

## Digital processes reimagined with Jana Brendel and Richard Dodd

### - Part 2

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BRADLEY HOWARD (BH): Hello and welcome back to the Tech Reimagined podcast on digital necessity with my guests, Jana Brendel, a CTO of payment company Nets, and Richard Dodd, Director of Digital at Macmillan Cancer Support. In this half, we'll get to know each of our guests a little better and look back over their careers to understand how they got to where they are today. Let's start with Jana. Can you describe a little bit about your background?

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JANA BRENDEL (JB): Oh, happy to. So, I started in February 1991 as a help desk agent here in Frankfurt. This was the time when you got two East Germans for the price of one West German, because we didn't know how to negotiate, right? So, yeah, I learned software engineering from scratch. Did my studies then in parallel with being a programmer in the '90s, studied remotely computer science and business administration, and when I had finished that, and that was really important for me as an East German having done that and being, yeah, how would you say, on eye level with the Western technology then in 1998, I started working for Deutsche Bank as a project manager. I did all corporate titles there. So, from an AVP to a managing director. And that gave me the opportunity to take step by step more responsibility, and yeah, drive their technology capabilities there. I was there for 19 years, and the last years I was responsible for the application development teams, and yeah, honoured by being the one doing the digital lean and agile transformation here in Germany. So, from three agile teams in 2014, then four years later, it was like roughly fifty-five zero, and yeah, major parts of the business and technology organisation here in Germany working in that kind of customer centric lean and agile way. And that solved the problem I was looking for, yeah, some years. I was always thinking about every Euro a big company like Deutsche spent on technology. I had the impression that only like 20 percent made it to the end user to the customer value-add point, yeah? So, I'm a real evangelist for lean and agile because I'm convinced that helps companies to develop customer-centric fast and really solving end user customer problems. The last two years I'm working now for a payment company, Concardis, and that one is now part of Nets, being one of the leading European payment providers. And this is all about settling payment transactions, going more and more into digital payments, and I'm really happy to see in Germany now, that was always a cash country, that last but not least, with the virus, we see huge adaption of digital payments here in the country. So, this is really cool.

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BH: And what were the key opportunities that really shaped your career in each of those different companies?

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JB: I think it was all about learning and doing where I thought the fun, but also the biggest fire was, right? So, the young people listening may not remember, in the 2000s, we had the first e-commerce hype. And in these days Deutsche was offering the first digital banking – not yet on mobile phones because you'll remember, maybe, the mobile phones had a screen being really small and not at all visual. It was all numeric. So, it was more about desktop online banking offers and there was no one who wanted to take that responsibility, and things were breaking down and nothing was stable, and the firewall was not able to cope with the huge excess numbers. And yeah, there is a pattern. I was always, yeah, trying to get into taking responsibilities, and yeah, trying to make things better. And this I did back in the 2000s and also now in the last five years,

like leading a big release in 2014, a big post-merger integration programme that was also covering technology, but also organisational changes. So, this is a pattern, right? Going there where the fun is.

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BH: I've written down three bullet points for Jana's opportunities in her career. Number one: learning. Number two: having fun. And three: finding the biggest fires. [LAUGHTER] So, Richard, you've worked at some of the biggest technology companies around. So, how did you originally start your career?

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RICHARD DODD (RD): Yeah, thanks. Great question. I dusted off the CV, the physical one. It's been hidden in LinkedIn for a while. So, I started off and I fell into a business information technology degree in 1995, having had no notion really of technology or anything like that, and I managed to somehow stumble through that and ended up – a similar story to Jana, actually – I came through the desk side support route in '97, ended up running service desks 1999. I guess that it's kind of interesting that you realise you're either a techie or not. But I was interested by the people side of it, the service element side of it. And the thing about running a service desk is you got, you're across, you know, desk side server applications, architecture, but I was never really techie. I was just a digital person – just didn't realise that that's what I was. And when I went from a service desk, I ended up in 2000 spending five years working at EMI Music. Primarily there it was around transformation, outsourcing of technology to third parties in India at the time. So, a lot around service management, project management, but all around kind of digital and technology transformation. And then I moved on from EMI Music, I think it was in 2010 – someone's going to trip me up on my timelines here – to spend four plus years working at PlayStation. And that's really when the digital eyes went on. And I was responsible for looking after PlayStation.com and PlayStation Store, the tech PMO and digital analytics and some sort of service desk for EMIR. It's obviously a Japanese kind of focused company, but great time, really exciting, swapped music for gaming. Lots going on. Again, you looked under the covers and you probably thought what was a really cool PlayStation.com and PlayStation Store, but actually what sat beneath the frontend was ingestion via multiple Excel spreadsheets and a really horrendous weekly content publishing to get the games on the storefront. So, it always sounds better than it actually was. And then after PlayStation, I think it was 2015, I joined Skype and Microsoft. Skype had just been purchased by Microsoft. So, the Death Star was not quite there yet. And there's a lot of autonomy for an Estonian company that really was a market leader before it came utility. And so, I worked a lot with product teams and responsible for Skype.com from a content and product perspective. And then during my tenancy there, I had some time to work with, as the Death Star got closer, the Office team and Bing, and really interesting from an organisation on a service design. And just massive mammoth of an organisation that is Microsoft typically tend to buy market leaders then just consume them, and if it's not Windows or Office then it rapidly gets spit out. So, some really interesting experience there. And then I started my own business and did some consulting for a while. Possibly ended up doing in 2016 a stint at Sage, which is an accountancy software company. And if you saw my shoes or hair style, you'd recognise that that probably wasn't the place for me. But they were re-envisioning their website and moving their product portfolio from a traditional kind of server client to SaaS model. So, some really interesting transformational activity there. And then I did some work in 2017 with Samsung. I worked on the release of the S9 and the QLED stuff and some TVs, but mostly my bag there was content strategy and working across digital. But also start – it's always been around the dot com and the channels and the content and the audience. And then, you know, I did some pro bono work for a while. I closed my company down and joined Macmillan in 2018. And, you know, finally, I think I said to you both when I was talking about, you know, the history, finally, finally landing somewhere I feel really comfortable with

– comfortable with the purpose, comfortable with the opportunity, and, you know, I've been happy there since 2018. You know, what's my bag there? You know, I'm responsible for the digital product portfolio and revisiting their digital estate, you know, did their digital transformation programme. I've got accountabilities or I'm surrounded and have the opportunity to work with great people around SEO, Product, UX, UI, Dev frontend/backend. So, a nice mix of internal teams there, but working with externals as well. So, there's the plotted history, and I apologise for getting the timelines wrong, or maybe over-expanding what I actually did there, or underselling even what I did there in some occasions. [LAUGHTER]

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BH: Along the way, did you have some mentors?

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RD: Yeah, yeah, I did. I had a couple. Some of them I won't tell you about, but some of them I will. There was a great guy I had at EMI called Steve. I won't give you his second name just in case he's listening.

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BH: Was that Steve Jobs when you met him?

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RD: [LAUGHTER] No, not quite. This was a guy called Steve who was, I guess, coming towards the end of his career and took me under his wing, and I was a young guy at EMI. And I guess what he did is he just let me run around in the jungle and knock trees over like an elephant, and he would pick me back up again and just kind of dust me off and, you know, say, "Don't do that again". And he was just brilliant, a brilliant guy to have around. He was definitely a mentor of mine. I had a couple of other mentors at Microsoft. They tell you not to drink too much of the Kool-Aid when you're at Microsoft, but one of the things I do remember about that, it's not when you've ballsed-up, it's what you do next that matters. And I guess that was one of them, the mentors' mantras from Microsoft, because it did happen. You know, working on campaigns and things like that in highly pressurised environments, it's what you do next that matters. And I try and take that into a lot of what I do.

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BH: It's a lovely bit of advice. And Jana, did you have any mentors?

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JB: Yeah, sure. So, I had several on, yeah, my career path. And I think this kind of, how would you say, more informal – I never had a formal mentor. It was more an informal way of me reaching out to someone, and I really trusted, and I was convinced I can learn from. Also being in a formal relationship like one of my former bosses in Deutsche. So, giving you just the example that made me MD was reaching out to my boss's boss and saying, "You know, I can do more. I can take responsibility. I can deliver software releases". And he was like, "Okay, let me think about that". And then gave me the responsibility budget wise for something that was 10 times bigger than what I ever did before. So, it was quite a risk for him, but – and he was saying to me, "Jana, you're really out of your comfort zone. You will sweat. You will make mistakes. This is normal". You just get through that, yeah? And he was there during my whole path, also helping with advice, because this is also about listening, right, and shaping things. And that is always helpful. And I think it's also about keeping those relationships over time because it's really long term. Yeah, and this is what I did, and I learned a lot. And, yeah, I can only recommend that for the listeners to look

for those people. And if you want, you can make it formal, but it doesn't need to be. It could also be an informal way of doing that.

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BH: I agree with that. Definitely. Do you read any business books, either of you?

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JB: Oh, sure. Actually, it's funny. When I'm interested in something, I need to have it in paper, and really, you know, summarise and scrabble around. I usually read digital, but business books I read in paper. My latest one and the one I really like is *Factfulness* from Hans Rosling. And that one is about the way we pick up information, and then that there are patterns with, how do you say, even educated people, that our picture of the world is much worse than the reality and the data. So, I can really recommend that one. *Factfulness*.

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BH: And Richard?

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RD: Probably not as much that I can quote that I should be. I find myself in a time style vacuum, and I think I've got some business books that are probably propping up the desk at work, if I could get to the desk at work, and are probably propping up the doors at home, if I could shut the doors at home. But I think the thing that I've always been obsessed with – what can I scour off the Internet? You know, there used to be great content aggregators, which I would smash through on my journey to work, and that would be kind of snippeted stuff. But none to call out as good books which I could recommend other than a desire just to consume as I need and do it in the best cost-effective way that I can timewise.

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BH: What advice do you have for today's graduates just coming into the industry, Richard?

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RD: It's a great question. My partner is a teacher and she's fascinated with skills and enterprise and experience. I look at the way that you get into something and I think the traditional models for the way you would go from school to college to university, I think they need to be challenged. I think about experience and I think about people and I think about where you land through chance. I think the more work experience you can get and the onus on the youth or whatever – what are Gen X, whatever you call now, Gen Millennials – it's more on them to build that work experience because it's not going to come, and I would venture that it's not maybe just your CV and your education experience that's going to get you that foot in your door. It's that work experience and who you've worked for. So, being aware of the importance of that and the importance of networking to find what you want or to land where you want. I'd caution teenagers or people going into work about the importance of their digital footprint because, you know, we all leave one. And what might have been a cool idea at the age of 15 might come back to bite you in the derriere at the age of 35. I don't know. I think the other thing is just recognise it's a global marketplace and so competition is high. So, how do you distinguish yourself between the next candidate? The other thing is, well, and just because I think it's super important, is the ability to build relationships and have a conversation. It's no point being brilliant if you can't articulate and you can't hold a conversation and you're not confident and comfortable with who you are at the time that you meet people. And recognise it's okay to make mistakes. At the end of the day, it's about having fun. Family and friends first, work second and third, right?

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BH: Well, it's not about the making mistakes. It's what you do next, isn't it, Richard?

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BH: It certainly is, Bradley. [LAUGHTER]

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BH: And Jana, what advice do you have for today's graduates coming into your company?

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JB: Okay, so what I would advise is, yeah, go where you think your purpose is. Yeah, and try and play and have fun. And three things I think is key: Have the ambition to succeed wherever you are. Speak up and make your point even when it's difficult. And take personal leadership, meaning responsibility to shape the environment. I always drove it in a way like, love it, change it or leave it. I mean, you shouldn't leave it too fast. There is a certain career path necessary, but if you can't succeed at where you are, you need to take the risk and change, and that will bring you in an event often or very often for me, a better position then.

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RD: I like that. Love it, change it, or leave it. I think if I could build on that, if there's an opportunity to build, I really like that. I think there's an empowerment that probably the workforce have that they didn't have when I certainly started out. And you know, the notion that you'd work for an organisation for an elongated amount of time, I just don't think that's there, yeah? I think we've got a workforce that is far more transient and open to taking risks in order to make sure that they fulfil their own career objectives but also, they get that work-life balance and purpose. So, I think, you know, in that you asked the question about advice to people starting out, I think there's also advice to organisations about how they retain and attract talent. It's not just a one-way street, right? And organisations have got to have that package, that enticement, and that opportunity in order to keep hold of and attract good talent.

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BH: And Jana, what do you think has changed between you starting your career and today's graduates?

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JB: So, the first thing that comes to my mind is for sure the massive computer power thing. So, we have talked already about Moore's Law. In 1991, when I started there were Intel CPU with the 80486 chip that had like one million transistors. And yeah, today there's chips with around 54 billion transistors. The second one that comes to my mind is the access to global knowledge is much easier now. So, when I wrote my master's in 1997, I was going to the library and really looking into paper, yeah? There was rarely anything available electronics. Yeah, and nowadays, I mean, you can access the knowledge of the world. It comes with the downside of there's also a lot of bullshit you need to avoid rightly, but you can access the knowledge of the world. So, this is much easier now to learn from the right things and pick up trends and so on. And last but not least, there are more women in technology, at least in senior roles. And I hope we can, yeah, convince more women here to get beyond that, what is it, 22 percent of women in technology and in financial services? Because I'm convinced, we need more women, everyone to implement real diverse services that are fitting the whole population and not only middle-aged white men, right? So, computer power, access to knowledge, and more women in technology. This is the difference.

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BH: Richard, anything to build on from that?

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RD: I'm really glad that Jana called it out. I mean, you know, especially in the current climate. Whatever it is, it really just should be that it's an inclusive workplace for everyone. And I'm sad to say that, you know, we've still all got prejudices that need to be challenged and a workplace and a workforce that needs to be more representative. So, you know, totally behind that. And I'm really glad that Jana called out especially the diversity question in terms of women in senior roles in technology. I would just expand that out to the obvious, given the sensitivities of where we are in the world at the moment and what's going on, regrettably.

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BH: Jana, one more point as well. You're studying a course on artificial intelligence at MIT this summer. What made you choose artificial intelligence? Where's the interest?

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JB: Oh, I think that is one of the most interesting technologies to rise and has the potential really to change our life massively. And I know a lot about the theories and also basics of the psychological pieces. But yeah, I want to give it, since I have some time, I give it more room finding out what artificial intelligence can mean for our life and our business. And it starts with the basics. There is not even a proper definition for what intelligence is, so artificial intelligence is another one that is not really clear, at least to me. I want to find out more. And in the end, it goes back to the big American promises. So, after six weeks, I walk out of that summer seminar – it's all digital e-learning – and I have a plan how to implement it successfully in the business environments I'm in. So, I'm not going below that aspiration.

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BH: Well, we're looking forward to hearing about that later.

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JB: Yeah, sure.

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BH: Well, thank you both for sharing some of your career insights and joining us in such an interesting discussion. Please remember to like this podcast and hit the subscribe button.