



HL INFLUENCERS: DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION TRANSCRIPT

LORD KULVEER RANGER
UK HOUSE OF LORDS

Leopold von Gerlach	Hello everybody and welcome to another edition of <i>The Influencers</i> , our podcast conversations on digital transformation and law. I'm Leo von Gerlach and with me today is a very special guest -- the English nobleman, Baron Kulveer, Ranger of Northwood, member of the House of Lords, in short, Lord Ranger. Lord Ranger has a long history of public service in the field of digital transformation, and in particular in public transportation. During his earlier career, he was instrumental to introduce the famous Oyster card for the London public transport system. Aside from his active role as a member of the House of Lords, he serves on many boards and in different functions all around the interface between policy, public service and cutting-edge technology. It's a great honor to have you on the show, Lord Ranger.
Lord Ranger	Thank you, Leo.
Leopold von Gerlach	Let's jump right into it and actually back to your role in public transportation. When you were instrumental to pioneering the Oyster card system in London and advising Boris Johnson and later on in different advisory roles all around digital transformation and transportation, can you tell us what were the turning points of your career and what guided you during all that journey?
Lord Ranger	<p>Yeah, that is a great question, and I could probably go on for days talking about my journey, but I will try and give a succinct answer to this because, as with many people's lives, there was no singular pathway for this journey, there were many curves, round balls, roundabouts and everything else that I can throw in to say that it wasn't linear.</p> <p>And it started off with a view that actually I wanted to train as an architect. I did a degree in pure architecture, undergraduate architecture at University College London at the Bartlett School. That was tremendous. But having come out, I felt that there was this world in the sort of mid 90s of IT. Everybody was moving into this world of information technology. And I thought that seemed very interesting, but it was how to come in, and at that stage you really were a techie, you were computer scientists and you understood sort of databases and SQL language and how to program, which are things that are fundamental to working in IT.</p>

	<p>I was more interested in how we applied technology and I got into eventually, after a lot of knocking on many doors, I wanted to get into a pure IT consultancy. I thought business and IT was a really interesting place to be. Businesses were changing already with the adoption of technology.</p> <p>But I ended up in a program and project management consultancy, a very wonderful firm where I spent almost a decade called the Nichols Group, and there they were working on mainly big infrastructure projects that were public sector, looking to improve them, looking to generally fix them if they'd gone wrong. But there was also this sort of transport and the emergence of technology in these programs, and one of the first ones I got to work on was a PFI called Prestige, which eventually delivered the Oyster card. Now, many people worked on it and then I have to say, I was part of the team that helped deliver it, but I spent three years working on that program, which then we eventually launched the Oyster card in 2003 and I remember at the start it wasn't even sure where we were heading because we were trying to collect revenue, we were trying to, you know before metro systems were just walk in, walk out, buy a ticket if you will. You know, there might be somebody checking at the other end.</p> <p>We were putting the gate lines in, the infrastructure, the technology, the background office systems, the station accounting facilities. To provide that structure that you need when you're then going to innovate and put new technology in and if we did all of that there was a line that said you might provide something called new ticketing media. Now why I think this is fundamental is, that effectively was the contactless card and its first use in Western society. The only other place in the world that had something like that before was Hong Kong, and they had the Octopus card. I don't know why the nautical references, but they had octopus, we brought an oyster, but this new technology meant that (a) it was going to be something different for people, you know: "What do you mean we're not buying, we're not getting a piece of paper, there's this card that we're going to use?"</p> <p>Although people had credit cards before, but then there was this tap in tap out. What do you mean? We just sort of do this and we have to trust the technology behind that and also there was a concept of data you'd be capturing data. So, contactless, e-money, data captured, these were all new concepts that had... we were going to use for the first time. Also that that really drives huge cultural change adoption in terms of technology, and it was a fascinating time to work on that kind of program, to understand how not only did we get the technology right and the innovation, but the implementation, and then eventually the adoption and I think that program really ticked all the boxes on that, which is why it's so assembled and from that point on in my career, I looked at technology differently. I didn't look at things through a lens that just said well, it's transport because even programs I worked on in industry before joining City Hall. Which were GSMR, the mobile phone network for the railways or, ERTMS, the European Rail Traffic Train Management System, which integrated train</p>
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	<p>management networks across Europe. These were heavy transport programs or considered that way, but actually they were leading cutting-edge technology-driven innovations and they fascinated me in how we were deploying new technology, which then led me yes, to City Hall to work in the transport sector, but also in 2010 to set up the digital office for London for the Mayor then, because I felt technology needed to be spoken about more clearly.</p> <p>It needed to come to the fore and we were having what was that then the sort of emergence of the fantastic entrepreneurial side of startups and technology because people were starting to use data to develop applications and new business models, and we were in a second wave of startups, with the first being in the early noughties the sort of .com bubble that happened then. And then I consider a second wave in 2000 around 2008/9/10 where startups started to emerge in East London and then all over the place and that drew in more and more interest about how could we use this technology in the public sector — and having done that for four years at City Hall, I went back into industry because I thought there's technology and then there's the customer, say the public sector which has its challenges and when you bring these two together, they're two different languages and from my experience at City Hall, I realized we needed people who could sit in the middle and look both ways — who could understand what the technology could potentially deliver and map that to a policy outcome or policy problem that we're trying to solve.</p> <p>Because if you just got one person from each side to try and do that they only spoke one language and I felt there was a bridge to be built here and I wanted to be part of that so that's what I did for almost the next 10 years in industry. Working in a in a global business called Atos to help shape strategy and communication around how do we get these wonderful innovation and technologies, whether it's big data, cyber security, Internet of Things and yes AI. How do we transform that and translate that into outcome-driven services that people can adopt and utilize?</p>
Leopold von Gerlach	<p>Totally fascinating. Great journey — and I mean, with that much accumulated knowledge on digital systems, behavior of great numbers of customers, you have brought an immense expertise in your role and now a member of the House of Lords, and I would assume that has shaped your aims and goals that you are pursuing at the moment. So, tell us a little bit about your priorities at this point in time.</p>
Lord Ranger	<p>Firstly, I have to say look, I have this huge privilege of sitting in the upper chamber of our Parliament in the UK and for those who don't understand how that works, we have the lower chamber, which is the Commons, which is where all the politicians who are MPs are elected and we in the Lords are considering revising chamber. We're generally appointed, nominated by political leaders, and we are bringing our expertise to the development of legislation, bills and policy, and it's a privilege to be asked to play that role and I don't take it lightly, but you're right in terms of how it's shaped.</p>

	<p>What I feel I can do having now been here just, you know, in terms of time a couple of years, I've begun to realize that a lot of our policy now and going forward will be driven by technology and innovation and as Parliament and Parliamentarians, our ability to understand what businesses both nationally and internationally are trying to achieve will be fundamental to us being able to both harness it for the betterment of citizens through whatever policies we... you know, governments ... bring forward, but also to ensure that citizens can be protected as well as getting the benefits from these technologies and from these industries. So, I think having been someone who's been on the other side of the fence for most of my 25 years in the industry, being in industry and the global industry, understanding how we see things as an industry person, I'm trying to use that now on the other side to help in terms of understanding and shaping of legislation and improving legislation, but I think this is going to be an ongoing challenge, which I still think we're in the early foothills of where the phrase "digital transformation" has been used for a couple of decades now but we know we are in the era of frontier technologies like AI and digital currencies and those elements are going to dramatically change not just the way that we do things, but society. So, the next era of adoption and implementation of these technologies is going to be critical for all citizens and how laws are developed around them.</p>
Leopold von Gerlach	<p>Let's stay for a moment with that topic of advising and overseeing government. Digital transformation, as a significant process, is something that keeps all governments busy at this point in time. Would you have any just overarching recommendations how governments, in particular governments in the western world should approach the topic?</p>
Lord Ranger	<p>I think there's two things. One, that people want to harness new technology to deliver benefits and outcomes, and I think any government, any policy that is derived by utilization of technology, yes, it needs to be clear about the technology, but it needs to be clear about what it is trying to achieve, a razor-like focus on the outcomes and improvements and benefits that are to be derived, because without that focus you can get lost in the technology and conversations around the technology, I think that's the first thing.</p> <p>I think the second thing is for governments not to think that they need to be the experts in the technology. I think that's where industry has to play its part. Industry innovates, it designs, it develops, it builds the solutions. It's up to governments to then be able to utilize that... those solutions for the betterment of their citizens. So, there's clearly defined roles that need to be identified. I've seen many a time these programs go wrong by focusing too much on the technology, by also not having clearly defined or understanding the roles that each person and organization should be playing, and finally by not having those outcomes well-defined.</p> <p>You know these things are critical to success and I think as we look to do ever more in terms of transforming — and we talk about digital transformation, but fundamentally Leo, this is about change. You know,</p>

	<p>these are about processes and outcomes that will change and we might develop new processes and new policies and new outcomes, but it is about change. So, change means culture change, change in terms of making people comfortable to take ownership of the change, people to understand what their role in the change is. So, although yes, there's this digital transformation point, those traditional concepts in any change program must be fundamentally part of what a government is trying to do.</p>
Leopold von Gerlach	<p>I love listening to you. That's so forceful. It's so very, very clear. So just first of all, put a marker down, and thank you for that. I think it's really appreciated by all the listeners. I would like to change a little bit the subject, something that I didn't mention in the intro. You are a member of the Sikh community and therefore have a very rich cultural and religious heritage that you bring as your background into the role so are there any particular perspectives that gives your view, your approach, for the nuance to those questions we just discussed because of that particular and very specific background that you have?</p>
Lord Ranger	<p>Thanks for asking Leo and obviously you know wearing a turban, having a beard, having those fundamental elements that define me as a Sikh, it is part of my identity and always has been and I'm an extremely proud Sikh. But I'm an equally proud British citizen. I'm equally proud to be a born and bred Londoner and there was immense pride that I served the city of my birth and, you know, could do things that helps hopefully the people of London and so all these elements make up who you are, but also you're approaching outlook and I have to say, look I was born in the 70s, grew up in London in the 80s and 90s. You know, times have changed quite significantly, even from the times of my parents and grandparents who came here in the sort of 50s, 60s and 70s. We have become a very different society, I think globally, let alone in the UK, a much more accepting understanding — wanting to see individuals be themselves, bring their true self into every walk of life that they're in. It wasn't always the case. I saw challenges growing up, of course there were, we have to talk about racism in its pure form in times gone by, and I think all society has worked on dealing with these issues of who we are, where we are. Where we came from is important, but where we are and what we do where we are is more important and where we belong and where we feel we belong, and I think everyone has a sense of belonging to where they are. That's how I see it. But Sikhism has been a wonderful part of my life. I'm very pleased... and you know to be a proud Sikh, and yes, if people see me, they may firstly see a man wearing a turban, but very quickly they probably look past that into all the other things that we discussed and talk about, but those fundamental values of Sikhism are core to my outlook on life, which are... you know there's a... very much a sense of public service. There's a concept called Seva in Sikhism which is about serving your fellow human being and that's selflessness, and in politics, there's a lot of selflessness, it doesn't sometimes feel that way, but it is public service, and maybe that's a bit of where my interest in political life has come from, but also equality. There is equality between people of all cultures and faiths Sikhism is...</p>

	<p>comes... is a rather new religion in terms of some of the older religions, it's only 400, 500 hundred years old, and we came from others. So, you know, we're not the first, we're not like an original concept, and you recognize the fact that all faiths have a role to play and we all evolve, and we all live together. I think actually going back, India previously is a good example of a multi-race society that generally -- I know all societies have challenges - - lives cheek by jowl, hopefully in mainly in peace together, and I think we all are trying to do that now in a multi-cultural world, and what I mean by that is that nearly every nation has a variety of faiths and cultures now within it, because we're a globalized world. People have moved all over the world, and so what your faith is, what your religion is, what your nationality is, what your identity is, can be a number of different things, and I think that's something we should all celebrate and hopefully will make us all appreciate each other even more.</p>
Leopold von Gerlach	<p>That's a very important topic and I would like to stay with it for a minute. You spoke about values and now going deeper into the Sikh rules of belief, you said service to the community is one particular very important one, and translating that to the real-world problems of today in your area of digital transformation, one of those problems is dealing with the inequality that we are facing by the enormous wealth that's generated by the technology and by some. There are a great group of others who may just not benefit to the same degree from that wealth that is being created. So, service to the community somehow needs to get their arms around this phenomenon. Any views on that?</p>
Lord Ranger	<p>I think, Leo, it's clear in this modern era where we've been in a technology-driven world where the technology industry is having huge success, so we could name those businesses, you know, the Amazons, the Apples, the Teslas, they're driving huge value, but, you know before that, there was the Microsofts and the SEGAs and sort of... the IBM's and before that there was other industries and before that there were the oil barons. There's always an industry that's succeeding at the forefront of an industrial change. I think wealth and business go together, business drives innovation and that drives the kind of benefits that society can capture. So, it's not governments that come up with, let's be honest, Leo, innovation and new ideas, it is industry, it's industry stupid and the reward for investment and risk-taking is that creation of wealth, but that wealth then does get utilized and you know, churned through the system into other places. Then we can talk about taxation or we can talk about all kinds of other things, but I don't envy people creating wealth. I think that's part of the process but I personally believe in in terms of the enabling people to be successful, to be able to do what drives them, that they're passionate about, and if that means that they'll be successful in their businesses and they'll create great outcomes for people whilst reaping the rewards then fair enough. I think the inequality I think about is the access to the kinds of services that will be developed. I've spoken about for the last 10 or 15 years, the digital society and a generation of people who are now born digital natives, and in fact we've gone beyond that, but we can't live in a world where people's lives</p>

	<p>will be defined by the technology that they have access to and I think that's the thing when we look at inequality, I'll be very much focused on in sort of months, weeks, years to come that as we move forward and we get the benefits of new technologies those benefits do benefit everybody, actually broader society, because we don't want to start creating tiers in a society based on what technology they can have access to and what benefits they can achieve it. It's going to be so fundamental to the change in how we live, how we work, how we , how our... you know, how our life spans are dictated, that that technology will be a critical factor, the access to it, to all kinds of things, to quality of life, to value, to you know, anything about us. So, I think at the center of it for me is how do we keep an eye on digital equality of access, access to technology that is equitable. I think that's going to be a big challenge.</p>
Leopold von Gerlach	<p>Moving from the internal challenges of a community to the external walks, we see a lot of rivalry, even fight for supremacy among different countries, nations, regions very much focused or anchored into supremacy and technology. How would you advise your government in that context? What are the guiding principles here?</p>
Lord Ranger	<p>I think it's... we are living, yes, through this broader era of technological change, but in a sort of narrower perspective, I hope a post globalized world which has had a few shocks to its globalized systems in the last few years, and what do I mean by that, I mean by, you know, the war in Ukraine, a major shock which has reverberated, yes, through Europe in terms of politically, but also through the markets, in terms of what it did to energy and various other things and pricing, the COVID shock which suddenly you know nation states had to think about what they were doing on their own as well as working in partnership for their people and the way when pressure was exerted on supply chains, the dynamics that played out about nationhood and national viewpoints, it became very clear, you know, very quickly that we sort of fragmented and I think those shocks are reverberating through and will continue to through this decade at least, if not beyond, because we're now seeing in a post globalized but more so post those shocks world, what does that mean to people as they start to rationalize trade and relationships, and yes, the instability around geopolitics in terms of we're seeing conflict as well on top of all these things is look... is then magnifying that nationalistic view about is it nationhood first when it comes to economic transactions. Now, in the UK, we had a vote on the European question around Brexit and the country voted to leave in 2016, so that that was an initial change which has happened pre these other shocks but that was something that was driven here and we've seen the UK now developing its relationships in a very national way with other countries. So, aligning yourself in transactional ways to have trade deals. And we can see that there's this conversation of is it nation or is it a group of nations and this balance of that... that conversation. Layer upon that Leo, a conversation about technology, and technology is operating at a global level, whether it's the conversation about these big global firms or whether it's data or whether it's cloud services. These multinationals</p>

	<p>operate in a global environment, countries have been trying ...are now operating at a more national level because of all the things I've just discussed. So how do we square this circle? What should nations do when they're trying to deal with global industry but operate at a local national level? I think this is the question of our time right now. We have to find solutions to how do we get what we're trying to do, but in some cases with countries and nations looking for sovereignty around the services that they want to see in their countries, whether that be, say, data centers or their cyber security. But in other ways, they need to operate in partnership with international businesses and maybe with other countries. I think this is the navigation that we're trying to do in this era.</p>
Leopold von Gerlach	<p>So, I kind of understand that we shouldn't really over emphasize the rivalries, the differences, but focus on the combining aspects and the uniting aspects that the technology can bring and understanding all that nuances which I think makes a lot of sense and now having looked kind of. Internally into the community and also externally, there is always that residual question of: How should the government best find the right balance between incentivizing innovation, technology advancement on the one side and the well-being of their citizens in the most comprehensive sense? And I'm not asking for the world formula here, but just for some concluding thoughts on that very big topic.</p>
Lord Ranger	<p>I was about to say, if I had the answer Leo, I would probably, you know, be a very wealthy man. No, it is the challenge of our time. Governments want to harness this era of technological change, especially as we all know AI is at the center of this at the moment, and there's huge potential and opportunity to improve public services, improve people's quality of life, improve the outcomes and also there's the other side of that which is to drive business and economic growth, which is fundamental to countries and their economic perspective. So, you've got people outcomes, you've got economic outcomes and in the middle of this is how do you harness that by leveraging and growing the technological ecosystem which you have. Now all countries, I think are trying to answer this question. In the UK, there's been a plethora of new policies and approaches by a new government here to try to harness out... so if we're focusing just on AI, there's an AI opportunities action plan, there's growth zones, and only recently a new industrial strategy has been published that out of eight big areas, one is fundamentally digital technology and how can that help generate economic growth that then delivers those kinds of benefits and outcomes to citizens as well. This is, as they say, the magic bullet. Okay, it is the sort of how do you get growth business innovation, wealth creation and outcomes that benefit the citizens. And although I'm being slightly 'tongue in cheek' by saying that it is possible this can be done. But I come back to what your first question, I think it was about, you know, where do you focus to make sure that this gets done right? It is by saying make sure your absolutely crystal clear about the outcomes you're trying to achieve. You clearly define the roles and what each area and people will play and know your own role, and then make sure that it is focused and the</p>

	<p>investment is there and it's driven with clarity and it doesn't change because the key point to getting success and the outcome and the benefits is by not changing course as you're midway through because that fundamentally is what also, you know, destroys the motivation, the benefits and the outcomes because you sort of headed down a path and then something changes and you lose all that momentum and effort that's been put in. So, stay the course be clear about who's going to do what, and be clear about the outcomes that you're trying to achieve.</p>
Leopold von Gerlach	<p>Lord Ranger, I'd really like to conclude on that very positive note and I really liked, I must say, the positive attitude and note throughout all your responses to the various questions, that was very insightful. Thank you so much and thank you everybody for tuning in this time. I hope you join us again for the next edition of <i>The Influencers</i> which will be coming up soon. Until then, take care. Goodbye.</p>
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