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Future of Work  
podcast

**What does the growing digitization ask of organizations to become future proof? One thing we know for sure: you need to focus on people and their digital transformation. This digital age carries challenges and opportunities. If we want to make use of these opportunities and be able to deal with the challenges, we need to focus on bringing understanding of the impact technology has on people, and make sure everybody is on board, without leaving anyone behind. Listen to our podcast for more.**

Digitization is pretty much on everyone's mind, whether it's to keep up with changing customer demands, creating global scale or just making operations work better. Although it seems like the success of our digitization efforts is dependent upon technology, we'd like to argue today that actually organizations need to focus on what has always made them great, which is their people. Many digitization initiatives fail when focus on enablement of people is missing. The return on investment of new technology just isn't there when people aren't making use of it.

We see this in research done by Forrester, Gardner, McKinsey and PwC as well as our own experiences. In this podcast, we talk about the importance of focusing on people in digital transformations. We hope to inspire you with some practical examples and we'll discuss dilemmas organizations can come across. My name is **Vanessa van de Wiel**. I work here at PwC where I lead our people in organisation practice in the financial services sector. And today I'm here with **Mel Jacobs** CIO International at ABN Amro Bank, who is an experienced hand at digitization programs within the bank. Welcome to our podcast.

**Vanessa:** Hi Mel, It's nice to have you here today.

**Mel:** Thanks for having me here.

**Vanessa:** Financial services organizations such as yours face quite a few challenges in this digital age. The impact of such organizations on society and on the economy is tremendous. It's a very important role to play. Challenges we see are, for instance, changing customer demands, regulations that promote more transparency, lower prices, competition and innovation, but also more focus on human values such as well-being, inclusion and purpose. And, of course, upscaling employees. Our recent CEO survey says that 74 percent of CEO's globally are concerned with the availability of key skills, but only 18 percent of these same CEOs have made significant progress establishing and upskilling program, that includes soft, technical and digital skills. This tells us CEOs are struggling with this challenge and are not sure how to start. And lastly, retaining employees can be a challenge. Twenty percent of CEOs in the banking and capital market sector say that their number one challenge is retaining employees who have been upskilled. But of course, there are also many opportunities in the digital age.





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So tech offers us infinite possibilities. It allows us to make a lot of facets of our lives a whole lot easier. And this is not the end of technological possibilities to come, right? Advances in automation technologies mean that people will increasingly work side by side with robots through smart automation and artificial intelligence. And we see humans and machines combined can generate much more value than each one can alone. I think, Mel, you've got a personal example with robots or 3D printers?

**Mel:** Yes, it is me and my 3D printer. I have 3D printed braces and I was always, I always wanted braces, but I didn't want to invest the time going to an orthodontist and having the slots and walking around for years. And then someone came with this 3D printed braces idea and I was immediately on. And the good thing is that it saves me a lot of time. It doesn't hurt. You hardly see it. And I get straight teeth. So it's win, win, win. And they're printed somewhere in Mexico, I believe, sent over. And every two weeks I get a new set. And once every six weeks I have a ten minutes appointment with the orthodontist.

So it truly saves me time. It doesn't save me money, but it does save me time.

**Vanessa:** And it saves the orthodontists time as well.

There is one thing, though, that technology is not able to offer us, is it? Technology is not yet able to offer real human values to genuinely care for others, to fulfil other people's needs, for human interaction, and to also give sense and meaning to technology. For organizations to reach their full potential in the digital age, they need to understand the effect of technology on people. For example, the effect of people's well-being – always being connected versus actually making our lives easier. We know that always being connected actually creates stress for people. And the impact on jobs. We see a lot of fear of job loss, but also we see that people are enabled to do more interesting work with the help of technology. In reality, digitization means that we as people will not necessarily have less work to do, but there will be a major switch in the type of work and the kind of skills we need.

Mel, what do you see as the key gaps in people's current capabilities within the financial sector?

**Mel:** It was, I think, as the world digitizes, it makes our work more complex. And it's the way that we incorporate technology and adopt technology to make it easier and always understand that we are in charge of it, so we can turn on the energy, the light switch. We are in charge of technology. So it's a shift in mindset and understanding that our work will always change, whether it's industrial revolution or a digital revolution. We need to change the way we work with the new technology that's at hand and that's a shift in mindset. We're in control. We use technology to deliver value and our work will always change. It's never going to stay the same, ever. That's what I think the most important is. And it's about getting closer to our customer and not further away.



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**Vanessa:** True. Very true. And how does ABN Amro deal with that sort of skill and mindset gap at the moment?

**Mel:** On various ways, I think the skill gap is treated in that we understand that people are always learning. It's also about hiring new skills, new types of people and creating multi-talented and also multi-skilled teams and not having all skills in one person, but all skills in one team. That's a different mindset, but also understanding that you have to keep on learning about new technology, new ways of working, exploring new markets, new trends. And you have to be an always curious colleague to survive in this day and age.

**Vanessa:** It has a lot of implications as well for how you organize the work as well, doesn't it?

**Mel:** Yeah. Yeah. Very many, to rethink how you work as an individual, as a team, as a department with your client, with partners like yourself.

**Vanessa:** Mel, what's the ultimate purpose of the bank and how does digitization help deliver on that?

**Mel:** Well, our purpose is banking for better for generations to come. And I would say, though, that our biggest challenge is to stay close to what our customers and society expect from us as a bank. And digitization is one of the most important ways to understand our clients better and to work together better inside and outside of our company to keep up with these high expectations that society puts on us. So, it's, I think, the only way that we can keep up.

**Vanessa:** Could you tell me a bit more about the digital journey of the bank? What's already gone well and what the challenges do you face?

**Mel:** Well, the biggest challenge, I would say is that we are an old company with a lot of legacy. So it's about putting the fundamentals in place. And we have one of our strategic pillars is a future-proof bank, and that is about data, having all our data in the right places. That's where we get our value from. But it's also about people and about applications and how they work together. So I think, it's digitization is in all aspects. But one that helps us accelerate is how we work together and how we use the tools to work together inside the bank, but also with our customers.

**Vanessa:** Nice.

**Mel:** Vanessa, can you tell me something about PwC and how your digital journey is going and how it helps you to keep up with clients expectations?

**Vanessa:** Sure. I think PwC and ABN Amro have a lot of similarities. For instance, they both deal with highly complex problems and both have a very important role to play, to build trust in society. We are both under ongoing pressure from legislators, from society and from our clients as well. And we also want to help everyone grow and innovate and do better.





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So our purpose is to build trust in society and solve important problems. You could call it our North Star in a way. The problems that our client face, that our clients face are often wicked problems, meaning there is no simple solution because multiple elements of what we call the ecosystem are impacted. So organizations don't just deal with themselves anymore and their clients, but they also deal with regulators, with other partners in the value chain, etcetera. And these days, our clients as well as our people expect us to get on the front foot of digitization. So we focus our digitization journey on leveraging technology to help our people to use more of their talents to deliver a better service to our clients. This means we invest in technology to help people be more innovative, collaborative and flexible, which sounds a lot like what ABN Amro is doing. And we also invest in upscaling all of our people through what we call a digital fitness program, where they can improve their knowledge and skills in an interactive way. We really believe that people in technology together can achieve more rather than technology replacing people in the workplace. But of course, we also have our struggles making time for learning and making time for innovation can be really difficult. They both take time, but also endurance and energy. And balancing today's demands with the investment in the demands of the future is not easy. Which I think is also what many CEOs in other organizations are struggling with. How do you keep the shop open while reskilling and remodelling?

**Mel:** Yeah, I actually I like the way you use the fitness program because I think, digital skills and upskilling is a lifestyle change. It's not a diet, something you do one time off. t's something you do every day to become a little bit fitter. Yeah. I like that.

**Vanessa:** And I think that's, you know, what our people are experiencing that that is a great thing to have. But also it means that you have to make time for it on a daily or weekly basis, which is not always easy.

**Mel:** And change habits every day.

**Vanessa:** Mel, how does ABN Amro enable its employees to benefit from digital tools?

**Mel:** Well, first of all, it's about giving the first-class tools, so that always have to be work, be on every device, always available.

So that's the most important. But when they're there, it starts about how to use them and how to use them to benefit at the first hand the employee. And the second hand the customer. So it's about training people to develop new skills, new ways of working with these tools and change the way they work every day.

**Vanessa:** And do you find that across the many generations that you have in your workforce, there is a difference in to what degree people adopt those new tools?



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**Mel:** Of course, I mean, we support five generations at this moment in the workplace. And it will probably become six, maybe seven at a certain point in time. And of course, the way someone treats technology that was born on the Internet is different than someone that we had to learn how to use an email 30 years ago. But I see that you cannot only take the age view. Of course, someone that is older can be much more digital adept than someone that's born on the Internet, but just only knows how to use Snapchat or Instagram. You have to focus on every generation in how they can use these tools to improve the way they work together. Be smarter, faster in the way they collaborate, share knowledge. I mean, it's not only an age thing. But of course, we see difference.

**Vanessa:** Mel, we worked with you on the implementation of Office 365 within the bank. How does that tooling fit into ABN Amro's journey of digitization?

**Mel:** Well, in many ways, but I think one of the most important is that we need to inspire our workforce on their workplace. So, they have to work with truly digital tools. That is also the promise we have towards our customers. So, having those tools and having them use those tools to work together in a smarter and faster way and free up time for the things that really count. And that's the interaction with our customers. So, I think that's where it fits mostly.

**Vanessa:** Nice, and what did you want to move away from with Office 365?

Many things maybe. I think that one of which is that we wanted to change habits that people have.

So that's saying that work is something that happens from 9:00 to 5:00, that it happens at a desk in a building owned by ABN Amro. But that work is a thing that you control. It can happen anywhere and that you can work in the way that's best for you, but also best for your team. Collaborate across geographies. So, I think that's also important part of Office 365. And our geographies are not only where our clients are, but also where our partners are. So we work a lot with India. That we use this tooling to collaborate better with these partners, to design things for our customers, but also interaction with our clients so that we have, it's not only the e-mail tooling, it's also video, but it's also knowledge sharing, which is very important that we use office 365 for.

**Vanessa:** I think that's one of the things that struck me when we were preparing our vision for office 365 as the new tool in ABN Amro that a lot of people responded from the perspective of; I now have, you know, access to this wealth of knowledge and information because I have all of these experts at my fingertips, whereas it felt like they weren't there before. And the people could really share lots of stuff within, you know, teams or OneNote or what have you.



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**Mel:** But I think that something like teams also bring brings down barriers. It's so much easier to chat quickly and it's so much more like you're used to communicating in real life. And an email is so formal. So you see that the knowledge – and we are in still in the middle of the true adoption – but you see it's like a spinning wheel. It gets easier and easier to collaborate and to share knowledge.

**Vanessa:** Amazing. What are some of the key learnings from the rollout itself? And you mentioned you're still in the middle of the adoption stage. Anything you want to share with us?

**Mel:** Well, I think what I really liked is the way we approach it. So we had role modelling with our senior leaders, but we also had a large base of enthusiastic people that really couldn't wait to share their knowledge and enthusiasm on Office 365. We call them explorers. I think we were aiming for 750. We reached about 1.100, some 60 or something like that. I don't have the exact number. And everybody really wanted to make this a success. And I think that approach top down and bottom up – it was key. But also the vibe it creates, that was the best I think, really people being really happy to get this tooling.

**Vanessa:** You mentioned these ambassadors for the change that you wanted to create were called explorers. Why did you call them explorers?

**Mel:** That's a funny one. Next to our purpose banking for better for generations to come. We also have five culture principles and one of them is; be an explorer. And that's about innovation, finding new ways of doing business, working. And I thought how funny it would be if we call these ambassadors, people that are truly motivated to set the right example, work in new ways, call them explorers with also a direct link to our culture principles. So that's why I came up with explorers. But it's also the ex of employee experience explorer.

So it's a bit of a double layer.

**Vanessa:** Clever.

**Mel:** And I think what's so important, they're not only engaging the leaders, but also the ambassadors. It's about setting an examples because people do as you do and not what you say. And in new ways of working you can send out an e-mail that everybody has to become more digital, but it's about working in new ways and showing that you are truly digital and not only saying that you want to be.

**Vanessa:** Fantastic! And these explorers have... It's their role, I guess, to help their colleagues understand, you know, what's unique about the tool and how to use it, right. How do they do that?

**Mel:** Of course, they get their hands-on training. So, they also get explained how things work. I think it's also about challenging the status quo.





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So, saying why are we doing this meeting physically, all being together at this table? Why don't we do it through teams? Why do we all start at 8:30 in the morning? Why don't we switch working times or sometimes work from home? Why do we send documents and not share documents? Why do we..? It's about challenging as well. And then, yes, showing that with that challenge, you actually start saving time for people and that the new ways of working were better than the ones that we all have in our heads, because that's how we learned it.

Yeah.

**Vanessa:** Yeah. I think the day we got 750 of them together to learn about the tools, but also to kind of kickstart the journey together. That was huge, wasn't it.

**Mel:** Yeah. And people also said this made them feel proud about the company they are working in. Not only proud about the tools they worked for but also that we were doing this as a company. That was great.

**Vanessa:** I think, again, that's such a key topic, isn't it? That it's not about the tool, but it's about how you introduce it, where you connect it to the purpose and strategy of the bank and what it enables you to do. And I think people really experienced the spirit of what we wanted to convey there.

**Mel:** Also, you made a link between the tool and their time. Yeah. And we also said your time is the most valuable thing you have and we respect that time. And we want you to be in control of your time.

**Vanessa:** Nice.

So, it almost sounds counterintuitive, doesn't it, to be successful in the digital age, we have to, on the one hand, be challenging the status quo and doing things differently and exploring. But on the other hand, also being vulnerable and asking for help when we need it.

**Mel:** Yeah, that's true. I mean, the digital age changes so much about. You just said before jobs, but also adopting new ways of working, etc. And I had the best example by the way, driving here.

I have an electrical car. I left. I thought I was a well on my way with 31 kilometres to go. And while I was in a Teams call, I missed the turnoff and my car said, you are not going to reach the destination, being here. So, I immediately had to think about how am I going to do this? And then I thought, oh yeah, if I break, I charge my car at the same time. So, I was driving and breaking on my way here. And then I drive into the garage and I find out that you have the best personal human service ever. And that's a valet charging service. So, there's a nice guy sitting downstairs helping people to charge their car. Because, of course, all the charging stations were filled as well. That happens on these kind of days. So that's a new job in this age of personal charging service.

It saved my day and my stress levels went down immediately.



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**Vanessa:** Fantastic.

And I guess, you know, it goes to show that staying curious and open minded are the mindset that we need.

**Mel:** And keep on driving!

**Vanessa:** And keep on driving through the digital age.

**Mel:** Exactly.

**Vanessa:** So maybe we'll wrap this podcast up then by posing a question to everyone who's listening today: How do I leverage all the potential that my employees and colleagues have to offer to make us future-proof as an organization? Cause I think it does really take everyone, doesn't it?

**Mel:** Everyone, yeah, everyone from the charging assistant to who is in charge.

**Vanessa:** The CEO.

