

The technology gender gap reimaged with Anna Barsby and Helena Nimmo

- Part 1

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BRADLEY HOWARD (BH): Hello, I'm Bradley Howard, and welcome to our podcast. A place where we get technology experts together to explore innovative ways to reimagine the relationship between people and technology as it relates to things that influence our everyday lives. Today, we're going to be discussing women in technology. Joining me are two women in senior IT management positions: Anna Barsby and Helena Nimmo. Anna, would you like to give a brief overview of your background?

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ANNA BARSBY (AB): Yeah. Hi, I'm Anna. I am a technology leader, but I describe myself quite often as a people and change leader who happens to love what technology can do and what it enables in businesses. I have been a consultant. I've been in business change. I've run large IT transformation programmes. I've also been a CIO at both Halfords and Morrisons. I'm now setting up a new consultancy with two others, two other founders called Tessiant, and we are going to be consulting in strategy, programme project delivery and due diligence and risk management, that kind of thing, which is really exciting. I've also got two beautiful daughters who are teenagers, and four dogs, amazingly, and a partner who is very, very patient.

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BH: And Helena?

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HELENA NIMMO (HN): So, I'm CIO for Endava. I'm a passionate technologist. I live and breathe technology to the huge frustration of our children. I am sure none of them are going to grow up to be technologists. We have a combined number of five of them. So that does keep us busy. And I'm also a very proud grandmother of our first grandchild who joined us about a week ago.

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BH: Congratulations.

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HN: Thank you.

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BH: So, I must admit that when I was first asked to record this podcast about women in technology, I thought, well, as a man, am I really qualified to host this discussion? So, to get a better perspective of women in technology today, I asked some women about their experience. And frankly, I'm shocked about some of the stories that I was told. I heard about women only a little younger than me returning to education to get professional qualifications because they were expected to prove themselves. Others thought back to their education and how they were discouraged from pursuing STEM subjects in school. I was pointed to media stories about women TV presenters earning less than their male counterparts, and these women shared that they were wondering if they were in the same position relative to their peers, but didn't have any ways of finding out if that was the case in their companies. And I was asked if I'd personally received messages from my managers at one o'clock in the morning asking if I'm okay. I thought this was

how society behaved decades ago, not here in 2020. So, Anna, do any of these stories resonate with you? And do you think that we'll still need to be discussing gender bias in technology in, let's say, 2040?

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AB: I suspect we will, although hopefully the conversation will have changed. I do find that the younger, more millennial generation that are in my team are less worried, less concerned and less—just less bothered about gender. It just doesn't occur to them as much as it seems to with the older generations. I do have a lot of stories. I have a lot of colleagues who have a lot of stories where gender has influenced their career in good and bad ways, which it brings us kind of onto the quota conversation, really. I think there's a lot of people with opinions on quotas. My view is they're not right—should absolutely have targets—but quotas is generating the wrong behaviour. It's moving females into positions that they're not ready for, or they might not be the best candidate. And no one wants to be in that position. Everyone wants to be there on their own merit. So, I think there are a lot of companies doing some brilliant stuff. And there was one major global company recently that announced they were 50 percent gender balanced. I think that's brilliant. And I think they've done that through a lot of proper initiatives that have been from the ground up around developing females. But I do think one of our biggest problems right now is a wealth of talent in our mid-to-junior management, and they are just not moving up for a variety of reasons. So I'm hoping that between now and 2040, we really start to address that middle bank of talent, and move them into—persuade them that they want to, because often they're saying to me, 'We don't want the hassle, we don't need it, we don't see what's appealing about it.' So, we do need to address that. So, I'm hoping by that 2040 we will have cracked that talent pool that we do have in businesses.

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BH: And as a male mid-to-senior IT manager myself, what do you think that I could do to help encourage the growth of women in the mid-to-senior IT management positions?

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AB: We need to be more deliberate. Generally, great leadership is about individuality. You absolutely have to create the right environment for everyone to flourish, and that should be gender agnostic. However, when you're doing individual coaching and individual leadership, whether it's male or female, you should be treating people separately and differently depending on their needs and wants. So, I think it is as much about just general great leadership. And then when you are with females in your team where you spot talent, you need to be listening a lot, finding out what they need. And generally, and it is a generalisation, but women tend to want a little bit more persuasion, a little bit more encouragement, a bit more coaching. The guys, in my experience, will be a bit more assertive. So, I think there is a style difference, but that should just be what a great leader does. They should know the people they're dealing with and know how to help them in different styles instead of a blanket style for everyone.

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BH: With you. And Helena, you've worked in Finland and the UK. Have you seen differences between how women are treated in both these two countries?

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HN: Absolutely. I found it a real eye opener when I came back to the UK because in Finland there is—you work. Everybody works. There was nobody when I was growing up in my peer group. In my family, all of the women work. So, there was not a not a single stay-at-home mom. So, it was very natural for everybody to be working and that work to be part of your contribution to be part of

society. And then you come to the UK and you've got the whole school gate thing, which I found really, really odd. And that's something obviously as a full-time working mom, that was not—and it's something I ever participated in. So, yes, it's very, very different how the gender and how females at the workplace are treated.

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BH: And how did you adapt to that?

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HN: Not very well. [Laughs] I have to admit, I didn't at all. I went through a period of self-doubts, as in, are my values that I have learnt from when growing up, are they valid or have I completely misunderstood the role of a woman in society? And I decided that I hadn't. So, it did make for some very, very tough conversations. And I have to say that I was known at school being the mom who is never there. None of the coffee mornings or anything else. But I just stuck to my values and decided that that was the right thing to do.

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BH: That's some good advice there. So, all three of us work in the IT industry. And according to a UK based PwC study, only 3 percent of female A-level students—that's aged 16 to 18 years old—say a career in technology is their first choice, which makes it unsurprising that only 5 percent of leadership positions in the technology sector are held by women. So, what can we do to encourage more girls between the ages of 16 to 18 want to do more technology subjects, and go into technology positions?

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AB: So, I think there's a few things. I think there's something around the branding of IT, as it has been, has been very males in cellars, in basements and dark rooms coding. I think with the rise of digital, there are a lot more exciting roles that are coming up that are appealing more to females. And if you look in a generally—in a marketing department—you'll often find the gender balance is the opposite to an IT department. But actually, marketers nowadays are very tech savvy. So, I think there are a lot of roles already in organisations that are technical. And I think if we can start talking more about digital technology roles and less about IT, that I'm finding that does appeal to schoolgirls and to students. I think then we need to be, as role models, we need to be getting into schools. We need to be running coding clubs. We need to be helping them. While I was at a previous organisation, we had a coding club from a girls' school. They came in and our digital team were coaching them in Java and various other skills. And that worked really well because it was great development for the coders, but it was really good for the females in the coding squad. And I know at least three of those are going on to do A-levels in computer science. Unfortunately, that school can't get a computer science teacher for A-level in the girls' school. So actually, they're losing some of those girls into different schools where they can get inside. I find that, I think there's something in the education system where we need to be getting brilliant computer science teachers or even calling it something different. Maybe they become digital teachers. Digital and innovation would be amazing. So, I think there's something in the education system to make it more modern and reflect where industry is now. And then we just have to embrace coding clubs. We just have to be getting to as many school children as we can and explaining how different it is today in modern business than it used to be. Just break down those barriers because I genuinely think in 10 years every single role in a business is going to be a technology role no matter which department you're in or what you're called. So, everyone needs those skills. And I think it has to start with the education system.

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BH: And what about you, Helena?

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HN: A huge part of the conversation is about getting girls into STEM subjects from school. And I think we're forgetting here that technology over the past two, three decades has generated more job descriptions and more roles than any other industry and not all of them you need to have a STEM qualification. I do not have a technical background. I've got economics and marketing, and that's never stopped me from becoming what I am today. So, I think that's the bit we need to we need to start getting over and understand that there's a huge role, skill, gender diversity in technology and not just focus on that one path.

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BH: Do you think that diversity starts in education?

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HN: Absolutely. It's like the more we talk about it, we more we polarise it. And this is going back to how the education and what I learned from the values in being in, living in Finland. It's the—it wasn't talked about it. Everything was given that everything is equal. And that goes through education, that goes through subjects. You know, every one of us is stronger in something and not so strong in something else. And that's okay. But that shouldn't dictate what you are going to do as part of your career. I think we're driving that too early.

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BH: So, what do you think we should be doing about it?

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HN: I think we should relax a little. [Laughter] If you think about the kids currently in school, you know, they're going to have a much longer working career than we ever had. We're currently talking about people having two or three different careers in their lifetime, which is fantastic. So, why are we still perpetuating in the education system the whole thing that you have to start choosing your GCSEs when you're 10 or 11? What do you know about what you're going to be doing at that point? So, I really honestly think we need to relax. We need to make it so that school is an enjoyable experience rather than target driven and kind of channeling pupils into something they might not need.

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BH: And do you have any insight into how the education system is adapting to that in Finland?

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HN: So, Finland's the education system is, or as I said, it's always been much more relaxed. It's never been as exam focused. That's still what is happening in that space. Yes. There's obviously much more diversification now. So, it's not just your three R's like it used to be. There's many more subjects to teach. But I think the whole ethos of the 'no pressure on exams, it's a fun place to be, it's enjoyable, you do the best you can in what you're good at', I think that's the key ethos that has remained despite that diversification of subjects.

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BH: So, I completely get what you're saying, which is because it's not really discussed so much in Finland, then it perpetuates into the industry where it's just not discussed, and it's just not an issue. But over here, we clearly do have an issue with the number of women in senior positions. The pay is different as well. So, what can we do if we don't really highlight this?

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HN: So, it does need to be highlighted. And I think there's ways. There's lots of fantastic initiatives out there that are kind of, on a larger, wider societal level, we are advertising and we're talking about it. But I think there's also remembering that as professionals, as working individuals, we all have a responsibility in our own small way to do things. So, I'm giving a trick away now, but I always expect any candidate that I make a job offer to to negotiate their salary. And I am really disappointed when that doesn't happen. And I've noticed that that's something that women tend to do less of, so they negotiate their salary less. So that's something that I'm trying to educate in a small way and teach that, look, it is OK to negotiate. I want you to negotiate. If you can't negotiate for yourself, how are you going to negotiate on behalf of the company? So, there's lots of little things we can do as individuals. And I think those are actually sometimes more important than the big headlines because they're personal.

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BH: Is that a confidence issue when your candidates are accepting a job offer?

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HN: I think it's a confidence issue. I think for some it's a self-worth issue. But I also think there's a point where for certain individuals, money is not the key driver. Culture can be more important. Your colleagues can be more important. The sector can be more important. So, it's also understanding what are the various drivers of individuals. But I would still like everybody to negotiate because it does boost their confidence and their self-worth.

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BH: You often see elements of an individual once you've interviewed them and you start that negotiation perspective as well, don't you? It uncovers some of the things which don't come through in the interview process.

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HN: Yes, you're absolutely right. It is all part of the process.

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BH: And once girls come into work, have you got any advice, or have you started any initiatives within the organisations you've worked in to try and encourage more development within women at work?

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AB: Yeah, I always set up a women in tech team and a diversity and inclusion group in our IT departments. I think it is important that we talk a lot around where you see your career going and even just starting that career conversation and saying, you know, 'What do you want? How do you want to get your skills? How can we get you into some common opportunities or move you around to improve your confidence?' And I hear it time and time and again, and I'm getting quite frustrated that the number of females that still need coaching on confidence. So, we do need to address that, because I think that something, seems to be something inherent in our characters where we just need that extra confidence, that extra boost. So, I think we should stop sort of ignoring that and just face it full on, because every single mentee I've had over the last 20 years have had the same— still having the same conversation. So, I think we've got to address confidence. But yeah, it is about having those groups so that those females can have a support group, if you will, to talk about their career, talk about what they want and hear what other people are doing and say,

‘Actually, you know what? I think I could do that. Can you help me move into that role?’ It is just about that constant coaching and pushing.

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AB: But my first women in tech group that I had at a previous company, a couple of the ladies said to me just flippantly, ‘God, I could never do what you do, Anna.’ And I said, ‘Well, why? What is it I do that you couldn’t do?’ ‘Oh, it’s all the hours.’ And I sat down with them and I said, ‘Look, you tell me how many hours you do, and I’ll tell you how many hours.’ And we did no different hours. Mine were just slightly more flexible. But I’ve got children and I made a point of any time I was going out to sports day or parents’ evening, I would make a point on a blog every week of what I was doing, because that’s great for any parents, but also people with hobbies and people with a life who feel the need to constantly be working. But it gives them permission to actually say, ‘No, do you know what? I’ve got choices here. I can finish early and then I can finish off another time.’ So that whole flexible working concept definitely suits women, but it also suits a lot of other people as well.

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BH: And Helena, why do you think that our offices in Eastern Europe seem to have an even split of male/female engineers and leadership roles while the client facing locations more in Western Europe, etc. are more male dominated?

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HN: I think it goes back to what I talked a little bit there about Finland’s as in everybody worked. I believe that Eastern European countries, just like Nordic countries have had that couple of generations of everybody works. That your value is member of society, not just as a pure individual and a member of your family. I think from that respect, Eastern and a Nordics are a couple of generations ahead of what we’re seeing in our customer facing locations.

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BH: Have either of you started a gender diversity initiative in your previous organisations?

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HN: I can’t say that I have tried to do a big headline banner diversity issue. But every time I talk about it all, there has been smaller conversations about we need to think about this. You do get pushback as in, you know, well, International Men’s Day. ‘When is International Men’s Day? What is so special about women? It’s just as tough being a man. So why should we treat you in a special way?’ And you do get a similar pushback also from other women. It’s the, ‘Oh, okay. You’re your shining a bit of a spotlight on us because of our gender. I’m not sure I like that. I would like to hide away.’ So, there are loads of obstacles to overcome. And I think it’s just about making sure that you as an individual, it doesn’t matter what your gender is, it’s you as an individual. It is okay to stand up and make a call and make a stand when you see that something isn’t quite right, that you see somebody is being treated unfairly or somebody is not being heard either because of their gender or anything else.

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BH: But that’s really difficult to do when it’s pay-related or promotion related, etc., because it will often be one person’s decision and in their mind, you’re not going to see some evidence of that. So how do you try and look out for it in such a senior position?

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HN: It’s making sure that you do understand what is going on. And we’ve talked a lot about making sure that you have got time to reflect and think about things. I think it’s also really important to

have the time to look around and smell the roses, but smell the roses in the office, which is understanding what the interactions are. There's an awful lot to be gained by people watching, by understanding how individuals interact and those are a lot of the characters that you're starting to look out for, which is when you're looking at promotions, when you're looking when you believe somebody might need some extra help with mentoring or coaching, either in a way that uplifts or in a way that transforms their behaviour.

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BH: Really interesting how you have a—definitely have a theme around, just stop for a while, absorb what's going on, watch what people are doing and trying to second-guess what they're thinking and switching off. You have this definite theme through your approach. Can we go back to the point that you raised about confidence and you said that it's very difficult, but it's clearly very widespread among the female mentees that you're looking after. So why is that? And what else can the wider organisation do to improve the confidence? Is it a case of more training or more one to one coaching?

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AB: I think it's probably both. But I also think there's something in the nature of leadership, which—leadership was invented by men. I think that we know that centuries ago, because men were the only early leaders going back a very long time. So, leadership traits have been created by men—not judging that, it is just a fact. So, I think we just need to reassess what a great leader is and actually think about, it can be lots of different things. And I think the more you can role model that no more you can show, 'You don't have to be a type A doing things in a particular way to be a great leader,' then I think that's a brilliant way to get more and more females thinking, 'Well, actually, I don't need to turn into that in order to be a leader. Therefore, I can be myself and be myself in a different role.' And I think there's something we need to be having very open conversations about that. But I absolutely agree. I think there is—it does come down to coaching. And certainly, in my experience, having that great mentor or that great coach along the way—and I've had a few in my career—has made a massive difference to my confidence. Before I was a CIO, I was working as an interim and I was in a company. And the CIO said to me, 'So, when are you going to become a CIO?' Did you know, it never occurred to me that I was going to be CIO? And it wasn't till he said that I just thought, 'Oh, yeah, probably could, couldn't I? I've got all the skills.' So, I've got personal experience of being a mentee and mentor. I think we just need a nudge every now and then. So, it is about being more aware of your team and their individual needs.

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AB: And also, I think there's a big education for male middle management as well. The ones who are managing that talent pool that I've talked about to be moving people up, because I think we know about unconscious bias. We know that we promote, and we recruit in our own image. And that's all of us. So, we've just got to be very, very careful and very aware of that so that we can break the cycle and move on.

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BH: And the other point that you talked about before was that you had two children in the middle of your career. How was it returning to work?

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AB: So, I was at a major retailer at the time when I had my first daughter and I came back after 10 months, I think it was. And they were brilliant. I went back into a very similar role. I just did four days a week instead of five, but that's pretty similar. I think you still do five days, just cram it into four. After I had my second daughter, actually, I did change my career and I did go and work as a

contractor, as an interim. And I did that for five years. I thought it was a—very naively thought, actually—I would take the summers off. I would work less. I actually worked harder as a contractor in an interim than I ever have before. So, but it did give me the flexibility to on location in particular as to where I was going to be. So, I did change things, but I said to myself, the only way I would continue working for myself is if my career was moving on and growing. And I was able, whether I made my own luck, or I was lucky, I managed to have three clients during that five-year period and each time my career grew one step further each time. So, and that was the point at which, yeah, this guy said to me, ‘Actually, shouldn't you be going for CIO?’ So, I then went back into a permanent role in order to move myself up that final step.

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BH: And you've worked in a number of different industries, including insurance, but predominately retail. Have you found that there's been a different gender balance in those two organisations or industries I should say?

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AB: I think within the IT teams, it's largely what it is. It is most, still mostly male and different areas have more females. So, business analysts, project managers, you're likely to get a better balance. When it comes to, sort of, backend server cloud infrastructure, it tends to be very male dominated. Development, slightly getting better. I think when I went out to a campus of a large Indian outsourcer, and they were doing a lot of development for us, they were getting to fifty-fifty levels, which was brilliant. But over in this country, less so for development. And then leadership, it is what it is. It's very tough.

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AB: In terms of different companies, I think retail are—retail are pretty good because certainly the companies I've been in have got a lot of female customers. But the retail staff don't particularly reflect that. Certainly, retail management, the shop floor, definitely. Retail management still has a long way to go. And there were some conversations about job sharing at a store manager level. We're still as an industry playing with that. We've not we've not nailed it. And there should be no reason you can't do a job share as a store manager. I think it was just, nobody's done it. And we've got the old example. But it's not wholesale yet at all. I'm not seeing much difference across the industries I have to say. But I do think those industries that are more heavily invested in, more regulated—financial industry—actually, I do think they're moving ahead. I don't know. I think retail's got a way to catch up yet.

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BH: The gender pay gap has narrowed to a record low but is closing so slowly that it's going to be not until 2073 before there's parity between men and women. According to the Office of National Statistics, the ONS, the average female worker earned 17.9 percent less than her male counterpart, down from 18.4 percent. What do you think we can do in the industry to help that gender pay gap?

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HN: Now, that's an interesting question, because every time within a company when you're doing your pay rounds, your pay increases. There is an average percentage increase that is applied across everybody. You know, your grades, your performance, all of that determine what that is. So that suggests that it's the pay gap that starts already when you're joining the company in the first place. There's a point there which goes back to the you need to negotiate. It is okay to negotiate that starting salary, because that means that you've got a better chance of achieving that parity throughout your career.

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BH: And companies with more than 250 employees need to report salaries for analysis. Do you think this is a good thing?

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AB: I think it is a very good thing. I have seen a lot of changes. I have seen organisations properly worrying about it and making sure that it is right and also finding for themselves and being quite surprised at the gaps that they do have. Again, it's made people very deliberate. It's made people have a look at it and it has made people change them. I do think there are some issues around roles that are predominately filled by women, roles predominately filled by men. I know there's a big debate over retail colleagues compared to logistics colleagues. That's a really tricky one because those different roles tend to appeal to different genders. So, the fact that they're on different pays, that's a really, really tricky subject. And I know there's a court case going on, so it's not for me to comment. But I think it does get quite tricky at those levels. But I do think it's very good that we are looking at pay. We are having to report on pay.

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BH: And what about you?

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HN: Yes. Yes and no. So, yes, from a perspective, it does highlight that parity, but it also highlights something that's just very different, as in a lot of companies at the 250, they have been set up initially by entrepreneurial men. And we're only now starting to see a wave of entrepreneurial women coming through. Obviously, the longer you have been a company owner, the bigger likelihood that that you, as the founder, reap the benefits from that. So that's also a really good thing because it's fantastic. We need more entrepreneurs in the country. I think that's a really powerful message to give. But it does get interpreted sometimes in the wrong way. We are forgetting the fact that it does take years and years to build up to that—that real true success. It doesn't come overnight. So, I think in the next 20 years, I would like to be seeing more and more female entrepreneur-led organizations starting to come up to that 250. And I'm showing those reports.

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BH: Do you think there's anything that we can do together to promote more female entrepreneurs, especially in technology?

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HN: I think it's naturally starting to happen. So, if you look at some of the reports, we now have more women in work than we've ever had before. And a lot of women are choosing with the aid of technology in particular—so, technology is an enabler—they are choosing to create and start their own businesses because that gives them the flexibility that they want to have around who they are and what is important to them. And it also takes them away out of some of the corporate culture, which for certain women that doesn't sit terribly well.

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BH: There are lots of reports about women are often hired to lead failing companies. As in, when companies appoint a female CEO, that can often be because there's already massive pressure within that company or that industry. And it's happened to country leaders as well. Do you see any correlation there as well?

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AB: I do think some of the best transformation directors that I know are female. Now, whether that's coincidence or not, I don't know. But I think there is something in there about the breadth of skills that females can draw on in terms of their delivery experience, but also their ability to lead teams, be empathetic, listen, communicate extremely well. And I know there are guys that do that brilliantly, too, but I—certainly the best, and actually I'd probably be as bold as to say the best CIOs that I know are actually female at the moment as well. And I think it is that combination of skills that they're using rather than, you know, just that I'm going to push forward. It's that listening empathetic side that is really working well in this modern world for sure.

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BH: What do you think, Helena?

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HN: Completely agree. I think it is all about empathy. When an organisation is failing, it's always about people. Everything we do, everything any company is, it's always about people. And maybe there is a point there that when you are in trouble, you are looking more for that empathy, looking more for that decisiveness to drive through the change that needs to be done. And I'm sorry to say, but I do believe women are actually better at driving that change in tough, difficult situations. And maybe that's because we are more empathic, and we do listen more to individuals.

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BH: We had Adam Banks from Maersk join us a couple of episodes ago, and one of the things he talked about was diversity within the team during their cybersecurity issue. And he said that he had people in the team thinking so differently. So, someone looking at immediate resolution for immediate restoration of services. But then they had other people within the team who were thinking much longer term but knew that it was going to take a long time to approach that. So that diversity really pulled them through. It was one of the elements that pulled them through the episode. So how do you think of gender balance and diversity in terms of different ways of thinking and you talking about empathy was exactly what spawned me onto this. What do you think about that?

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AB: I think it's absolutely crucial. And I do think while we have shone a brilliant spotlight on gender, and we will continue to have to do that for a long time, I do think diversity is the overall conversation we should be having. Diversity of thinking in a leadership team is critical. And you can see the difference. If you've got a team who are just saying yes, yes, yes to everything, then it will be lovely. But you're not really going to get the right answers, and you're not going to move on. You really do need that supportive and constructive challenge, but it needs to be that. You need to have the challenge. And you absolutely do have to have people thinking about things in different ways. Like on the shop floor. If we're walking around, I will look at things from a customer point of view and sometimes I'm there with my peers who are male, who don't do the shop every week. You know, it's a fact. I'm afraid that there are more females that tend to do the weekly shop. So, you need to look at it from a customer point of view. So, we're talking about the size of a new replenishment trolley. Well, I would look at it say if I'm a customer and the side that comes down the aisle at me, I'm gonna be pretty annoyed because it's going to get in my way. So, by having that looking at things from a very different point of view—whereas if it was looking at the ergonomics of the trolley—I'm looking at it as a customer. So that's just one example of how you just need people who will come at things from a very different angle.

[00:34:25]

BH: So usually we have a quickfire round called 'This or That', but we're actually gonna have a slightly different element this week to support women in technology. So, this is a quickfire round. We're looking for short answers, if that's possible. So, who's the most inspirational woman in history for you?

[00:34:44]

AB: Gosh, that's a really, really hard one. I think one of the problems is they're not as well publicised. I know we're getting a lot better and there's a brilliant book about females in history that you can buy for your kids nowadays. So, there are some—there's a lot more information out there, but it's a really hard one. There's a lot I admire about Thatcher because she was ground-breaking. But my biggest problem with her—leave policies aside—my biggest problem was she didn't encourage the females beneath her to come through. So, it's got to be those women that are succeeding and then they're bringing females with them. I mean, I think the New Zealand prime minister is amazing. I love the fact that she's got her baby and she's feeding it in public. And I just, I think right now she's probably up there for me.

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BH: And what about you, Helena?

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HN: There are many to choose from. I would have to stay quite close to home and say Emily Pankhurst, just because of the society changes she was going up against, it wasn't just a female issue. It was a societal issue.

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BH: What's the best lesson you learned in your years of education? And I'm expecting this to be a fun answer if Finnish education is so much fun.

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HN: Knitting. I'm left-handed. A right-handed teacher trying to teach you, a left-handed child, to knit is a true achievement.

[00:36:07]

BH: And what about you?

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AB: What I learnt in education was you got a lot of transferable skills. So, I did art history at degree level. And I've still not found another CIO that's got an art history degree. But what I really think it gave me is that creativity of thinking and those analytical skills which you get as a historian. And I was really lucky that somebody said to me, 'What do you want to do?' And I said, 'Well, I've no idea.' And they said, 'So what do you love?' And I said, 'I love old buildings.' And they said, 'Have you looked at this art history course?', which was fantastic. And my parents were really supportive and said, 'It really doesn't matter to your career. Just go do something you love doing at university.' So those two triggers were brilliant. But actually, I found those transferable skills have stood me in good stead for my career.

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BH: What would you change if you were prime minister or president for a day?

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AB: I think it would be about pushing business and technology a lot more in schools. I think we do a lot of traditional subjects, but I think kids are a lot less patient than we were and they're wanting to know, 'Why is this relevant to what I'm going to be doing in the future?' So, I would give a lot more options to learn business, understand that whole world, whether it's marketing, accountancy, IT, bring a lot of that into the education system.

[00:37:24]

BH: And Helena?

[00:37:25]

HN: I would shut all the roads down for a day and have a massive pothole filling in session.

[00:37:34]

BH: Fantastic. We're both cyclists. So that's definitely coming through on that one. What's the most noteworthy businessperson you've ever met?

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HN: I would have to say somebody like Steve Jobs, not because of who he was, but how he was able to convince and really share his vision. Now, afterwards, we already know that he wasn't quite the person that everybody thought he was, but what he was an inspirational leader. And he had that whole thing of being able to portray that, whereas something else was happening behind the scenes.

[00:38:13]

AB: I think there are two, if I'm going to be cheating. I think Justin King, when I was at Sainsbury's, I was absolutely astonished with how he culturally turned that organisation around and completely refocused it. I was very sceptical that one new CEO could do something quite as ground-breaking as that. But it was phenomenal. I thought he did an amazing job there. And I also think Matt Davies at Halfords. He's just an inspirational leader. And I've never known, I mean, back on the Justin thing. People were asking for Justin's autograph from the shop floor because he was just that inspiring character. And it was the same with Matt. When Matt spoke at Halfords, everybody listened. And he had the ability to go on store visits, give them some tough messages, but leave them feeling so inspired. And I think that's so—that's just something that not many people have got.

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BH: Who's the most influential woman in your life?

[00:39:11]

HN: My mother. She's [Laughs]—she's a stubborn old lady. She always made sure that I understood the value and importance of work. She worked throughout her career and she was also kind of a quiet feminist. So, she never beat the drums about it. But there are little glimpses that I have seen that I've kind of gone, 'Right. Okay. I know what you're talking about.'

[00:39:38]

BH: Well, thank you very much, Anna and Helena. In Part 2, I'll take a closer look at how Anna and Helena got to where they are today in their careers and find out the best pieces of advice they've ever received. We'll also look back at how the IT industry has changed over the past two decades. Don't forget to like this podcast and subscribe to the channel to automatically get all of our new episodes directly on your device.