

Insights from working with 100+ companies

With Dr. Daniel Mölle, Prof. Dr. Christian Johner

Transcript

00:00:00 Speaker 1

Structures create behavior and behavior creates events.

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And there we are now really in the field of culture.

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So if I structure my organization in a certain way, for example in a way.

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Medical Device Insights, a podcast by the Johner Institute for medical device manufacturers, authorities and notified bodies.

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In one of our last podcasts, we talked about how our medical device ecosystem is currently

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tectonic changes, tectonic changes, in which some companies are also in danger of being crushed.

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In this podcast, we had already talked about what we were doing at the Jona Institute to do, especially to arm ourselves and why we managed to position ourselves so stably.

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Today I brought my colleague Doctor Daniel Müller with me, who shares his experience of how other companies

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be able to prepare for such tectonic changes.

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Daniel, so that our listeners can classify you and your experience, give us a very brief background and a short wrap-up of what you have done so far.

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Yes, I would very much like to do that.

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I'll start a bit at the beginning, so I'm a computer scientist by training, so I have a scientific background.

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I had business administration as a minor, which is not completely irrelevant for today's topic, so I'll say it about it.

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I then pursued my doctorate for 4 years as a research assistant, but then went very specifically into the private sector.

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That was the plan from the beginning.

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And I spent the last 17 years there at an engineering service provider, especially in the field of medical device development.

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And that certainly shaped most of my perspective.

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Perhaps I should say that during this time I

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He had an insight into the size of about 100 customer companies.

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So these were really manufacturing companies, but also really, from startups to global corporations, there was everything in terms of size.

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And most of it was medical technology, but I also had insight into other areas.

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Of course, there were also collaboration partners and I also worked with our own competitors on projects that were very, very large.

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you could always look a little bit into it.

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Mhm, that means you got a statistically significant insight into this ecosystem.

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That's why it's so important to me, I'm so grateful to you, that you're here today, because if someone has seen so much, then you've certainly come across things that are conducive to success and I would like to take it a little further, to the happiness of the individuals under and of the companies.

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what do you think, what are behaviors, characteristics, attributes that you have noticed, perhaps also activities at the companies that you would grant yourself that they were successful and that the people who work there were also able to work in happiness and contentment?

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What distinguishes them?

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Have you found such a common denominator?

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Yes, that was at least 2 very, very big questions in one.

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So the success of companies is, of course, a

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huge domain and the happiness of people even more so.

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But let's try to break it down a bit systematically.

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As far as the success of companies is concerned, there are general explanatory models, such as those we teach in business studies.

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And here you can say quite clearly, from the point of view of a scientist, there are true tendencies in it, but they are not reliable explanatory models in the sense of physical theories or even mathematical theorems.

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I like

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a very short example.

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For example, you already learn in the basic studies of business administration that there are actually only three strategies with which a manufacturing company can be successful.

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Quality leadership or cost leadership or you go into a niche market.

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And this model is not suitable for explaining many areas.

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So, for example, when I look at the automotive industry, it's just not like that.

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The model makes predictions that do not apply there.

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There are

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The same applies to contemporary literature, where, for example, certain individual successes are interpreted by some companies that cause a sensation, where recipes for success are sometimes to be sold.

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It partly goes into the quality of self-help books and you have to be careful there.

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So there are really a lot of factors that are named in this literature that tend to be true.

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And maybe I'll list a few examples.

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But there are not these very simple laws.

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If I do X, then I survive in the market or if I leave Y, then I have to perish.

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It's not that simple at first.

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Then let's make a few concrete examples of recipes for success or of things that tend to help.

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So one thing we've talked about a lot in recent years is startups.

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That has been, I mean, company start-ups have always existed.

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Suddenly we no longer call it a company foundation, but talk about startups and suddenly there are huge networks, there are a lot of supporting organizations, every city now has its own start-up advisory center, we have some startup circles and so on.

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And there, for example, there are simply very clear statements on books like Berlin Startup, so for my sake, you have to devotion your products early, you can't completely bypass the target market, the application concept

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context and bypass the users in a quiet room to develop your products.

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And such findings, they are certainly true by and large, although there are of course exceptions to them.

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What we are also experiencing, of course, is that we talk very, very much about digitalization, that there are simply major shifts taking place, that companies have to do the same in order to be successful.

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But even that is not slavish.

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So there are also advances in the direction of digitization.

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any undertakings that come to nothing.

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What you have to say in any case is that success is not so controllable.

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This is not as deterministic as we like to pretend.

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In particular, some successes are random successes and then you like to try to read something into them afterwards in order to push it into some interpretation schemes, but in my experience it's not quite that simple.

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Another aspect that I would like to say is that when I entered the free economy, in 2007,

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I would have imagined the market economy, especially among the manufacturing companies, to be much more Darwinian than it actually is.

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So in the sense that if you make a strategic wrong decision, you're as good as out of the window.

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And I've really experienced that in many cases, it's not that simple.

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So this law does not exist in this form either.

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So you have now said that many models and theories are not so resilient, i.e. that things are not so mechanical or

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Modokasal, are there still factors of which you would say that the companies that were successful did certain things differently or more often than the companies that were not?

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Well, you had already hinted at a few things.

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For example, you said the ability to pivot, i.e. to really develop close to the customer and to adapt accordingly if you have strayed from the right path.

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You have the topic of digitization

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do you see any other examples of successful companies?

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Yes, one pattern that also comes to mind is the following, if we really look at the manufacturing industry in Germany, for example, we have a history where many companies come from mechanical engineering or electrical engineering and they were not software development companies per se.

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But now it's just like that and that's also a commonplace that you know,

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The share of added value of software in the products, in the devices, is constantly increasing.

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In the meantime, depending on which source you use, 80, 90 percent.

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And that means that almost all of these manufacturing companies have at some point been forced to

become software project houses on a more or less large scale.

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And it is often the case that the decision-makers in these companies understand the laws of software.

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and have not internalized the laws of software development projects very well.

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And these are different laws than you have with pure mechanical products, for example, and when developing them.

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And of course, I have experienced this again and again, especially during this time of service, that we have come across companies that know their market incredibly well, incredibly well with the hardware that is attached to it and that are massively overwhelmed so that the software

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that they need for the next generation of products.

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So to put it positively, you had asked about success patterns, about recipes for success, you somehow need this software know-how, you also have to understand the laws of software development in order to be able to implement the whole thing in a way that makes sense from a business point of view.

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We still had this happiness question in the background, let's maybe put it on hold for a moment so that we can stay on topic.

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Now you have mentioned factors that contribute to this, if you now negate this in companies that

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that you have seen, that were just not successful.

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What were the patterns?

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Of course, you can say, yes, having the software and not understanding the necessary competence, about the engineering know-how, that would be such a negation.

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Are there any other patterns, perhaps also from the field of culture?

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Yes, certainly.

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So maybe I'll try to start with the extreme examples.

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So I've witnessed several development projects,

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where large teams worked on software platforms for several years, for example, without there even being a product vision, i.e. a resilient product vision.

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And we're not talking about a cultural question yet, but really about a very classic, how do I actually do a successful project question, yes, where you tried to go through the product development cycle practically backwards and that just doesn't work at all.

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Yes, and these are the really expensive ones, so we are very quickly at amounts around 10000000 or in this order of magnitude, which have been put in the sand.

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Yes, so that, that, those are of course very bad examples.

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But now you want to go a little more in the direction of culture.

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So, I'm interested in everything, I just wanted us to have the whole spectrum.

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Yes, but very briefly maybe an interim summary, so what you consider important is this engineering competence, that's this target image,

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is also correlated to this to a certain extent, also related to what you said earlier, the ability to develop close to the customer and also to make decisions to return to the railway.

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So those were important factors that you just mentioned.

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So we need the whole area, not just the cultural one, but I think it's part of it for a complete picture.

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Yes, well, then, let's go a little more in this direction and I'll try to

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again a bit from literature.

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On the recommendation of a colleague from the project management, I recently read the book „The Fifth Discipline“, for example, where there is a very, very nice insight to which this is distilled down.

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And they say there that structures create behavior and behavior creates events.

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And there we are now really in the field of culture.

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So if I structure my organization in a certain way,

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For example, in a way where decisions are suddenly made by committees that are very, very far away from the affected persons or even facts, then this leads to behavior that is no longer comprehensible according to common sense.

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I can no longer understand why certain things were decided in such and such a way.

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I can no longer understand why certain tasks are assigned to certain people or certain departments.

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I

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no longer understand why certain processes of the company are suddenly defined by certain sources.

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And if I then have this behavior, which is also forced by these structures, such as the behavior that leads to inappropriate decisions that miss the operational reality, then events come around, then such singular accidents happen or there are particularly absurd examples,

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who really have an effect on the employees, who leave a lasting impression, and culture is not what I write on the poster and hang in the elevator, but culture is the lived behavior.

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It's an abstract, inherent property of the collective behavior of the people in the company.

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Do you have any examples of this, where you just spoke of the absurdity, so that one can imagine it and perhaps also empathize with something?

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Yes, exactly, so of course I have to pay a little attention to non-disclosure agreements and the like.

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So of course everything will be a bit discreet and abstract now, but I just had insights into companies where things that really worked very, very well, that were also done above average in an industry comparison, simply broke.

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because it was put somewhere else without necessity due to structural requirements.

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That is, processes that previously worked very, very well in their results, were very effective in their results and efficient in their efforts, have suddenly been inflated by several integer factors.

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Yes, everything was suddenly much, much more cumbersome.

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The results produced were worse than before.

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And those affected stood to the left and right of it and simply had the famous question marks in their eyes.

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But that also happens in very, very individual processes.

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For example, something that has an incredible amount to do with the culture in a company is the image that the workforce has of the management level and vice versa.

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What image does the management level have of the employee?

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And there is now something like theory X and theory Y.

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So I believe that my employees are self-motivated, that they want to act on their own responsibility, that they then become happier and even more productive.

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Or do I suppose they're all just lazy individuals that I have to whip up to deliver something.

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And these two, i.e. the view of the management level on the workforce, naturally leads to a counter-reaction.

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So if the decisions that come from the management level,

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The employees are repeatedly presented with this image: We want to control you more strictly.

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We want to punish you more strongly if you don't do certain things the way we want them to.

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Then at some point it will also create a counter-movement.

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Then the mistrust in the opposite direction also increases.

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Yes, and the other way around is also true.

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So even a management level can be alienated if it is always met with ingratitude and such things from below.

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It has both directions.

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So, we're really in the cultural topic and what you just mentioned in the topic of mutual appreciation or lack of appreciation and what I found very exciting and new thought, that it's a two-sided issue.

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So, it's not just how the company management sees its own employees, but also how do the employees, its own management level, its own top management and

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there can sometimes be effects, yes, where where things take on a life of their own, I think again in both areas and leads to this self-reinforcing behavior, you could perhaps also call it expectation-compliant behavior, which is then reinforced by such thought patterns.

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So what should companies do to prevent this from happening, so that they don't slip into such a culture, a lack of mutual appreciation

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And the resulting, incomprehensible decisions that you have just mentioned, which sometimes result in

alienation, but then also result in quantitatively and qualitatively poor results, which you have already mentioned.

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So, do you see levers that companies should take to counteract this or to prevent it from becoming a reality in the first place.

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Yes, absolutely.

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And even these are not universal recipes with the claim that it is always applicable and always just as causal, but tendencies.

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I believe that they are already resilient in reality.

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At the Jona Institute, for example, we have the luxury of still being in an area where you really understand the whole group.

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I can really know all 150 names.

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I can have met all these people once.

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And that means that if I had to make decisions about any person or team, I wouldn't do it from an infinitely great distance.

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I know what I'm talking about, I can exchange ideas with people directly.

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Now, of course, there are organizations and companies that are simply larger or will inevitably become larger at some point.

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But I think you can do it well or badly.

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For example, even in a company that at some point goes well beyond this famous tribe size, I can make decisions

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where decisions are still made close to the person concerned, i.e. the facts or persons concerned.

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Or I do it exactly the other way and do it very centralistically, for example, and then I have the problem that I'm suddenly very far away.

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Then I have decisions that may no longer fit with what I actually want to achieve at the operational location.

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So, in the sense of a recipe for success, this means that you try to delegate responsibility for decisions to the local,

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where the affected facts and people are located and of course I can do that.

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So I mean, a company, which is now let's say example multinational and where we are talking about thousands or tens of thousands of employees, still has somehow a kind of tree structure and then you can see, how far down in this tree I can best make a decision, you can do it.

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So what you're talking about is the stretcher, how decentralized can I actually act to keep the closeness, but

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even without losing consistency, so that the thing doesn't shred.

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Yes, do you have any thoughts on how to find the right balance.

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We are then talking about something where there are ultimately 2 kinds of errors.

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So the one mistake is that I lump together 2 things that are really different.

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So I act as if they are identical, as if I can treat them the same.

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That's the one kind of mistake that, I think, is relatively serious when you make it.

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And the other kind of mistake is that I have two things that are actually the same, but I miss this synergy effect.

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I'm missing efficiency by using it, for example, I'm inventing two solutions in parallel for the same problem.

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This is sometimes harmful, but perhaps not quite as tragic.

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So, that's the question, how can I prevent this?

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And I have to say, the cases that I have witnessed, where

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such mistakes can simply be prevented with common sense.

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So I don't need to have understood any particular study or doctrine.

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This is usually done by looking.

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So if, for example, I act as if all countries are the same and that the same laws apply in the respective labour markets, for example, in a company that works in several countries, then I make a mistake in thinking.

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It's not that simple

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sometimes the differences are smaller, sometimes they are greater.

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But if I don't see them, if I don't classify it correctly and then say, for example, that I would like to have one and the same recruitment policy and one and the same labour market approach for 2 countries that tick completely differently, then of course this will have consequences in some way.

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So it's not the magic bullet that you need with this balance between central and decentralized, but just look at it, common sense, keep an overview.

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And then you get closer to the matter.

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You are still relatively young at the Johanna Institute.

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The fact that you have come to us is an active decision.

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What were important factors for you to make this decision?

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Because someone like you naturally has an infinitely large pool of alternatives.

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You've made a conscious decision.

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What were those Gedanken?

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What were the aspects that made you

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decided to join us.

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So there are essentially three and I know that so well, because of course I thought about it very consciously during the transition phase.

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The first thing is first of all, I just have quite a luxury in life.

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So I've studied something that is in high demand on the job market and I have previous experience that is valued and that's why I'm simply in the position that I can choose something and I know this luxury

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to be appreciated.

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So I'm aware of that, I don't take it for granted.

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But because of this luxurious starting point, I have a bit of a choice.

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And I can say, for example, that I personally know very well that I need an intelligent and sympathetic environment.

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So I have to work with people I really enjoy, where you can work at a high level, but also with a good atmosphere and a good atmosphere.

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cooperative point of view and not to the extent that performance is faded out, so to speak.

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So you have to have fun doing good things and doing good things with a certain efficiency.

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That's also my claim.

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And this balance, I have the luxury of being able to look for places where I can find it.

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And that was clearly a decisive point.

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And that has to do with the fact that I don't just tell the Jonah Institute about the

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website or something like that, but we have had points of contact for probably over ten years, met at trade fairs, gave lectures one after the other.

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I've been to training courses at the institute, I also have personal contacts with several people who work there and things like that.

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So I really had insights into what you do and how you do it and in what size and in which direction of movement.

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That was the first point, this intelligent and sympathetic environment, in which you can still achieve something.

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The second point, which is really important for me personally,

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is that I don't want to go into a certain niche.

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I don't want to be just a software architect for the rest of my life, for example, or just a project manager or whatever different roles I've had in the past, but I really want to have these fields of action, this creative freedom and in five years' time they should be different from what I might suspect myself today.

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So I really understand it as a journey, so even if this term is always used so inflationarily today, but in the sense of: I

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I really don't know what I'll be interested in in five years.

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I also don't know what interesting offers of fields of action can be made to me in five years, but to find out and know that there are simply opportunities to find one's way into new fields is something that creates a long-term perspective for me.

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So, and I can also see that very concretely at the institute.

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So there are the trainings, i.e. the seminars, where you simply offer it to the outside world as a service.

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There are

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the pure consulting services, there is this work in the academic field and, of course, now the company's own digital solutions, its own products.

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Yes, so it's a project house, a consulting house, a product house, so you have everything in it, that promises me a whole bouquet of activities and fields of action.

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And it's just like that, my last boss, at my last employer, gave me a very nice assessment, I would actually have been comfortable

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life.

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So I had arrived at a position where I could have continued to swim very, very comfortably until retirement, so to speak, without being subjected to any special challenges or anything like that.

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I could have accepted a kind of early retirement, so to speak, but in my mid-40s I thought it was a bit violent.

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And I'd rather go into this challenge and go into an environment that I didn't know exactly before and

would like to try my hand at it.

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simply to keep it exciting.

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Yes, that's clearly a motivator for me.

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That would be you here and you noticed that, got everything.

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So the playing field is any size, arbitrarily demanding and what I think is important can be designed, we don't want to be anyone and where there is a fixed playing field border.

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Yes, that's the area in which you play, but we have grown, become bigger, become better because we all have

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where we have new opportunities, where we can develop further, where we can develop the company.

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And I think that's a great strength, because ultimately what is the institute?

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These are the people who work there and with you we have gained another very important colleague and I am very sure that he will help us to make this playground bigger, more exciting and more successful.

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Yes, and that brings us back to the question of success.

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We have now looked at it again from 2 perspectives,

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Once from your external glasses.

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Yes, it is still relatively neutral or still unrestricted by the experience you have had here.

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And there you told us again that it is cultural issues, that it is the proximity of the decisions to the operational point that make a big difference, that it is also very concrete skills that make companies successful or not successful.

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And then at the end you have it off again

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What makes success and good jobs so important.

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And of course, a company is only successful if it has very good employees and what makes it interesting and worth living and worth working for employees, you have now described at the end.

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So I would like to emphasize very briefly once again that the degrees of freedom, having a large enough playing field, a challenging playing field, being able to help shape it, and these are exactly the things that

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also make up the DNA of the institute and which are particularly important to me that we can always, always keep it.

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Even if we now, we have now arrived at Beyond in 170, have left this tribe greatness, that this culture is preserved and you are a very important part of it that it stays that way.

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Daniel, have 1000 thanks for your insights.

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Yes, I said it, gladly again.