Teams. And so it was a single digital hub for the teachers to go to. And just recently we've released on their 2-year anniversary of Microsoft Teams for Education, a bunch of new features. Some of these were signaled at BETT London in January 2019 and now they're available in your tenants as well now. And so, pulling out a couple of the top ones: a new simplified design, making it even easier for students and teachers to be able to use and quickly find the content inside of the Teams that they want, a greater synchronization using school data sync. And remember, Amit, we talked about that when we did the Intune for education and device management podcast a few months back, that perhaps the one that really has a stood out for me is leveraging school data sync we now have the weekly email to parents and guardians around upcoming assignments after their students. And so this is something that many schools have been asking for, some way to have increased visibility and accountability ideas of what's happening inside the classroom, but given to parents and guardian. And so, that's a pretty exciting one and then of course the Turnitin integration is now live as well. So, those customers that are doing plagiarism checking of their student work assignments inside of Microsoft

Teams now supports that. And the last one I might even throw to you, Amit, because I know this is something of interest to you, is the ability to do real-time close captions on Teams meetings, right? There's great example of some AI happening inside of Teams.

Amit: Yeah, absolutely. I think that's actually been brought up in the recent demo that I did to a customer here. They really appreciate given that in their schools they have students with various capabilities or abilities of English reading and comprehension and having that subtitling live or captioning live of the meeting that's been had really makes it very inclusive for students of various capabilities or backgrounds and it's proving to be actually useful. So, I was surprised to say that it goes beyond just the demo that you and I normally do. To see it actually being used in a classroom here in Singapore, at a couple of schools, has been really -- it's heart-warming as well as impactful to understand the work our teams are doing does have a real world usage scenario here.

Sam: Absolutely. I was talking to a deputy principal in Auckland today at a large, very large girl school, very multi-ethnic school, a lot of English and speakers of other languages and I was showing here the translation features that are built into immersive reader. And it really resonated with this school later because she was saying many of the girls come into our school, their English is quite limited and to have something like immersive reader with that translation service built into it is a bit of a game changer. And I think the thing is true as well with what you're saying here in the Team's meeting. So, let's focus on accessibility. We go back to that old saying we had with Ray Fleming on the podcast with him around the intelligent cloud is powering the intelligent edge. We're seeing all of this again come into the fore inside of Microsoft Teams. The winners here are the schools and the students, right?

Amit: Absolutely. Yeah. And some of these features are even available offline. I think, you know, that's the other part about the intelligent edge that as much as we want everything to be connected to the Internet, there's times when you're just not able to, especially in the emerging markets that we deal with in APAC, we do have to contend with the fact that devices are not always connected to the cloud and Microsoft platforms are ready for that as well. So, that's a good indication of that, that whole development and platform kind of approach that Microsoft's taken to with education tools.

Sam: I completely agree. And look, I think we're going to introduce our guest on the podcast this month. We previously had a very own boss, Don Carlson, the director for education across Asia Pacific. And I think he had a lot of fun podcasting with us, don't you think, Amit?

Amit: I think so. I think we'll want the listeners to let us know how these podcasts are evolving and we kind of want to bring in the right guests who can add their perspective on education and that perspective on how technology is empowering the students and educators to achieve more. Now I think we should introduce off our new our guest today, which is our own colleague, Rob Smith. Welcome, Rob.

START OF DISCUSSION, INTRODUCING ROB SMITH

Rob: Thanks, Amit, thanks Sam. Hi, it's great to be here.

Amit: Excellent. Just introduce yourself, Rob, as to what you do within the team because it'll be better coming from you than from the two of us.

Rob: It's always dangerous, I can give myself my own title. I'm Rob, Rob Smith, part of the Asia Pacific education team, working with Sam, Amit, under Don's stewardship. My role is really translating what we as a technology organization can do for higher education and research across the region. I still say I think I've got one of the best jobs in the world. Being able to apply that, the best technology available to solve problems for graduates of tomorrow.

Amit: Sounds like a mouthful as well there, Rob. I mean, you must be busy just flying around APAC then.

Rob: I get to operate that on a business card. But yeah, you're right. It's a, I am busy and the reason why I'm so busy is that we have so many institutions wanting to talk to us about how they transform. It's exciting times and challenging times for them. And then technology plays a huge part in that.

Sam: Look, I think we will jump into just the timescales that universities operate in when it comes to change and change management and the feature section of this. But you know, Rob, you've just heard Amit and I are talking a little bit about what we're seeing in some of the schools that we've been talking to recently -- process automation, Microsoft Teams, some of the new features there. Is there anything sort of top of mind in the technology universe that you've kind of come across recently that you would like to share with all of us as well?

Rob: I'll let you in besides the Xbox, new Xbox announcement in the streaming services.

Sam: Alright. Tell us more.

Rob: Well, no, I think for me I want you to sign it, anything invented after you were 30 years considered technology. For my grandparents, that was a remote control. For my parents, I suppose it was the Internet. I'm at the stage of my life where I'm wondering what that will be, and I think it's probably going to be AI as I look at it, changing the way we do things. And for me that's got to be very new. For my children, that will be very normal. And I think that it's having a massive impact on the world. It's this fourth industrial revolution concept. I think it's also having an impact on our industry of education and specifically the graduates of tomorrow. So, pretty exciting times but so that's kind of top of mind for me in general and then looking from the technology world is some of the recent announcements around partnerships between Microsoft and Oracle, helping out, helping our customers really provide them choice, providing them flexibility and confidence in their investments. Amongst other things, we're having universities talking to us already about how they can run their applications, their Oracle applications like PeopleSoft that kind of manage their unis and run them, have the choice of which cloud to run them on, which data platform to run them on and integrate that into a broader strategy, so a couple of really exciting things that are happening -- I think power and transformation for our universities.

Amit: Fantastic. Rob, I think we probably want to just go step back a little bit. And for the listener's sake, kind of recall the typical conversation that you have. So, I mean, you've talked a little bit about universities or higher ed institutions coming to us wanting to know about transformation. Just walk me and Sam through a typical conversation that says, Hey, you know what, this is how a higher ed institution starts the conversation with Microsoft. Given that they already have investments in an IT infrastructure, how do we enable that, that kind of next step of the conversation to say, Hey, I have something I want to get to here. How do I get there?

Rob: It's a great question, Amit, and I think, for the past few years we've been having conversations with institutions about really why they need to do something different. University education -- universities had been doing in some cases the same thing for many, many years, quite successfully: producing graduates. But the time is coming where a lot of them are reflecting, either due to their self needs or governments are asking them to, especially across Southeast Asia, to change what they're doing and change the value they provide and that's leading past the why conversation. There's usually then three real themes. The first one around, I think what we'd all expect around the academic excellence. How we look to improve student outcomes or success and that success could be many things: the graduation on time. It could be grades, it could be employability, it could be retaining the student just to make sure they complete their education. But that ultimately then leads to how do we attract and retain student talent and improve the academic performance of the institution is a big one. I think that the second area is around research and research acceleration or excellence, how to drive more publications, more finding, which is ultimately going to help the university in terms of their ranking and ultimately funding as well from government and from the private sector and attracting more researchers. And lastly, how do we help them optimize the institution or the business of being in education? I think a lot of these universities are as small to medium enterprises and they're complex to run, and they're trying to put as much resources as possible back into the students. So, how did they do more with less? How did they meet the needs of their researchers, their students and industry? How do they build smarter campuses, how do they improve the services and those types of things. We tend to end up in those three themes and due to that we often try and address that with what we call the higher Education Transformation Framework. Don would have spoken I think on the last podcast around our approach to K to 12, but in higher education we really align our approach to those. There's three main areas: teaching and learning, research, student experience and the campus experience as well, a kind of big key themes of conversation. And I think the difference now is we're being brought from that. Well, okay, we understand we need to change, we understand the areas in which we want to change, what do we do about it and how do we do it? And I think that's where we tend to be going next.

Sam: We're going to jump in there. You're like a runaway freight train once you get on this and I love the passion. And you're right, you're picking up on some of these themes that Don talked to us about as well, and that whole idea of moving beyond the why and into the how. And I find it fascinating that that was resonating at a K-12 space and it was resonating with ministries of education, as Don explained it to us and you're seeing exactly the same sort of transition and thinking at a higher education space. Microsoft is in a position to help these organizations through something like the higher education transformation framework. That's a real, like a synergy that's happening there between the two spheres of education.

Amit: So just for the listeners benefit to Rob and Sam, is there a link that we can send our listeners to, to get started with this conversation or is there a resource that we can point them to say, hey, if you want to know a little bit more about the higher education transformation framework that you can, you know, read up something and what's the process look like to then engage with Microsoft on that journey?

Rob: Absolutely. There is, I don't know it off the top of my head, but we have a link we can share with you around this transformation framework and some great examples of how it's being used and applied by institutions globally.

Amit: So, great. So, what you're telling me is that the framework is not really Microsoft specific then it is something that we can include their existing, like you mentioned earlier in the Microsoft-Oracle partnership is a great example as to how we can modernize or re-platform perhaps their Oracle workloads. Are there any other workloads that are typically discussed as part of this conversation?

Rob: Yeah, I think it's a really great point there, Amit. The goal here is not to be a Microsoft centric framework. It's very much a goals and outcomes centric framework to support the university in its vision and its mission to transform and potentially become more relevant. We're seeing researchers use a whole lot of open source workloads on the cloud. We're seeing collaboration between different institutions, a lot of conversation around skills and how we help the students be more future ready. But absolutely, it's not built just on technology, but it helps us guide and understanding of where technology may help, in a way Microsoft technology may help. There's the ongoing conversation of data or data depending on where you're from and AI, but it's helping put those technologies in the context of the transformation and aligning that transformation to where the university wants to be.

Sam: Can I just jump in there because I think Rob and certainly Amit, you've both been with Microsoft for longer than myself, and it sounds like what we're hearing here, this is not that the old Microsoft of many years ago where it was just the Microsoft way or the highway that instead we're positioning ourselves as a real partner to these higher education institutes and providing a platform that they can run almost any application they choose to on top of the Azure cloud, and leverage against the infrastructure that we can provide? In that sense, when we provide something like a framework, like the higher education transformation framework, this is say, hey, whatever you are trying to transform inside of your organization, here's some best practice, here's some research driven outcomes that you can strive for and really add value into that relationship. Would that be kind of clear?

Rob: I think it's a great synopsis there, Sam. And it's a lot of that is also how to drive value out of current investments as well and how do you leverage, not necessarily best of breed, but how do you build a platform upon which you can solve the challenges or meet the needs of many different constituents in a university, be a researcher on one side, yet a finance division on the other side. How do you keep within an IT department or within a support saying the same set of skills, a common identity across all of those platforms, a common data layer, and then supporting putting the right tools in the hands of the right people for what they're trying to do.

Sam: Yeah, that's good. And I guess one of the things that perhaps in the K-12 world as a bit of a benefit is that schools and districts tend to centrally procure, right? However, at higher education sometimes the different faculties have different IT providers or different strategies. And so, something like the higher education transformation framework enables a holistic view to be approached to like is the, the university to kind of bring all of those different faculties into alignment.

Rob: Absolutely. The best example I ever heard was one university that had approximately 120 different email services across this campus. And now we're all eventually with a bit of a centralization strategy aligned to Office 365 providing a far better experience to users. And that was certainly not a spend more money for the institution. It was let's save money, consolidate money and improve user experience. So, there's some great examples of that sort of that approach happening.

Amit: So help me understand. I mean, it's great to know that, you know, technology is giving a better experience, but what impact does that have to the end user satisfaction? Because I heard you speak earlier that universities want to attract the best students as well, as much as students want to go to the best university. How does having these experiences attract I suppose the right kind of student population and retain? Because I think one of the things that we discuss a lot during our team meetings is a big challenge for a lot of the higher ed institutions is retention of these students. So, are these end user experiences that you talk about enable that better outcome, attract the right students, retain the right student and of course graduate as many or half the course completion be at a high level compared to prior to having this digital transformation?

Rob: Yeah. I think that's a really hot topic for so many institutions for so many reasons. Whether it be changes in the way they're funded from a government level or if some of the countries have declining aging populations. So university graduate numbers are down, the competitiveness is up. You're really looking to understand how to differentiate or how to attract more students. And I think some of that comes from students expect a certain amount of digital access, a certain experience when they come to a university and you know, they're all used to in the home life, having certain services, certain ways of doing things. And then they come to the university and those things are taken away from them. They're not going to thrive and possibly not going to choose that institution. So seeing so many unis very interested in providing the very best services to students, and that can be at many levels. I mean one is how do we make sure you've got access to the best collaboration tools? How do we make sure the learning is accessible? Because a lot of our students are non-traditional students as well, not necessarily fresh graduates out of high school. They may be re-skilling, they might be returning to the work force that could be midcareer and looking for a change. So, we're looking to address those diverse learning styles and learning scenarios as well. On the other end, there's some research around retaining students that says the increase in student success and retention if a student has a one to one mentor is huge, but there's not many universities, especially in this part of the world that can support a one to one mentor program for a student. So we're seeing unis turn to technology like AI and artificial intelligence and bots to see how can we provide a virtual bot or a virtual mentor to these students to help give them that similar benefit and augments or offset the physical mentor and the traditional capabilities in the uni to support the students better, therefore retain them, , and hopefully have them graduating on time and graduating at an employable level.

Sam: So, a really interesting idea, isn't it? This concept of an AI Bot or mentor that tracks through the university this career or progress of a student. And a few podcasts back Amit and I recorded this in person in Singapore with Ray Fleming from Australia and he shared what some of the universities in Australia are doing in this space. And it's, it's fascinating to see how those bots can intelligently be deployed using some of the Azure cognitive framework and you know, do things like real-time translation and handle some of that low level stuff but also be trained such that if there's a sense of different engagement by the students that can actually hand that conversation over to a real staff member to pick up and make sure that they handled the situation appropriately and that level of intelligence is only going to increase, right?

Rob: Absolutely. I think there's this big scary theme around what artificial intelligence is going to disrupt, but ultimately when used in, in the right way, I think it can greatly improve, improve the lives of everybody. It can help scale, it can help personalize. It can really hopefully help out our students graduate on time.

Sam: Yeah. I sat through a presentation from a New Zealand University that's quite good thinking on the space and they were using bots as well as part of the enrollment process. A graduated high school student could simply start a chat session with on their phone with a bot on the university website or punch the Facebook Messenger even and through that process could solicit the student's name, contact details and automatically be populating into something like Dynamics 365 all of the student records and again, could do real-time translation for them if they were maybe an English speaker as a second language. And that was one way of streamlining the students' engagement in a way that's very native and intuitive to them. And for many younger people, they would prefer to

engage via an app and pick up a phone and have a phone call with a real person, right? So, I think universities need to be meeting the students at their point of need and how they prefer to communicate to attract that top talent.

Rob: That's the epitome of a student-centered approach – I think meeting the students where they are, doing it the way they want to. I think there was another university, Sam, in Australia that when they all added to their call center capacity with some of these chatbot capability. The initial intention was that the call center volume would go down. But on the contrary, the call center volume stayed the same. But they reached a whole new audience of people that prefer to meet with the university in that way via bot and they ultimately increase their student enrollment. So, it was a fantastic result for them, but not quite in the way that intended when they started the project.

Sam: Very interesting.

Amit: What other examples of the environment modifying or updating itself to meet these requirements? As we've talked about in the previous podcast, Sam, we talked about the right device for the right end-user. Have you seen the impact of the different ways of collaborating on different device types, impact on the Higher Ed outcomes, Sam? Oh, sorry, Rob.

Rob: Yeah, I think it's a really good, that's a great question because again, our students are into university today growing up as technology natives as they're expecting to be able to learn their way. Again, expecting also to be able to learn where they want to learn and when they want to learn. And there was a study awhile back around the delivery of online learning. And at one stage that was "hey, we'll just take some slides and we might even record some content and we'll put it on a Share and students can read it at their own will". And students really disengaged, the students' grades didn't improve, they dropped their numbers. And that was because the experience for the student wasn't great. There was no focus put on what is the online experience or what is the blended experience. We're now seeing so many more unis focusing on that learning experience, knowing that they need to scale through non-traditional face-to-face methods both for a sheer number of students' perspective, but also for the fact that again, the non-traditional learners aren't going to learn face-to-face. So they're looking at tools like Teams looking to leverage the power of Windows with inking and building knowledge real-time with learners, whether they are face-to-face, using the old sort of overhead projector model, using whiteboarding, building that knowledge, building that learning with students and then the students are consuming it in the way that they want to consume it, whether it be on a one to one device --in some countries that is a mobile device, in others it's on a desktop or a laptop and others it might be a shared remote outreach center for the university that they've got set up where students can come in and learn in that center. So, having that flexibility and that accessibility of different devices at different levels is really helping them learn. But ultimately, it's not taking away from the learning experience and possibly adding to it. When we talk about the graduates being employable and how do we help these students collaborate better, we don't have a collaboration course. We build collaboration into the learning and what used to be just a group project is really, really difficult when nobody's meeting face to face. But for an online university, we can still have group projects, we can still have collaboration, we can still do teamwork and we can drive those skills due to the real, I suppose, the low entry bar to the technology that these institutions are investing in and the devices that are now in the hands of the students.

Sam: Such interesting insights there, Rob. And I guess from my perspective, I don't think we could finish this podcast without having a conversation around research -- it's what many of these universities actually exist for. And if we think back to the early days of computing, it was actually the universities that we're investing huge sums of money into infrastructure, massive farms, super computers, all of these sorts of things. How has the evolution of the Azure cloud positioned itself to support universities with research? And I know it's a bit of a dark art and you know, there's a lot of things that many of our listeners and myself included won't kind of get here. But when we hear terms being thrown around like the elastic cloud and scale up and scale down, what does this mean for research in universities?

Rob: Yeah, research, it's kind of a scary topic for some people. People with access to compute doing research and the, the access to that, what we call high performance computing or super computing to researchers has been very narrow. And, and that's driven some sort of real elite universities or lead researchers and institutions who have had access to this computing power. What we're seeing is a bit of a shift away from that access to a few to access to

many and really democratizing the access to this compute power, these technologies, some of the services such as AI, due to the cloud. And Azure cloud is a great example of that. And what we're seeing is as universities again look to differentiate themselves, they want to improve their rankings, they want to attract more funding or they want to use researchers to improve the learning outcomes and the teaching offerings for the courses, having the right services and the right platform has been really, really important. With technology evolving so quickly, the old approach of we'll buy a supercomputer, we'll have it, will sweat it out for five years and then we'll buy a new one has been really difficult. The new capabilities, I mean we talk about quantum computing on the horizon, but GPUs and FPGA, is really powerful non-traditional processing capabilities, giving that access to any research has been really, really important. And we're seeing acceleration of research output. We're seeing democratization of access to that, that research computing. It's opening up new challenges as well as to how do we make that more accessible in terms of the technology or the skills gap to be able to come and for a researcher to be able to use that technology. And we're seeing the emergence of the roles like the cloud research software engineer and the need to make code reusable. And these are conversations, if I would have spoken to a university or a head of research five years ago, they probably would have said, why is Microsoft talking to us? And nowadays we're having schools come to us and say, hey, Microsoft how can you help us in this area. I hear you can do this super computing with Cray on the cloud, how do we get access to that? And I understand you've got InfiniBand, you've got all of this technology available, how can we get access to it? Because the traditional way of giving access is not working, it's not scaling. And also we want to use some of these AI stuff to accelerate some domains of research that we haven't traditionally focused on before. So, it's really exciting times. Yeah. In that research space, we're still, we're still learning a lot as Microsoft and researchers. Thankfully it feels like there's a much more open collaboration now, but new challenges and I think new opportunity for driving that transformation in the research space.

Sam: So interesting because I remember reading Malcolm Gladwell's book *Outliers* where he just talked about, you know, the fact that Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft, had access to, was sneaking time on some of the computers at the local university, gave him the kind of the magical 10,000 hours to kind of develop expertise in that space. And what I'm hearing from you now is that it's not about having physical access to the supercomputer or any computing at all since they're available for anybody, anywhere. And the idea of democratization of access to supercomputer is far more readily available to everybody. And that's got to be a good thing, right?

Rob: Absolutely. I think that's the case. It's a good thing. It's the power of many and how do we help unlock discovery, which is ultimately going to drive innovation.

Sam: Amit, since we've kind of approached the end of the podcast, are there any sort of final thoughts or questions on what Rob has kind of shared around this for now.

Amit: I'm going to shift gears a little bit actually now that we've come to a kind of logical point in the conversation. What do you think is the future, Rob? I mean we deal with so much with this new way of interacting with the digital world. As a device SSP, Sam and I, we deal with devices like the HoloLens, Windows mixed reality headsets and augmented reality on phones and other things. How do you think that's going to impact this experience for students of the future who can potentially learn anytime, anywhere yet be associated with a university or a higher ed institution that's enabling them to have the skills that they can take into the real world? So it's kind of those, you know, I suppose my question is where do you think there is that, , the device as the portal into this environment, but then what does that look like in the future as students look to different kinds of experiences or are accelerating their learning because of 3D technology for example. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Rob: Yeah, I think it's an exciting world that these graduates are going to move into. I think a university for them is going to be far more interesting than potentially was for us. You talk about some of those technologies that we're looking at university probably translate to real, more real world learning experiences. As we talk about future-ready skills, I think it's easy to talk about AI and data science and stem and steam and those sorts of things. And we've talked about competencies around collaboration, but if you then add that, yeah, I'm an engineer and I'm going to be working on advanced machinery yet throughout my learning I can get some more practical experience with something like the HoloLens I think is fantastic. The universities, this part of the world teaching our midwifery complex more practical scenarios, using the HoloLens, being much more immersive and it's also democratizing that the learning experience because hey, everybody learns a different way. Some people want to learn by reading, some might joke that I'm not that way inclined but if you can give me something I had experience, I can learn it.

That's the way I learn and we're giving students access to that. I think more importantly, we talk about our HoloLens as an example. That's potentially not practical for every student to have a HoloLens or for every classroom. But how do we bring that same type of experience to students with other devices in democratizing access? How do they use just a simple PC and get an augmented reality experience? I think that's really important and I can see that changing the way students learn and making them a little more workforce ready. And also I think driving the need for partnerships between industry and academia as well, I think those partnerships again will accelerate that. I spoke to a very large what's called a technology disrupter recently and they said, look, most big tech companies, when they hire tech talent, it's about six months between them graduating and being really useful in the workforce and that's a lot of intensive training and that was in the US. In some parts of Southeast Asia, it's about nine months and they really want to know how to get, how to partner with institutions, provide those learning experiences that technology can enable that potentially couldn't be there in the past and have them up and running in a month or two. Have them ready to go right out of university and being workforce ready. I think there's some exciting opportunities for that. And thankfully, to the credit of universities right now they're asking how do we do this? How does technology, how does AI, how does data, how do devices, how do they help us change what we're doing to provide future ready graduates and be much more relevant for the digital transformation that's happening in the economy right now.

Sam: I'm going to just jump in there with a final thought as well because I know to your question, Amit, how are devices influencing what's happening in this space and whilst much of the conversation on this podcast has been focused around the universities, I saw a great example in a polytechnic where they were teaching people how to do welding. The messaging there was essentially training, you know, novices who know nothing about welding is quite expensive in terms of the materials that you use. And there's also an element of risk involved in that as well. And so they started to use virtual reality headsets that were powered by Windows team where the students were visually seeing what they were welding and they were still holding a virtual welding wand. It had accelerometers in it so that they could actually ensure that they were getting the welding wand on exactly the right angle to complete the perfect kind of weld on the metal. But they were not using real materials and it was only in the latter stages of the courses when they had clearly progressed through, you know, the basic and elementary skillsets to develop that they started doing real welding with real equipment. And I think that's a great example of how higher education organizations can leverage technology to both improve safety and reduce costs and the devices are an important element of that.

Amit: I think it's an exciting world that these students are in. As Rob said, it's much more exciting than when you and I were at university. So, I really want to thank Rob for spending the time with us at this podcast and yeah, Sam, it's been a great exchange of ideas. I hope listeners find it useful as well, so listeners please let us know through your feedback and then if you have any thoughts, leave comments in your favorite podcast platform and let us know how we're doing from a subject perspective. And also let us know if you want to get into depth with any of these conversations we're having with our guests and I'm sure Rob, we would love to have you on board again to have a more in depth conversations about what our listeners tell us about.

Rob: Well, thank you and thank you to your listeners for the opportunity to have a bit of a conversation today and would love to continue that conversation in the future.

TIPS AND TRICKS

Amit: Okay, well I'm going to put a curve one to you, Rob, what's your favorite tech tip? What do you use? What technology do you use on a day-to-day basis yourself? I know we've talked about the students, but what do you use on a day-to-day basis that makes your life just that much easier? Just as a tech tip?

Rob: Oh look, it's a controversial one. I love video in Teams personally but I really love the ability to blow my background, which means I can work anywhere, anytime. I'm often in different countries, I'm often in different places, but I can be part of our team, helps me be more productive. It means I'm not slowing people down but I can do it in a way that's convenient for me. So it's a massive shout out to Teams and a little bit of background blur and in the future it will be subtitling with my voice and we can translate English in brackets, Australian in the English for everybody. I think there'll be a big one for me.

Amit: We look forward to being able to understand you finally, Rob. Sam, the same question for you. What's your tech tip for this month?

Sam: Yeah, my tech tip for this month, that's a relatively new one actually. In office.com, we have now got the ability, there's a search box at the top, which sounds kind of intuitive that it should have been there for a long time, but it's a very multifunction search box that allows you to search to launch Excel online or OneNote online or Teams online very quickly. But it will also search across your documents and interestingly search across any third-party apps that you may have also included into your waffle launcher using single sign-on. I know many of our educational institutes are now using, you know, browser-based platforms and Office 365 online work superbly. So, if you sign into office.com you'll see the search box there and again, get searching for those documents or apps that you want to launch really quickly.

Amit: Absolutely. That's a great tip, Sam. I'm going to go with a slightly different tip this year—this week—this month, sorry, it's actually Microsoft Flow. And I've noticed that a lot of customers have always wanted a workflow tool, or workflow platform that was easy to use. I've been spending a little bit of time just researching on Flow and how it would be useful to a lot of customers. I'm actually finding, as I said at the beginning of the call, this whole robotic automation process conversations are becoming more prevalent. At Microsoft, Flow is the platform that enables that. So, for all our listeners, if you have Office 365, you have access to Microsoft Flow that you can start taking advantage of. And if you haven't enabled it, you need to talk to your IT administrator to enable the flow, within your tenant. And it will let you automate a lot of these processes. For example, you know, if you have a form, a Microsoft form where you're asking somebody a survey result or collecting data from a form, you can trigger activities like emails or you know, saving of that content in the SharePoint or putting that data into a database just by triggering a form submission or a workflow for approvals using a form submission. So, there are many different scenarios and literally I would love to hear from our listeners through our feedback channel, still if they have used forms, how they finding it and what scenarios they using forms and Flow for. So yeah, that's my tech tip for this month.

Sam: Great tech tip, Amit, and look, I read a blog post in October last year around how schools could leverage Flow for their workflow approval process. And a common one is leave request forms, right? IT might need to go to your head of department and then get approved by a deputy principal and you can build an email triggers to disconfirm back and forth, letting sure everyone knows what stage the process is at and if someone's ignoring it, it'll send an automatic follow up. So I'll post a link to that at the bottom of the podcast as well so that people can check that one out. And I think with that it's time to thank Rob once again for your contribution and the two takeaways I got was around that democratization to research power in the cloud. I think that was a big learning curve for me. And the second one was around how higher education institutes are really pivoting to meet their students at their point of need and how they want to engage with them to really drive almost a customer service centric focus for this learning. So, thank you very much, Rob. Thank you, Amit for your time. It's been fun podcasting with you all again.

Amit: Excellent. This has been fun. Until next time, listeners, we will catch up with you at our next Edutech Talks with Microsoft, , Amit and Sam. So yeah, thank you for your time today. See you next time.

Sam: Thank you.