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Speaker 1: Tech Reimagined: redefining the relationship between people and technology. Brought to you by Endava. This is Tech Reimagined.

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Bradley Howard: Hello, and welcome back to Tech Reimagined. I'm Bradley House. I'm glad to welcome you to the latest episode of our show. We're now full steam into season three, in which we explore how technology is influencing the fabric of our society, how we live, the way we work, and how we do business. Each Thursday we try to speak to the leading minds in the tech world on how it impacts our day-to- day lives. And speaking of interesting personalities in the tech world, it is such a great opportunity to be able to introduce you today to my colleague Endava CIO, Chief Information Officer, Helena Nimmo. Hi, and how are you Helena?

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Helena Nimmo: I am good, Bradley, and I hope your week and your year has started well.

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Bradley Howard: It certainly has. It's going by very quickly at the moment. So today's episode theme is the future of work, and how it'll be shaped by the growth of technology. So into the deep end, what do you think will be the next big shift in the future of work in the following years?

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Helena Nimmo: I think there's an interesting change of language we might have to adapt as part of that, because I think it's not just the future of work, I think it's the future of living, as we are in the hybrid working model. We talk about hybrid working and we're talking about working from home.
 But actually if we are home and we are doing hybrid working, are we also hybrid living? And a lot of the technologies that we're using at work, we are also using as individuals in our social lives. A lot of us, myself included, have family in other countries. We've been using this technology for years to be able to engage and maintain a relationship.
 So the steps in hybrid working as we are coining it, but the hybrid living, is how do we look at this fantastic technology that we currently have and make it work for us without it taking over? And I think by that I mean the fact that we still need that human touch. We still need that human connection. It is about who we are. It is in built into us as a need, so we can't erase that. So how do we use this technology to supplement it, and bring more into our lives? So I think that's going to be one of the big themes we're going to see emerging over the next few years.

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Bradley Howard: So how do you maintain a work- life balance and not be on your phone checking emails every waking hour of the week? How do you manage that?

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Helena Nimmo: What makes you suggest I don't check my email frequently? Yeah, you're right. It is a bit of a challenge, and I've had to build in a certain discipline. So there are

individuals I know, I'm sure you know some of them as well, who carry two phones, two devices for example. One is personal use, one is work use, and that's a very physical barrier separation. And that works for some.

I have to admit, it hasn't been until the past maybe 3, 4, 5 years in my career, that I have been in a position where I have had the confidence to go, " I am going on holiday right now and I am not going to look at my email. If there is an emergency, please contact me, but contact me the old- fashioned way. Don't expect me to troll through my emails while I'm on holiday."

So I think there's different ways of managing it. As I said, some people have physical barriers, others just can't do it for a while. Others, it comes with experience. But I definitely blend my home life into my work as well. I do check my personal emails on my phone when I'm at work, or my personal WhatsApp messages from the children. That's never going to change, just because they don't call an app on a landline on a work phone.

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Bradley Howard: Yeah. And what do you think that hybrid work 2.0 will look like in terms of technology and solutions?

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Helena Nimmo: I think, again, that's going to go back into the premise of understanding the individual. Obviously when we went into pandemic, there was a huge shift. There was an awful lot of people, an awful lot of companies who didn't have that hybrid working technology in place already.

For a lot of people it was very standard, especially those working in big global corporations. We are so used to working across time zones and using technology to interact, but there was still a huge pool of individuals who this was brand new to. So learning the technology was one thing, but getting used to the working methods was also there.

Then there's also a huge pool of individuals who haven't got that, they haven't got the luxury of ever using technology at work in this way. So having meetings online, for example, if you happen to work in a shop in retailing, you have to physically be there. That is your job and your role.

So I think it's understanding what works for those different individuals and those different user groups, on how do we move things forward in the hybrid two dot nought.

I also believe we will start seeing much more augmentation as we're moving into the next level of hybrid. We are still only in infancy when we talk about VR and AR, and how that can enhance individuals' working lives.

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Bradley Howard: Can you foresee a time when a company is going to hand out headsets, like Oculus headsets, for their employees?

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Helena Nimmo: So definitely during '21 and '22 there was a massive influx, where companies were buying headsets for people to experience VR. I don't think it's quite there yet, from that perspective. The bit that I would like to see happening first is the AR piece.

If you work in any field engineering, be it fixing boilers or anything else, being able to have that AR experience in front of you, when you are trying to figure out the make and the model of the boiler, for example, and trying to find what are the spare parts you

might have to order, that is a revelation complete compared to having a paper- based handbook, for example.

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Bradley Howard: I just want to be clear, AR is augmented reality, which is where you are looking through the real world through spectacles or something, and then we can overlay some graphic on top.

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Helena Nimmo: Yes, absolutely. Thank you for holding me true to that one.

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Bradley Howard: And when it comes to hybrid working, of working sometimes remotely, sometimes in a central office, do you think that we should invite certain groups of people, for example, more junior colleagues into the office, so they can learn from everyone? Or do you think that it should just be free for all? Whoever wants to come in can come in?

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Helena Nimmo: Again, there's a bit of a combination. So I would say that when you are starting out in your career, having that face- to- face and that social interaction is actually part of the process. How do you evolve as a human being, as an employee, as a colleague, if you cannot have that full experience of working in a team? So I think for graduates in particular, really important. Anybody just starting their working career, very important. Having that Thursday night beer is just as revolutionary for a young person in the workplace, than actually being physically in the office. So I think it's really, really important.

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Bradley Howard: There is so much implicit learning from being around other people early on in your career. But I personally worry that if you've just got lots of junior people in the office, you need lots of senior people as well, for them to learn over, for them to learn not from, and to pick up some of the communication and language, et cetera.

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Helena Nimmo: You're absolutely right. And seniors have to make a conscious effort of being seen. Now the challenge with seniors often is that we are locked in meeting rooms. We can be locked in a meeting room for eight hours a day, which means that actually you don't see us at all, or there's more traveling involved. So we are thinner on the ground from the sense that who is there.
 So I think there's specific effort and events that needs to be created, where you can have that mixing of different groups of individuals. You can have an opportunity to have conversations about certain things. So I think there's a definite tailoring on how do you initiate and maintain those conversations between different seniority groups, and different groups from different functions.

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Bradley Howard: We talked a little bit before about virtual reality and also augmented reality. Have you seen any solutions that can override the remote working type environment? One of the things that really frustrates me is that although Teams is very good, there's still this half second delay, which means sometimes people are talking over each other, or you can't see enough of someone's body language to know when they

finished a comment. So have you seen anything come out recently where you're thinking, "You know what, that could be really good, if not now, in the future?"

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Helena Nimmo: Well, I do think virtual reality definitely is going to be the way moving forward. I don't think we are there yet. I think we've got another decade to move on it, to really develop it, for it to be something that is, you can easily move between the physical and the virtual. The latest iterations that we've seen in, for example, the Oculus technologies.
You can see a desk, and you can do some of that moving back and forth between the physical and virtual. But we're still not there, with things like the headsets.
And we have to remember, I absolutely love virtual reality. I think it's the best thing on a cold winter's evening, to put a virtual reality headset on and drift off. But what we forget, that actually there's a lot of people there who cannot stand the experience. So the experience of the virtual reality is physically or mentally distressing for those individuals.
So I think there's a bit of a way to go, to actually develop it into something that really, really will move the dial for everybody as it needs to do. Because it does need to move it to everybody.

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Bradley Howard: When you said, "Drifting off in virtual reality," thankfully I don't get seasick, and some of the sickness that other people think, but it makes me 100% alert and I just can't even imagine drifting off in that type of environment. But there we go. Everyone's completely different.
And on hybrid working, what's your view on the ethical considerations around employee tracking of remote activity, tracker software, et cetera?

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Helena Nimmo: Ooh, the creepy line. This hasn't been talked about enough yet, in my view. I think it's something that we do need to talk about more. There used to be these time measure studies that were done, when people used to come in and have a clipboard and check how long does a certain task take to do that? I think literally, some of this tracking technology that we're seeing is just moving that clipboard activity online.
The difference is that when you've got a person in front of you with a pen and a clipboard, you can see them. When it's done virtually, you cannot see them. You might not even know that this is being done to you. So I think there is definitely the kind of ethics question there.
There's also a big question around trust. I would be mortified if I thought that my employer didn't trust me to do the job that I'm being paid for. And if you break that trust once, you know how it is, you break the trust and you can't get it back. It's a difficult thing to recoup. So definitely, I think companies need to be very careful on thinking about why they would be using this, and what is the cost going to be if it backfires.

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Bradley Howard: And the message it sends both ways, as well, it's just something else, isn't it?

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Helena Nimmo: Absolutely.

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Bradley Howard: And I think there's just a technology war going on between devices that try and circumvent the remote tracking software. I think there are black cradles and stuff on Amazon that, I don't know, tilt your mouse or something. We don't have them, so therefore I don't know enough about them, but I see memes and stuff on Twitter, about this continuous war between the tracking software and then devices to counteract that, so it just sounds crazy to me all the time.

My last question for you, is how can companies ensure that the right policies are being applied to at home working environments and hybrid working environments?

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Helena Nimmo: This is going to be an interesting development piece again, so not everybody, I'm very lucky, I have got my own working space, I have my own working office at home, but not everybody has that luxury. So that means that we are seeing individuals maybe working in a setup that is completely inappropriate.

They might be sitting on their bed cross-legged, hunched over their laptop, and if you do it for a while, and when you're younger, it doesn't really matter. But if you do it constantly and continuously it is going to give you problems.

So whose responsibility is that? The whole piece around working environment. When we come into the office, we all have ergonomically designed chairs, and we've got the proper seating height, and we've got feet risers and we've got laptop risers, we have it all. But are we taking the same care when we're doing that at home, either as employers or as individuals?

So I think there's that whole health and safety, and that policy piece is definitely there. Then there's other policies which are, they're less overt, but the whole thing of when do you start and stop working, making sure that individuals do take breaks, making sure that individuals don't work 14 hours a day. So I think there's all these kind of things that we do need to think about, and make sure that we are somehow tracking and understanding them.

And I don't talk about crossing the creepy line here by having tracking technologies, but literally that we understand what are the safeguards we need to put in place, because we want everybody to be productive and happy. And to be productive and happy, you need to have enough downtime and good enough working environment for that to happen.

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Bradley Howard: Yeah, definitely. And as someone who had a trapped nerve in my neck last year from poor posture over decades of just bad posture, I can't advocate that enough. Please just get up, move around every so often, set timers on your desktop, et cetera. So thank you very much for that.

Thank you Helena, for joining us for the whole of the episode on the different perspective of the future of work. If anyone wants to get a hold of you, what's the best way of doing so?

00:16:19

Helena Nimmo: I am easily found on LinkedIn under Helena Nimmo.

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Bradley Howard: Great. Thank you very much. I'm Bradley Howard, and until next week, please don't forget to share and subscribe.