Podcast: Process Transformers

Episode 30: Beyond Tools: Envisioning AI as Symbiotic Partners in Business and Life | Feat. Helen and Dave Edwards

Fig. 1 – Cover art of Process Transformers podcast
Figure description – A square cover image with decorative geometric designs representing workflows and connections with blocks, circles, and arrows in varying shades of blue. The title "Process Transformers" is featured at the top of the image, and logos for "SAP" and "SAP Signavio" are featured underneath the image

Transcript

Lukas Egger: Hello and welcome to *Process Transformers*, the podcast that talks about business transformation at the intersection of processes and AI. For those of you who have listened before, welcome back, and if you're new to the show, thanks for tuning in. My name is Lukas Egger, I'm the head of innovation at SAP Signavio, and I'll be your host for today's episode titled "*Beyond tools: envisioning AI as symbiotic partners in business and life*", and I'm very excited to introduce today's guests, Helen and Dave Edwards. Through their nonprofit, the Artificiality Institute, they explore the emotional, cognitive and cultural shifts that come from living and working alongside synthetic minds rather than treating AI as a productivity tool, they treat it as a co-author in how we form ideas, identity, and meaning. Welcome to the show.

Dave Edwards: Thanks for having us.

Helen Edwards: Thank you.

Lukas Egger: Artificiality mission is to shape the emerging human experience in a synthetic world. Wow. That's a mouthful. If we unpack that, what is the most interesting part that you want to, or what is the part that you want to make sure listeners understand about that mission and how and why did you choose that like that as your mission?

Dave Edwards: Good question. I'll jump in first. I think that we chose that mission for a couple things. there's sort of three things that stand out to me as you read it to us. Uh,

Helen Edwards: 'Cause the words matter.

Dave Edwards: 'Cause the words matter. And I'll start with shaping our mission is not just to study and observe and understand, but to actually help shape the human experience. We take that with a view that we don't believe in, subscribe to support the, what's actually become very much the primary direction of the AI industry, which is that A lot of the major companies see creating AI as an artificial human to try to compete with humans and therefore the. Only viable conclusion from that is that you are going to try to replace humans, and that's the goal of creating these products. We don't think that's inevitable. We don't think that's a good idea. We actually think that it's wildly unimaginative that actually that these tools, these systems, these algorithms, whatever, however you wanna describe all the different bits and pieces, they're quite different from human intelligence. So, we see an opportunity to create things that are quite different from humans that can do things we can't do, maybe things we don't want to do, but definitely the most interesting

are the things that we can't do. And so, we think about shaping that experience. The second part is human experience, which is we've always approached this as thinking about what the human experiences of AI, rather than what the technology will be. So, we start with the human experience of it and bring it toward the product rather than the other way around. Do you wanna tackle the synthetic side?

Helen Edwards: No.

Dave Edwards: In the synthetic world? No.

Helen Edwards: No, because you had a very particular view of that. But I'll come back to sort of pull out some of the long-term things.

Dave Edwards: Alright, so, and the last is synthetic. We've chose synthetic specifically rather than artificial, and that is because, when you think about the words, at least, there's lots of different ways you could think, but the way we think about it is artificial tends to be something that you're making an artificial copy of another thing, so you're trying to take human intelligence and take an artificial copy of it. Synthetic is essentially not natural, so that's fine. This is a synthetic, whatever it is, and whether you consider it intelligent or not, it is synthetic. We look at the opportunity to be synthetic much more broadly than you might think of to replicate a human. You think about these systems operate in combinatorial space that we can't understand. They operate in so many dimensions, that's impossible for understand. We understand three, four dimensions kinds of things. The power that these things have to understand the world in ways we don't understand is what we wanna tap into. We think that is something that will be a real positive for the human experience.

Helen Edwards: Which is why we think about the very long term here. This is not just about current instantiations of artificial intelligence. We think much more long term about the different kinds of diverse intelligences that might exist, that we might discover, that we might create, whether there's cyborgs or whether there's something new altogether. But that word was chosen specifically to try and juxtapose it against just the current moment and build in the sense of, this is changing humans, but it doesn't change us from being humans. We are not transhumanists in that sense. So, it was a very deliberate choice of word.

Lukas Egger: Now one could argue that any new technology or tool reshapes the human experience, right? whether it's the internet or before the airplane or whatnot. But I sense that for you, the transition is, it goes beyond what we experienced before. So, is there like an aha moment that you guys had or something that sets this technology apart and why it's important to use this very specific wording to call out that this is not the ordinary change you might expect from a new tool or a new technology?

Helen Edwards: Many aha moments... Back in 2016, 2017 when we first started building intelligentsia. There were a couple of significant aha moments about the concentration of wealth and power that artificial intelligence can bring with just the way it's developed in our, society. But there were aha moments around how it was pretty clear that, the philosophy here is that these are autonomous agents that think and decide on their own. They learn from data that they learn on their own, and their behavior relies on their post-design experience. It's not something where engineers can design exactly how they're gonna work and that's how they work. that's not how it goes. And increasingly as then of course, the big aha moment was how powerful languages to capture our mental ease to capture our thought processes to reflect back on us and work with us on significant problems in the real world without any of these machines actually being in the real world. I mean, that's an extraordinary advance. So, these are in our cognitive space. They can compete with us, but they can also be very complimentary. They produce different kinds of artifacts. We are still seeing, we're seeing very early research and evidence that they literally change the way that we think. And so, there's sort of these various aha moments. The most recent aha moment was recognizing how if you take the tools from human computer interaction and technology adoption and the way that humans react to technology and the extended mind argument of David Chalmers and Andy Clark. Then on the other side of it, you take the sort of core cognitive science about human social and development and learning, and you put all of that together. You're still missing something. You're still missing a framework for understanding how we take these cognitive technologies and incorporate them into our own minds and into our complex social system. So that was a pretty recent aha moment for us.

Dave Edwards: I think one of the fundamental differences for me is that prior to this technology, everything that we've done, at least in terms of computing technology, is about creating tools that help humans communicate with each other. It's always been that there's a medium that connects us, whether it's one-to-one or one to many, or many to many. This is the first time that we've ever created a technology that creates the message itself. So, if you think of the McCluen mindset, right, that the medium is the message and for sure media has dramatically changed the message that we exchange among each other and it's changed our cultures, but this is the first time that the machine has generated the message itself. And that is a fundamental difference in terms of the way we communicate with these machines. It's not just that all in the past, it's always been instructional interfaces and now it's more inference based. But this ability for a machine to create a message is fundamentally different.

Lukas Egger: Why do you think that right now everybody is so excited about the productivity gains, but let's say this deeper message that you really are shining a light on is not as prominently featured? One could argue that like as soon as it tackles like the emotional space and identity. This should be like front and center of everybody's like mind and the overtone window and what people discuss. Do you

have a hypothesis why people are for now so focused on what the tools will be able to do in terms of productivity instead of identity and shaping our minds?

Helen Edwards: Well, I think those conversations are happening. They're just in different domains, so you know, when it comes to work, it's about productivity because everyone wants to get more for less. And we just have this obsession with productivity and, and rightly so. But the part that's missing in that conversation is that I always think about it as little p productivity, you know, little bits and pieces of time, as opposed to big P productivity, which is fundamental discontinuities and new inventions that truly allow us to invent new things that really unlock true productivity. It's kind of the difference between someone working a little bit faster with a slightly better rake versus having a leaf blower. Right? So, it's just that different perspective on it. In the personal space, I mean, the media's full of stories about whether it be Replica or ChatGPT, but people falling in love with their chat bots and doing, those kinds of personal things. There's plenty of stories. I think there's a lot of conversation about that. But of course, what's missing is that exact same thing is actually happening at work, and the work stuff is actually happening at home. You know, there's still, both of those things are crossing over. It's just very early. We haven't developed frameworks we don't even have a vocabulary for what's the word for when you have an idea, and you cannot remember whether it came from ChatGPT or from you? We don't have a word for that. Now in human psychology, you know, we get all of our knowledge from the community. We have a knowledge illusion that we know more than we do because we know someone who knows it, and we see that over and over again with digital technologies. But this is, really on steroids, as it were with language models because what you remember is the prompt you put in, but you don't actually remember what that information is, you just know where to go back and find it again. So, we're still very early in how we even talk about this.

Lukas Egger: Now it makes perfect sense. I'm kind of curious because there's a lot of people who either lean towards excitement or a little bit of a doom, right? Like that is, could be like potentially devastating and so forth. When you now look at, let's say, the professional space. Do you believe that it's more of we need to safeguard the safe rollout and a sustainable way of working with it? Or do you feel like this new vocabulary and investigating this space is in order to unlock the potential of the technology, so is it like a positive or let's say a cautionary reaction?

Helen Edwards: Oh, I'm kind of like, the classic metaphor is cars without breaks, cars with breaks can go a lot faster. and what we are seeing, I think right now, and Dave will chime in, in a sec when I let him, is that there's a huge amount of momentum being driven by the AGI arms race essentially. What we are not really seeing is, that in some ways the safest thing is to allow people to catch up. It's really, really hard to keep up with what's possible. And, so the rhetoric, there's still a lot of hype, is kind of the short way of saying it. What about you?

Dave Edwards: Well, I think that AI fundamentally is a cultural technology. So, it enters your culture, it changes the culture and it, often amplifies whatever culture it's in. And the culture within which AI is being introduced is a competitive capitalist culture. So it is, getting put into a system that is about efficiency and speed and productivity and optimization and profits, and it's amplifying that. The thing that's kind of disconcerting here is that it's, creating change faster than we can adapt to as individuals, as groups, as organizations, as societies. This is all happening so quickly. So, it creates this cultural dissonance, and it gets confusing because you feel like you're being really productive, but then something feels off, you know, you feel like a fraud or you, feel like things are really exciting, but then you're not really sure why. There's all of this stuff that makes it just sort of generally confusing. So, I think about it as it's less about the constructs. We don't spend a lot of time on this sort of core technical guardrails that you might not, that we don't appreciate those or think there's are bad ideas. That's just not what we do. We're focused on the human experience and that cultural experience and how to think about introducing it as a culture. And I do think that people are, and organizations are moving too quickly. They're racing to find ways to save money. They're claiming that they're going to get rid of lots of people in favor of AI, which may be true, it may also be using technology as a scapegoat for some other issues that are going on in their business or in the economy generally. But either way, they're throwing this out there and I sort of wanna stop and sit down with every leader that we meet with and say, how's that gonna go with your people? Do you really wanna be a people less as organization? Do you really wanna, you know, basically put all of your people on notice that they could be offloaded because of a machine? Isn't there a better way? Isn't there a way when you think about how this technology can compliment your people, isn't there a way how this technology could allow your business to do something you're not doing today? Right? There's something, actually I said before that I find it wildly unimaginative to just try and replace a human. It's also wildly pessimistic to think that the humans in your organization have done everything that can be done. Isn't there some expansion to what you do that a technology could allow you to do and do differently? You know, think back to 25 years ago when everybody was trying to figure out what it means to be in the internet. The first thing was is they put up their brochures as like graphics on the internet. Well, that didn't do very much. But then they started to think about new business lines, new ways of communicating with suppliers or vendors; all the things that have emerged over the last 25 years that became an expansion of what everyone did. But we're still stuck in this. We don't have any new ideas except to use this thing to do the thing we're doing today more efficiently, rather than thinking, whoa, what could we do differently now?

Lukas Egger: Not only do I I think it also creates a lot of anxiety, right? People seeing that there should be more and feeling that they're not yet using the full potential. But then again, nobody gets up in the morning and is excited about doing a mediocre job. Partly the problem is that very often we just don't know what good looks like until we see it. So, with productivity, we kind of know where the yardstick goes, It's like time, money, we understand the metrics. Have you and your research

and working in that field uncovered or thought about new ideas in how to gauge that space? And maybe paint the picture about what good could look like and how this adoption of technology and introducing symbiotic minds and all that, how that could be better?

Helen Edwards: Well, if you look at what we know now, and you take a couple of different cuts at this. One, is that you know, there's a fundamental advantage that artificial intelligence has, which is just the pure scale, scope, and speed of what it can do, and humans can't compete with that. So, we shouldn't. We need to use that as a tool for... essentially, it's another kind of search. So, searching a large combinatorial space for new solutions, new drugs, new materials, whatever. But none of that can happen without the human processes that sit behind it. Because to get a new drug to market, for example, is not just about compressing the identification of a particular molecule down to, you know, weeks compared to years or whatever the time span is. It's all of the other things that come in behind that to introduce and test and roll out that drug so that's a well-worn path. A lot of people talk about that. What we don't talk about enough is. the reality of human learning and the reality of what it takes to sort of build a brain that makes good decisions, because the thing that's gonna be the last to go here is our sense of accountability to each other. And so if we rely on other people for making good decisions or processing data, or giving us a perspective and opinion; giving us their taste and their curation of what it is that they think that we should embrace as a product or whatever -- that is all... that process is very human, but behind that process, we can speed it up a lot with AI When you work with these tools, you experience what it's like to not know where you stop and the AI starts, where the product idea that you might have come up with using an AI based on your experience and your expertise and your taste and curation for what's worthy of pursuing, you are backwards and forwards with the AI on whatever example, whatever kind of idea the AI comes up with, and you're constantly adjusting your own thought process. And that's changing you, in your learning and you're creating new meaning and new structures as you do it. Where we see the fastest, most productive adoption of AI is when someone quite rapidly is able to get to a point where they know that there's a boundary between them and the machine. Like, they don't just think that they should take what the AI says as gospel. They've got that sense, that boundary of their own mind, but they're very fluid in the way they adopt a framework. So, it could be something as simple as you've never done any coding before, but you're using Codal ChatGPT to learn how to code. And you're not just taking instruction, you're actually changing your whole framework in your mind about what it means to use a language. You're moving into Python from English, for example. We see people rapidly learning in really productive, solid, genuine ways when they're engaging in that process of meaning making and adopting that framework; and we call that symbolic plasticity, where they're becoming more able to create meaning in a way in their own mind. They're not just copying and pasting; it's a genuine sort of partnership. So that's kind of where I feel pretty positive. Where I feel really negative is when people just can't be bothered anymore. And I think that this is the part that you were getting to with your

question, which is if you are a leader in an organization, you know I cannot understand why anyone would want to say that humans aren't valuable because this is not gonna change straight away. The last thing you wanna do is just turn all your humans into automations that don't care about your, don't care about the goal of the business. How are you gonna get any innovation? Because no one's actually really caring. And that's something that we do.

Dave Edwards: I think that getting at your question around sort of metrics, I think was your question is interesting because. The easy path when you're thinking about metrics is to think about productivity metrics or efficiency metrics. 'Cause they're things that are measurable. They're, they, you can put 'em on a, some form of linear scale and you can calculate them. There's a couple of challenges to that in this space. One is you're essentially; you're slotting humans into something that machines will do better at. Machines are really good at optimizing and really optimizing for a specific goal and really good at optimizing for a particular linear, linear scale, right? So, if you're thinking that that's your measurement, then you're kind of asking all of your people to use machines to be more like machines. Whereas what we know is that the real goal for humans is to have a sense, is to feel that what they're doing has meaning. Meaning to themselves, meaning to their family, meaning to their organization, meaning to society. That's what opens people up to be creative, to be innovative, right? Innovation comes because people find it meaningful to innovate. So that's where we focus in the research with the Chronicle. That's when we go in and work with organizations to help where their figure out where their people are on this symbiosis journey is we're really trying to help understand what this experience, this relationship means to them. Where they are in that space. And that's not a linear scale. So, when we look at it, it's across a terrain, you know, where people are in this terrain, there's no necessarily good or bad. There's not necessarily a hundred or a zero. And that's a different kind of way of thinking about metrics. You know, when you're trying to say, what we're trying to assess is meaningfulness, but we actually think that is the core direction in the future that we have to be thinking about this.

Lukas Egger: I love that you're pointing out learning and meaning, and now it makes more sense because I guess I asked about metrics, but meaning is really not easily pigeonholed into metrics. Right. And I think I remember reading that you also at some point stated that we need new myths and metaphors to make sense of this change. So. let's assume we want more meaning at the corporate level, you know, in the business world, right? And we want this fluidity of work. Even if that means we potentially need to throw away all the job descriptions and like a lot of change and change management. But what are. The most helpful ideas, myths, or stories if we're not thinking about metrics that you have encountered or that you would advocate for in order to not just go after the uninspired, as you call it, or the very sad interpretation of what AI could be, if that question makes sense.

Dave Edwards: First thing that comes to my mind is that is brand. Brand is fundamentally a story that means something to people, right? So, the greatest brand potentially in the world, and definitely the greatest brand I ever worked for was Apple. It meant something. You knew what it meant if you thought about a new product of whether that was an Apple product or not. You can't measure that. There's no metric, there's no score. You couldn't put up a new product and say, yep, iTunes is definitely gonna be an Apple product. But there was something there that we understood it and we could share that meaning across an organization because there was a story behind it that made sense. And so, I, some ways I feel like. you can interpret the meaning and meaningfulness in a lot of different ways, and people might hear it as kind of wooey and whatever. But then when you realize that meaning is how we actually communicate with each other, it's how we impress things upon each other. And when you think about the fact that, at least when I was at Apple, Steve said that the number one most valuable asset in the company was the brand. Now you can't measure it. You couldn't calculate it. It didn't show up on the balance sheet, but he was right. There was no question that is the most valuable thing, that that company still has today. So that's all about meaning. Now, what's interesting about machines is machines these tools can help you create new meanings, create new concepts, create new ideas. They can help you communicate it to other people. What's fascinating is that these machines operate in this combinatorial space. We can't see, but then maybe it can help us find meanings that we wouldn't find otherwise. And that's really cool when you step back and realize that there's this completely different intelligence that can look across an entire thing and find something that means something to you. We were talking earlier today with an expert in the legal profession who was talking about using LLMs to be able to, when you're pursuing a case and trying to find out something, that suddenly you have this tool that can look across the entire recorded history of law. And help you find new meaning that might, you might be able to bring to this one particular case that's incredibly powerful and uses that intelligence in a very different way than a human intelligence could because it would take forever for a human to really. Be able to every recorded legal document ever. Yeah.

Helen Edwards: And we look at, you know when we work with organizations on this, when we work with people on this, we're looking very, very particular markers in language. And we are looking for very particular markers about the way that people conceive of this technology. So, a really simple example is, how often when you talk to people, do you hear people say, 'This gave me a really different perspective'? 'I'd never thought about it this way before'? Those sound so simple and so mundane, but those are little gold nuggets that show you that people have really healthy ways of working with the technology. Because it's like their mental model says, 'I can access everything that humans have ever put on the internet, and I can make a judgment about where that fits into my sense of meaning, the problem I'm trying to solve'. So, there are things like, looking for markers about so odd, the use of pronouns. People will talk about 'us' or 'we' as opposed to 'it' or 'she' or 'they', those sorts of things. But it gave me a different perspective. Never thought about it this

way before. If only I could, you know, starting to get these nuggets that people are thinking about. Totally new ways of doing it. I used it for, I didn't know. Oh wow. Aha. Oh. Then the fractures, the things that go bad, and then the things that are really intriguing about where people set new boundaries. Well, I used to do it for that. I use chat GPT for all of this part up until here, but when it comes to doing the presentation, I own that. That kind of, so we are looking for very particular journeys and we have markers that, that, that give us that signpost where people are on this overall sort of spectrum.

Lukas Egger: Are they for now descriptive or also prescriptive in a sense that. If we want to envision a really healthy workplace, and we do want to imbue meaning into a company's voice and taste and, how it acts do you have already found best practices or things that you can point to for people who want to go beyond, let's say the metrics and the productivity and the efficiency and say like, Hey, I do wanna embrace that? But again, like where to start because is it. The brand? Is it like how we work? Is it top down? Is it bottom up? Mostly people say it depends and it's a combination of all of these things. But have you already created like a specific, I guess some sort of opinion on where to start and what are good markers for teams?

Helen Edwards: The very first is so incredibly obvious that people forget about it, but then they back engineer it, which is, are you giving humans dignity? That's like the top of the whole thing. the way that you communicate to people how you are recognizing their individual dignity and their collective dignity as a team. That, that's very cultural. That's different in Apple versus Amazon, you know, just to pick two a's at the front of the alphabet. But we've seen examples where you would have quote unquote, the sort of AI transformation manager say, this is what we're going to do with, we have to introduce this much AI, whatever their metric is. And that's within these certain number of months. And here's the team that's gonna figure out what processes get changed. And then we have other people who, where it's the HR manager who stands up with a bit of pithy humor and says it's all about people, but this is what I expect you to do now as people. And it's just such a different kind of instantiation of the individual culture. But I think when you boil it all down, you've kind of gotta understand now what humans really mean to you. Like, are you prepared to invest in human intelligence as well as machine intelligence? And, we had that, Dave said before that, I mean, right now the discourse is kind of a bit overwhelmed with everyone saying they're gonna get rid of humans. There's not gonna be any jobs for humans, and it's all gonna be about agents and, there's alternative reason, there's alternative explanations for that stance right now. Yes, we are gonna see significant adoption of AI, but it won't be this kind of wholesale. Replacement because there's still things that humans are way better at. Even if the humans are just sitting there checking the machine outputs, they still need to have expertise in order to be able to do that. So, you've gotta kind of like, it's more time than we have to really break down that argument. But that's something that we sort of spend a lot of time really going into the details with people about, well, what is it exactly that you're trying to get out of this process and what outputs are easy and

simple and fast and cheap with AI, but what process do humans need to do to pull it all through to it, to something that people can rely on and feel comfortable being accountable for? Because it's really easy right now to confuse a pure output with everything it took to get to that output. And AI does a really good job at mimicking many of those outputs. And we want that. But there's also behind that, a nested process of expertise and accountability and a whole ecosystem of complexity that we have to sort of remind people isn't gonna go away.

Dave Edwards: I think there's a starting point when looking at an organization is whether they see walking through the AI doors, whether AI is, is a competitor or a collaborator, and that choice is kind of one or the other. And when you're going down the competitor path, you're driving your organization towards optimization and efficiency. If you see it as a collaborator with humans, you're pushing the organization towards creativity and innovation. You can't get you, you're not gonna get creativity and innovation out of AI taking over jobs for humans. That just won't happen. that's what we do. But you can supercharge in some ways. Human creativity and innovation. When you l when humans learn how to use these tools to expand the problem set, to expand the probability, to expand the opportunity space that they're working in, that can be really powerful.

Helen Edwards: Yeah, kind of like the old explore-exploit dilemma. You can't do both at the same time. So, everything that we do is always this back and forth, this toggling between those things.

Lukas Egger: I come back to the well analogy, or let's say the lived experience with chess engines, People are always fundamentally interested in other people because if it were different, we would be only looking at games played by computers, but that wasn't the case. Right. We are fundamentally interested in how humans do, and I also do believe that we are over-indexing on this myth about the replacement because it feeds a narrative about efficiency that feels comfortable, right? Which is part of the story, but I love how you point out that this is, you can go beyond this myth and then create maybe a more conducive environment for innovation, for flourishing, and for other parts that we really do want. And that also can be a competitive moat and a differentiator in the market, because in the beginning it's always hard, as the something new comes onto the scene, to make sense of it. and you are at the very forefront. Are there other things that you would recommend to people who are interested in it? Say like, Hey Helen, Dave, they do have a point. We do wanna understand how this symbiotic partnerships could look like. How we can bring more meaning in how we can create more opportunity for dignity and so forth? What are, let's say, the easy ways to get into that and maybe continue on that path that you would recommend other than obviously reaching out to the Artificiality Institute?

Dave Edwards: Yeah. Well thank you for that plug. Number one thing, for us is stories now, and we use that as our analytical tool, meaning that the Chronicle is

based on listening to people talking about their experience. When we work with organizations, we're interviewing people and talking to them about their stories because you need to hear the narrative. This isn't a tool and a journey that you can look at, just big data. Who's using how often? How many times did they prompt something, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah? Is that working or not? Because the difference of these tools of being cognitive tools that are part of that journey is something that you need to hear, what that phenomenological experience is of the tool. And so that can be done one-on-one. It's the best journeys we've seen of getting people going is when we take a group of people through it because they share the experience, they talk to each other, they find their points of vulnerability to be with each other. They teach each other about it. In some ways, the most similar is thinking about the way you've taken a group of people through leadership training, in a large organization, you don't do that one-on-one. You do that in groups. People get to talk about what it's like to work with other kinds of people. How do they motivate their teams to get things done? What did they learn from people above them or below them? It's not the same as working with a machine, but the dynamics are more similar to me in that than it is learning how to point and click and calculate things in Excel. You have to think about it as something that has emotion, that has cognition. People question themselves. Right now, especially, people are worried. The narrative from Silicon Valley is that they're creating technologies that are gonna put you out of work. And so, people are justifiably concerned. So having that be vocalized-- to be able to help people see how these tools are actually allow them to do something new and different that they hadn't before-- but doing that together, is the important part.

Helen Edwards: Yeah, I'd echo that and, I mean, I could go down to some sort of, again, in the weeds, in the detail stuff. But at a high level, innovation is fundamentally inefficient. So, you have to allow space for people to be inefficient, and the best place to be inefficient is with other people. It's the most efficient way of being inefficient because if you've got a creative idea, it's not a machine that's gonna tell you whether it's creative, it's your peers. It's the other experts that will judge whether that something that is truly new and novel. And, yes, you can get a scan across the great space. AIs will change, it will get better, but there's definitely a blandness, right? There's a, averaging out that happens with AI today, 'cause it's, architected and designed by people that are trying to kind of keep it from the edges. And if you want something really quite out there on the edge that is very different. It's humans that give you that, and that give you that judgment. The tools themselves, it is a blind spot with all of the actual design. They're very hard to collaborate with. There's sharing and tools and stuff like that, but they're not in a group with humans. And when we take people through this and they're learning about how to sort of bring in all of the different perspectives, including the machine perspective, it's very, very clumsy. And so, spending time really getting teams productive with when everyone's working with these things individually is really worth the investment. Totally worth the investment.

Lukas Egger: And how can that be easily facilitated? In a sense that, let's say I am in a position where I wanna facilitate change in a positive way and create or capture those stories. And maybe what I see is that there's always like some percentage of people who are excited, that are more willing to share stories. Do you also have maybe a couple of ideas that we can share with the audience of about how to frame it and how to conduct it, like gathering those stories and intermediating those stories and sharing them and working with them because it could be easily framed into, oh, let's do a design sprint. Let's make sure that, we heard about the productivity gains of group A so Group B can profit benefit of them. Are there ways that you have seen that are that you found really inspirational or that you advocate for in sharing those stories and capturing them?

Helen Edwards: What we've found to be effective and really the most effective, sort of, the fastest way to do it, is to take people through decision making processes. You have to evaluate different kinds of decisions, and you start off kind of small, like just a relatively simple decision that has to be made between individuals and their own, ChatGPT's or Claudes or whatever, and then build the sophistication. And just, they're learning environments, but you practice bringing in increasingly sophisticated use of AI, and increasingly complex decisions that require increasingly more judgment. if someone wants to put in a new metric for anything in their organization, the one to look for is, are you able to make more complex decisions faster?

Dave Edwards: I definitely agree with that. I think that the focus on decisions also helps deflect away from the focus on production, so it's easy to look at these tools and say, how do I create a thing right? But that's not going through the difficult journey, which is applying judgment to the thing that you're working on with the machine, or you as a group are working on with your five instances of the machine and you're having to figure out how to make a decision on what to do next. And that's the part that's really challenging. I would say that in terms of mechanism, groups are essential. It is sure helpful to have facilitation for all things like this. running through in workshops, but the best practice is a recurring part of that becomes part of the culture. So more of a community of practice that you actually are working on things on a regular basis, that you're actually going through this journey and learning. 'Cause these tools are changing a lot. Cultures are changing a lot, so how do you keep the culture cohesive by working through these things with these new systems on a regular cadence.

Lukas Egger: Well, I certainly love that perspective, but now I wanna put your feet to the fire a little bit and ask you: if you had the power to not just facilitate decision making processes in organizations, but have the decision power about, let's say, one process that you could instantly change, waving a magic wand or whatever, what would you like to see being changed right now today?

Dave Edwards: If I had a magic wand, I'd change the mindset in Silicon Valley that the objective is to replace humans. I would rather see the objective be creating technologies for humans that allow us to do things we've never done before, but to allow us to do it, not to defer to a machine to do it for us.

Helen Edwards: And I'm thinking more at sort of the level of an organization: For every dollar I'd put into a project about cost efficiency, I'd be putting two into new, creative, innovative, exploratory processes that are essentially a kind of co-R&D. Because these machines are incredible at finding anything from, you know, kind of what are they called? There's a word, I'm blanking the name. The hidden discoveries that people have forgotten, or they've been at the edges. you know, unusual, obscure knowledge, all the way through to helping you link concepts that you've never been able to link before. So, your, ability to generate new ideas. Most of them will be junk, like most of them would be absolute junk. But if you generate a hundred ideas that you could never have generated before, and even like one or two, or three or four of them makes sense to your teams, you've got an entirely different way of innovating and creating. And I think that it's such an obvious asymmetry, it's so easy to look at what you already have and know how to fine tune it. It's so much harder to imagine something new. Imagination is hard work. and the judgment and the taste required to take what a machine does and say, Yep, that's a good thing. I'm gonna run with it. Or, Nope, that's awful, but it made me think of this thing over here. That's where these things can really change the way that you, think about innovation within companies.

Lukas Egger: I think that's a beautiful way to end, namely, dignity, humanity first and a future that is filled with more innovation and new stories that we're telling each other in symbiotic ways with AI. Thank you so much for being here. Thank you, Dave. Thank you, Helen.

Helen Edwards: Thank you.

Lukas Egger: And with that, thanks for listening to another episode of Process Transformers. This podcast is brought to you by the dedicated efforts and hard work of our team, so, a heartfelt thank you to Beyza Kartal, Jahanzeb Khan, Reagan Nyandoro, Erica Davis, Cecilia Sarquis, Fawzi Mourad, and Julian Thevenod. If you have questions or comments, email us at processtransformers@sap.com, and until next time, for another transformative conversation.

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