Data Mesh Radio Episode #292: Aligning Your Data Transformation to the Business

Interview with Nailya Sabirzyanova

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0:00:00 Scott Hirleman
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0:00:07 Starburst
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0:00:29 Scott Hirleman
Data Mesh Radio is provided as a free community resource by Data Mesh Understanding. It is produced and hosted by me, Scott Hirleman. I started this podcast as a place for practitioners to get useful information about data mesh. We're at over 200 episodes. I've now left DataStax, thanks for all their help in founding things, but I've left to start Data Mesh Understanding, which is also helping practitioners to get to the information needed to do data mesh well. We have free implementer introduction and roundtable programs, in addition to the more advanced yet affordable offerings, so please do get in touch if you're looking for more information on how to do, how to approach data mesh. Just check datameshunderstanding.com for more info. There's also a helpful organization of past Data Mesh Radio episodes there if you want to dig into specific topics rather than digging through 200 different episodes. So with that, let's hit the funky intro music and listen to what you'll hear about in this interview episode.

Episode 293: Aligning Your Data Transformation to the Business. Bottom line up front what are you gonna hear about and learn about in this episode? I interviewed Nailya Sabirzyanova, a Digitalization Manager at DHL and a PhD candidate around data architecture and data-driven transformation. To be clear though, she was only representing her own views on the episode. So here are some key takeaways or thoughts from Nailya's point of view. Number one, when it came to microservices and digital transformation, we aligned our application and business architectures. Now, we have to align our application business and data architectures if we want to really move towards being data-driven. Number two, to do data transformation well, you must align it to your application architecture transformation. Otherwise, you have two things transforming simultaneously, but not in conjunction. And so whenever that happens, they start to drift further and further apart.

Number three, it's crucial to involve business counterparts in your data architectural transformation. They know the business architecture best and the data architecture is there to best serve the business. That is a prerequisite to enable continuous business value generation from the actual transformation. Number four, regarding a transformation, ask two simple questions to your stakeholders: What should this transformation enable? How should we enable it? It will give them a chance to share their pain points and their ideas on how to address those pain points. The business stakeholders know their business problems better than the data people. Number five, your approach to data mesh at the start and throughout your journey must be adapted to your organization's organizational model and ways of working. Everyone starts from completely different places. Stop trying to copy/paste from other organizations when their starting points look completely different. Number six, data mesh won't work if you overly decentralize. You must find your balances between centralization and decentralization, and you must find them yourself. Again, this comes up over and over in every episode.

Number seven, potentially controversial, historically, teams were charged for data work and resources. But with something like data mesh, they can manage their data and data costs themselves far more efficiently. Framework processes, tools and skills help teams to identify which data is valuable for their own or other domains and thus requires investment, and which data or data processing operations, things that they've been doing are redundant and thus are a place to gut, that they're a source of savings. Number eight, potentially controversial, you should consider two phases of your early data mesh implementation. Now, calling the first one foundation, Nailya was saying, "Enabling teams to own their data by building corresponding teams, processes and tools." And then the second is operationalization and scaling, which is enabling or incentivizing them to share their data well with others. They have overlap between those two. But if you don't focus on enabling to own data for themselves, you may have trouble incentivizing them to own their own data, let alone share it.

Number nine, to drive incentivization and prioritization well, to do something like data mesh or really most large-scale transformations, you need top down support from the highest levels in the organization. Number 10, potentially controversial, in highly regulated industries, you'll have domains that already have very strong governance capabilities and practices. Focus on enabling them to safely manage their data within a new framework rather than trying to change their ways of working. They've kind of… If they're already decentralized and doing what they're doing, it's really gonna be hard to try and change their ways of working when they already know what they're doing. Focus on making it safe for them. Number 11, relatedly, focus on the frameworks and guidelines as well as the tooling to enable those domains that aren't nearly as advanced in their governance. Number 12, if you are looking to federate, decentralize to all domains at the same time, consider how you leverage central committees. If you don't have someone helping guide people towards some degree of consistency, you can't find repeatable scaling patterns and best practices and are likely to create data silos. I will say it's somewhat of an anti-pattern to try and decentralize and federate all the domains at once, but if you are gonna go down this route, this is something to really think about.

Number 13, the level of importance your company places on your data transformation, mesh or otherwise, should determine how you combine it with your digital transformation. It might be under your digital transformation as part of it, entirely separate but at a peer level, et cetera, but they should get aligned no matter what, to have the best impact. Again, you can have these things that are completely heading in different directions and you're not making a lot of progress, especially progress together. Number 14, everyone must understand that data mesh is a journey, you will learn and adjust along the way. And finally, number 15, getting budget for your data transformation or data mesh journey is probably more political than many expect. The easiest way to get budget is high level management attention. And Scott note, but of course, that could be hard to get that buy in first to get that high level management attention. Okay, enough of just me. Let's hear from our awesome guest in this interview episode.

Okay. Very, very excited for today's episode. I've got Nailya Sabirzyanova here who is the Digitalization Manager at DHL and also a PhD candidate researching in that data architecture area. To be clear though, she's only representing her own views. And we're gonna have another thing, talking about transformation. And I really liked what Nailya was saying about when we were in the pre-call, about historically, we had to learn to align the business and application architectures. And now, we have to add data into that. And so, can we just smoosh data in, or do we have to completely realign? We're gonna talk about those organizations that are coming to data mesh from a decentralized approach. And these challenges are very different. I've talked about this a little bit with "The Journey to Meshtopia," that everybody is trying to

head into that same general area of what a good data mesh implementation would look like, but everybody's starting from completely different places all over the map.

And we're gonna talk about the maturity journey within data, because it's hard to do these incremental improvements when incremental and data hasn't really worked that well historically. So now that we possibly can, hopefully can, how do we rethink that, as well as just data mesh and digital transformation are aligned and you have to integrate these into these things instead of trying to have a completely different data mesh transformation, instead of the way that your entire organization is transforming. But before we get into that, Nailya, if you don't mind giving people a bit of an introduction to yourself and then we can jump into the conversation at hand.

0:10:21 Nailya Sabirzyanova
Yes. Sure, Scott. Hi. Hi, everyone. My name is Nailya and I'm working already 10 years in the area of digital transformation, starting as business consultant and now as digitalization manager at DHL Group. In addition, as it was already introduced, I'm a doctoral candidate dedicating my research also to the area of the data-driven transformation and I'm doing it in collaboration with Johnson & Johnson. And I'm glad to be here to talk about data mesh within the digital transformation, and also to share my personal views, learnings, experiences with you.

0:11:07 Scott Hirleman
Yes. Awesome. And so I would like to start with... I thought this was a really, really great insight and I've repeated it a couple of times. I hope when I have repeated it, that I've given you credit, but I can't promise that I did that every time. But this idea of how difficult was it historically, let's talk about this, of learning how to align our application and business architectures so that we can get at least an idea of how much harder it's gonna be with data? 'Cause you're exponentially adding to the complication factor. But how long, how did that happen or how did you see when you look back, as to how long that took or how long it took to get doing well? I think about this when I think about microservices. Microservices really started to come to the forefront at maybe 2010/2011. And really, people weren't very good at microservices until maybe 2020/2021, so it was kind of a 10-year type cycle. Are you seeing the same thing when you look historically at, just in general, aligning the business architecture and the application architecture?

0:12:23 Nailya Sabirzyanova
So, a very good question, Scott. So actually, I would like to answer with two points to that. Firstly, as representative of academia, as I researched this topic historically from point of view as it has evolved and we all know that application architecture started its movement toward modularization, decentralization much earlier. Already from

the '90s, we hear about that, about also the microservices with a different success of the implementations and so on. And only later, the data architecture transformation following the same trends come up to our stage and also in the area of the enterprise architecture, especially for the large scale company. Now, so when I am talking about my personal experience with different companies where we ran this approach, so one of my personal learnings, it was really extremely important not fully to decouple this data transformation strategy, but always to be fully aligned with the application architecture transformation.

And I'm not saying perfectly aligned, I'm saying just aligned optimally, aligned so that the application and data, they're not players of different roles. Both of them should support our business, our strategic business goal. And based on that, if we have some initiatives, some transformations on the application area, and it is happening with most of the companies, they are building also the domains that are... They are also restructuring the way, how they are delivering the application or the digital capabilities for the business. And also, the same is happening on the data side. And that's why... So, if for the most of the companies, data transformation is coming up afterwards, it should be aligned and integrated with each other. I often saying that it is something like the Lego blocks, so they shouldn't perfectly fit each other, meaning these domains and the structural elements of these two strategies. But they should work, they should be interoperable, they should work together to serve business, because both of them, data should serve business and applications should serve business.
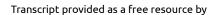
0:15:10 Scott Hirleman
And are you finding... I think that makes perfect sense. This is something that I get frustrated about, is data people doing data things for data people and data people doing data things for the sake of doing data things instead of, to serve the business, to serve the business strategy, what are we trying to do? So let's say that it took a while for the company to align the business and the app architecture, and they don't want to restructure that, they don't want to change everything up to also align to data. Are you seeing that people are able to iterate into aligning, or are you seeing that people have to redo a lot of the work and then there's not a lot of appetite for people redoing the work? So I'm just trying to figure out, say somebody out there is saying, "Okay, I fully agree with Nailya," that, "I fully agree with you," and they want to do this, but do I have to do a ton of work?

0:16:18 Nailya Sabirzyanova
You raised a very important topic. So to get people motivated and engaged and commit for such a transformation, it is an extremely important topic. So from my experience, I have seen two different strategies how data mesh is going to be implemented. So first, companies are more coming from the data teams, from the

data centralized teams, from the data platform teams. And the other way people that are coming more from the business side where they are implementing this transformation more aligned with business and with the business divisions. And this part of commitment of business for this big change, I would say, it is from my point of view and from my experience, it is easier when these strategies are somehow engaged and the business people are incorporated there. So that's why the commitment of business and the leadership of business extremely important for that.

And to make them engaged into this somehow aligning of the strategies, application and the data architecture transformation strategies, it is very important. And you definitely need to find the good arguments to explain why this transformation is important, not only for the whole company, that in the future, we'll be data-driven company and we will transform our business models and we will get, I don't know, competitive advantage and so on. But we should already explain how this will help for your individual function, your, for example, data domain responsible for the business capability, A, B, C, how this transformation, what we are doing here with this framework will help you with your daily business. And they should understand this value. Only within that, people will go with you, will invest the effort, time to support this transformation.

0:18:48 Scott Hirleman

Yeah, I keep having this conversation where people keep trying just to pretend like it's a gotcha, that getting buy in and doing incentivization in data mesh is hard, as if people haven't thought of this. And it's more there isn't an answer that is universal. You just said you have to find the good arguments. Can you just provide us all the good arguments? Well, no, that doesn't make any sense, right? It's just like, can you convince everybody with one phrase? No, they're individuals. So let's say somebody's, again, saying, "Okay, I wanna do this," how have you found to dig into that? Is it just you really have to understand their business? Is it just you have to have conversations with them and they'll just tell you and you just have to learn a little bit to listen? How do you go in? Is it going and going above them and not trying to do it in a stick kind of way, of, "Hey, I'm bringing your boss down to hit you on the nose with the stick to say, "You gotta do this," but to have those conversations and say, "Where is this in the prioritization chain?" What have you found that works well? And maybe, what have you found that really doesn't work well that people keep trying to do? 'Cause I think that second one is just going in and telling them they should do it.

0:20:15 Nailya Sabirzyanova

So, fully agree with you, Scott. So there is no universal answer. There is no universal approach. There are individual journeys, how to get for that. Maybe I can share my experiences where it went actually well. So first, my hint will be, with one of the

journeys of the data transformation, we engage business a lot in the composition into the design of the framework. So the whole strategy started with the question to all the stakeholders, two simple questions; what should enable this transformation? With which means we can enable it? And it worked so well that people... So it was like the questions addressed to more than 200 people. And a lot of people could answer it and contribute to their pain points what they feel could be different with the data and how they see. And explicitly here, they can address also the pain points, the improvement suggestions related to their business. So there is no one who knows the business better than people who are doing it, and that's why we could firstly get real, not biased input, what our organization would expect from this transformation from the framework.

And from the other side, we couldn't get enough broad number of answers not to be biased and also to create the transparency about... So transparency for all the other divisions saying that, "Here and here, there are a lot of improvement potentials," or, "In this area, they expect this and that." And actually, it worked very well. And afterwards, I can even add that people who understood that the new framework incorporates their pain points and our aim to solve them, they were engaged to go with us and to get this transformation journey, that's why I name it journey, successful, and to be committed to that.

0:23:02 Scott Hirleman
Yeah, it's amazing how much it just keeps coming back to, if people feel seen and heard, they react in a way where they'll lean in far more. And I actually had something that came to mind a little bit while we were talking, while you were giving that answer, which was, I feel like data people are used to taking requirements from others. So when they try and go to others, they want to requirement-drop on them and say, "This is what you've gotta do," instead of that conversation around exactly what you're talking about, of going to them and saying, "What would be better? What is going to get you to lean in?" A lot of times, people will just tell you. It's like, "Hey, what are the three things I have to hit in figuring this out for you that are gonna get you to lean in?"

And sometimes, people are gonna tell you one thing and do another and you just have to deal with that, and you have to find the people that you wanna work with. I think this is a big problem in data mesh, is everybody thinks they have to work with everybody at the start, or you have to work with the domain that has the most valuable data. And it's like, if they're not willing to put in the effort to share, if you can't find a good incentivization, you go elsewhere and then you create all this value, and then they're like, "Hey, wait. What about me? I want the value." And you're like... You can't just go, "Well, you didn't say you were gonna, so now we're not going... " But it's that whole gradual build-up of buy in that you're talking about, and this

alignment and all that stuff. I think it just makes sense the more I hear from more people that are focused on this. So, yeah, I think we talked through that pretty well. Is there anything else that you wanted to add onto how people wanna do... Or did you wanna jump into a little bit more of dovetailing of how we think about this coming from how this can apply to when you're thinking about data mesh and you're thinking about coming from a decentralized approach?

0:25:12 Nailya Sabirzyanova
So let's go to the next point of decentralized approach.

0:25:16 Scott Hirleman
Well, and I think this helps because, again, people are... When you look at Zhamak's book, you look at the way Zhamak has talked about data mesh, a lot of it is from an assumption of coming from a centralized approach and then going to federated/decentralized and that type of thing. But when you've already had everybody decentralized, everybody's doing whatever they want, but there's no central cohesion. So how do you think about... From what you've seen of people trying to go to data mesh from a decentralized approach, where do you think people are getting it wrong? Is it that they're trying to play from Zhamak's playbook a little bit too much and that's more focused on centralized to decentralized, or... Where are you thinking that people are maybe making mistakes or overlooking things? Because it is such a different approach. Maybe even explain why it's so different, as well, if you want to.

0:26:18 Nailya Sabirzyanova
So, very interesting point. And I think that, yeah, I would also stress that it is very individual for the organizations, because we are not starting from the scratch. Each organization that is facing such a technological change has some background; background in the org structure and in the cultural level, so regarding the acceptance of the decentralization, how the org structures are built up, how they used to work previously, how this fluency between these different departments... Because one of the elements where we are talking about data mesh, we would like to bring data closer to people. Somehow, that would try to remove data silos, information silos and try to build these cross-functional teams who are working together.

And also, yeah, we are very dependent how previously organization used to work with, how previously cross-functional teams were built, and if it is a usual practice to work in such a manner. And based on that, I would say that it is very individual journey and approach how to move from the previously centralized data teams. And now as we are moving the data closer to business and we would like to decentralize to bring this data closer to business and to make it more decentralized, and we will,

for most of the large-scale companies, and I think even for each of the company, fully decentralized approach will not work with the highest probability. But something in the middle, that also Zhamak says about federalization, will work much better. And this balance between centralization and decentralization is often called federalization should be found individually by each of the company. What are my individual grade of centralization, decentralization level where I say that it is an optimal fit for my company?

And usually... So what I see from my experience, it is that the data platform usually centralized as a platform, because business has not enough knowledge to make complex, I don't know, data integration or something, stuff within this data platform. But as we know, that technology is not staying currently on the place and the self-service functionalities and the ease of use given these new data platforms is becoming much better, so that a lot of already functions could be taken over by business. And the second point regarding decentralization, I think that the whole spirit, the whole value that we are talking about the decentralization, the core is happening that we are giving more responsibility, accountability about the data to business. I even heard about the point that... One hint from one of the companies, how they motivated people to take this ownership, because it is not easy to say that, from today, you are owning your data and now you should do A, B, C, D and so on. People are motivated by the cost control, saying that, using that, you can better control the cost that your department or your domain is taking for your data. And that motivates people to govern data in more federated way.

0:30:34 Scott Hirleman
So I think there's a lot of really interesting points in there, but I wanna hit on the last part for a second, because if people are able to... If you're saying that you can lower your costs, then are people just gonna stop doing data work that is applicable to any other part of the organization, or are you still saying that since we're giving you this control, you still have to provide data for the rest of the organization? 'Cause I think that this is where it gets into those... It's a very particular point. I wanna react to the rest of it as well, but... 'Cause even when you were talking about finding your centralization-decentralization balance, with your hands, you were miming a slider, and that's the thing that I think of, of like... You're like, "Hey, okay, I'm gonna move it up. Nope, nope. That didn't work. I'm gonna move it back a little bit more towards centralization, or I'm gonna... Okay, we started really centralized, we're gonna go way too decentralized, move it back towards centralized or the other way around."

But when you're thinking about that motivation factor, that incentivization, is it different when you're coming from a decentralized approach at the start than from a centralized approach? 'Cause a lot of times, like you said, people already own their data work. They already own a lot of it, at least. And so now, you're like, "Okay, we're

gonna give you much tighter controls over your own costs and things like that." Is that the motivation when it's already a decentralized approach versus a centralized, or... I'd just love to hear more on what you're seeing there.

0:32:06 Nailya Sabirzyanova
So yeah, I would like to stress or to note that together, for most of the organization, it was already previously that the IT cost, also the data cost, were distributed between business. And as previously, business was not really involved in the control of this cost, so they didn't have enough knowledge, and based on that, maybe they didn't have enough instruments to control it. They just accepted it or were not such much involved in this business. But now, as they are getting more instruments and the accountability to control it, so they have much more motivation to say, "What is this data? Why this data loads are coming in?" They have more interest to understand what is behind it in order to be able to control. And also, that leads not only to the motivation to own the data and to govern it properly, it also contributes to the quality of data. Because during these practices, we know that, we identify that there are some data that is not used or could be stored differently or processed differently, and it is also the additional benefit of that.

0:33:40 Scott Hirleman
Yeah. And I've seen as well some people talking about... Iryna Arzner from RBI was on, and she was talking about... She's the head of a line of business herself, and so she was very, very excited about seeing how much value her data could generate for other parts of the organization. And so from an incentivization structure, you can say, "Okay, your team gets more investment into your data work if you're showing value for the rest of your organization, and we're creating a way to track how that flows down." And so you get credit for a significant portion of the value generated by your data. And so if you're probably the domain, your line of business is probably the number one benefactor of your own data work. So if we're investing more and more in your own data, you're going to capture more of that value than anyone else in the organization, but you proved that it was of value by generating this value for other downstream people. But it's still... It's a conversation that has many twists and turns, because it's not the same for... Everybody wants it to be, but...

0:34:55 Nailya Sabirzyanova
It's quite extremely interesting point, and especially, I thought about it a lot of time. So because to get people motivated to share their data, and you know that from the first point of view, you don't know how much value it could generate. You can only guess, and it is the way of the experiment. So you invest your effort, time, money, and then... So you see how it works. And based on that, so really culturally, to trigger this re-usability and to motivate people to move to already the second maturity level of this transformation is a challenging task, I would say. And that's why I especially

highlight that it is next level of maturity. The first... So, to go to the level where you could manage forming this data domains, you could somehow... To give for this data domains, the ownership for their data, to enable them with all the technological background and the instruments to do it. And so the next level would be to trigger this culture of the re-usability data, of sharing data. And that second level, it is even much more difficult, from my point of view, and it is a big social change for the organization. And so we need enough effort, change management and the expertise to implement it.

0:36:37 Scott Hirleman

There's many different questions I could have from that. I guess we can go a little bit divergent from our planned topic for this follow-up question, but should that be on the data team? Should that be on somebody coming from the exact sponsorship level and coming in and rearranging people's KPIs? How do you think that you get that motivation to actually happen instead of just words? 'Cause people aren't paid to serve the rest of the organization, unless they're paid to serve the rest of the organization. Unless they're actually that's part of their remit, unless that's what they're told that they're supposed to do... "Yeah, I wanna help you out, but you're just asking me to do something," versus, "My job is to do this." So how do you think about that working well? And again, I'm not trying to have you... I would love if you could solve it for everybody out there with just a wave of the wand, but how do you think about that conversation internally so that it's not just data people trying to push and push and push and move these massive, massive rocks all by themselves instead of have a bunch of people that are working together?

0:37:56 Nailya Sabirzyanova

So here, I would like also to highlight that even for the first step of these transformation, while we are starting to build the data domains, data products and the whole data mesh principles, it was not the... Could work just in the form of project or single initiative. So it should be a very dedicated leadership support on enough high level, it should be some global strategy. Only in this way, it should work. And so global strategy means also enough sponsorship for that. For the second level, when you need already to motivate to go beyond the core purpose of the data. So firstly, you're saying that my data supporting my business function, and that's why actually I'm interested to have it in a good quality, to have the ownership of that and so on. So there is direct motivation could be raised. But when you are talking about that you need to share this data with others and explore which other departments or domains should somehow benefit of that, so it is already a different question, and based on that, it should also come from enough high; so leadership attention, motivation in using their downstream departments, that it'll bring such... In the future, a lot of value for our company and also for us. Because not we only will share the data for the benefit of others, but the others will also share their data for our

0:40:00 Scott Hirleman
Yeah, and one pushback on that that I've heard is just, "Oh well, yeah, they should share their data so we get the value, but why should we put in the work?" But that's just somebody being selfish, and we can't always solve for that. So I did want to circle back to this, coming from a decentralized perspective to data mesh and the challenges that you've seen that look a little bit different. You talked a little bit about every domain having their ways of working and trying to coordinate them in ways of working. Maybe that's not even the most important thing, but you still need to coordinate them in ways of sharing information, so that way, you don't have... Every single data product looks completely different. So how do you think about that, and how do you think about the concept of finding scalability patterns where you can go from domain to domain and get them participating when everybody works in a completely different way? Like finding those patterns not just on the data side, but on the ways of working side. If somebody's in that perspective, what advice would you have to give to them and maybe what empathy would you have to give to them, of, "Hey, it's going to be a little tough."

0:41:20 Nailya Sabirzyanova
So I think that we're coming to one of the most challenging topics within this data transformation concept. It is the data governance. And definitely, there should be some framework and concept of the data governance, so best of all, in the federated data governance that are moving from centralized to more decentralized way. And it is a journey. So even within the same enterprise, all the departments are so different and all the functions within these departments are so different, and they used to govern the data differently. Some departments were fully relied on the centralized data team, but there are some departments where data, it is already previously was their strategic object. So they were governing it in different way, especially in the industries where that has a very strong government regulation like the pharmaceutical industry, or everything that is related to the patient data. So there are some departments that are only taking care about the patient data, and the norms and the regulations how to do it are totally different with all the rest.

And that's why... So to finding the... So some standard framework for the data governance within the data mesh, so it is very important, but it should be also in the way how to find balance between centralization and decentralization. So you should give the maximum power also for the business people who understand much better how the data should be governed from the other side. To enable scalability, you should have the global framework and the global standards and also the global tool that support you in that, to make it happen. So that's why, unfortunately, there is no

universal framework, but just my highlights that I learned from my experience.

0:43:53 Scott Hirleman
And how do you think about finding those patterns? Specifically, do you have any advice on going in and saying, "Okay, this does work in this other domain. I know they do a different way of working." But have you found anything that's specific to that? 'Cause I know that that's one of the keys to doing data mesh is that you don't... People want it to be exactly the same in every domain, and you have to understand that's not going to be the case at all. But if it's completely different every single time, it becomes more and more challenging because if it took six weeks to get the first domain in and it takes six weeks for every other domain instead of going down to four, then three, then two, then one to one and a half weeks or whatever, it becomes exceedingly expensive to do that for the entire organization. So how do you think about identifying those or sharing those even if it's not perfect for every new domain?

0:44:53 Nailya Sabirzyanova
Very good question. So maybe one advice from my side that worked well in one of my use cases, it is the... I think that most of the companies, they have the data governance committee, and even not one, but several for the large scale companies. So usually, these data governance committees or the organizations, they should as the centralized organ to ensure these conceptual consistency, these centralized frameworks. And also, there is central... Like within data teams, some, I don't know, architectural authority who should enable this consistency from technology point of view. So initiatives that are coming within each domain should be evaluated from both side. There is central, central like functional data governance team or committee or board that ensures from functional perspective, from data perspective, and there is also this technical data team who ensures the architectural consistency. And that, from the centralized approach, help to build up these centralized rules or scalability patterns or best practices, how to make it scalable, actually how to make it in the future faster and faster to implement data initiatives, to generate data product, to build the framework, how to make it not such costly but easy for the department to publish the data product for the benefit of others and not as the first POCs, the first experiments when you are piloting with the data mesh, with the first domain.

0:47:05 Scott Hirleman
Yeah, for sure. I think it's tough because when people hear "central governance committee," they think of somebody that's a gate instead of an enabler, and like, how do you flip that? How do you flip that perception? Maybe how do you stop using even the phrase "governance," and all that fun stuff. So I think we can wrap the last two topics that we were thinking about into one, which is thinking about the maturity journey around data, not just data mesh but also, how do you think about

integrating data mesh into your digital transformation journey? So how do you think about talking to people about transformation, and that it's not about getting it perfect at the start, it's not about getting everything right, it's about making that steady progress? How do you think about starting that conversation? Because historically, if something hasn't been right in data, it's been wrong, which is not the best perception. But also, if you didn't get something right and you had to change it, it was this huge break in change versus we have now iterative processes to make things better.

So let's start with even just, how do you start to have this conversation, and maybe at the different levels? When you're talking to the very, very senior executives, that's going to be a different conversation than a line of business head. And how do you think about getting them on board that we're actually doing something different in data instead of telling you we're doing something different and it's just a new technology, which has kind of been how we've done something different for the last 30 years.

0:48:43 Nailya Sabirzyanova
So, good point. And there are a lot of thoughts that are coming directly to my mind. So first of all, different companies are going different approach. So we know that some companies has global data strategies, some ones don't. Then, some ones has instead digital transformation strategy. And also, the hierarchy of the strategies also could be different. And based on that, where this data mesh or data transformation strategy is happening as a separate, only about data. It is also the question, is it integrated into the digital transformation strategy? It is even on the same level as the digital transformation strategy, like a separate data strategy for the company. So it also depends on how company went its journey. And so there are companies that have a digital transformation strategy, and also in addition, the separate data strategy that are on the same level.

How to integrate. So, some of my use cases that I worked on, so in most of the companies, this data transformation strategy, or it is called data mesh strategy or data fabric strategy, it could be called differently, it is often integrated in the digital transformation strategy. And how this went as a journey, so also, I think very valid point, because we cannot say that it will be something that we clearly see the target so our data will be managed, governed and so on. We could define some principal frameworks on the global level, and only with that, the global framework, we can giving there also enough flexibility to put it down to different departments that could execute different type of business. So it is very essential step. How to speak about that on the different level, so I would say it is also very individual topic depending on how the organization is structured and went this journey. But very valid sentence of you that it is journey. It is definitely journey. And even at the

beginning, if you somehow build up the principles and the framework, it should be adjusted during that time. You should learn from it, you should understand what worked out, what not, which structural elements of your framework fits and where we have the new, during-the-time technological advances, if we have the change of our business or our ecosystem. And that will also impact it, and that's why it is journey. The framework evolves during this journey. Your business needs evolve, your data capabilities and data needs evolve, and that's why you need to be flexible in this journey.

0:52:29 Scott Hirleman
Yeah. This is one of the most frustrating things about data mesh and transformation as well, is just that it depends, it depends, because it is so important to understand that there is no universal answer. But have you found something that is consistent when talking to... One thing that... The reason why I'm asking this question is, again, people are struggling the most on these transformation points. It's that whole thing in software where the hardest thing is the code except for everything else. It's that same thing with data. The hardest thing is the technology, except for everything else. And so have you found something that resonates well in general when you're talking to these different audiences? Because historically, again, data people have come to them and said, "This will solve all of our problems. It is the data warehouse," or "This will solve all of our problems. It is the data lake," or "It is the cloud's data... " or whatever, "It's moving to the cloud," or "It's this, it's that."

And now we're trying to say, "No, we're coming at it and we've got an approach instead of a technology." But they're like, "But you've always told me it was an approach instead of a technology." And so people are frustrated, the business people are frustrated 'cause they've constantly been promised and not delivered when it's come to data. So do you have anything that's really resonating with a lot of people? Is it, "Hey, we're going to deliver value now and much more value down the road. It's not only delivering value three years from now when the world has changed so much that what we were planning on is no longer really useful or valid," or is it, "Hey, we want to engage you, we want you to lean in and what we're going to do is reward you for leaning in, and we're going to reward everybody that leads in in certain ways," How are you finding that people... Are you finding any typical hooks? I know it is different for every single person, so I'm not asking you to solve for everybody. That's not possible. But are you finding some things that more consistently work when having these conversations?

0:54:50 Nailya Sabirzyanova
So I would like to draw parallels. Previously, it was a more centralized data or IT teams that said that data warehouse, data lake, and "Let's try this or that." And it was mostly managed by these centralized technical teams. And now, as the approach changes

and we are saying that we need you, business, to help us to build up this framework, exactly that is needed. We need to hear, even to build the framework, how we will... Not the framework but the approach, how we will get all the people heard, what are their pain points, what they expect from this data mesh data strategy, for which purposes they would use their data, and how we will transform it. And that was pivotal in some of my use cases. If people... So maybe I repeat myself. If people are really engaged in building up this framework, they're engaged in executing it.

0:56:11 Scott Hirleman
It's that feeling, seen and heard. If people feel seen and heard, they lean in.

0:56:16 Nailya Sabirzyanova
Yes, exactly. So because we are trying to solve their topics, we would like to support... That time is coming with some technology and saying that that will solve everything that you needed, but we are saying that now we are starting to speak with you and to understand what you would like. And afterwards, we will identify the proper technology, the proper framework, and we will build it together for the benefit of your business and for our whole company.

0:56:53 Scott Hirleman
So I'm going to ask a very difficult question, and I think the answer is, of course, "it depends." So we had on Alice Parker who just changed her name. I can't remember exactly what it is, it's a very Norwegian name now. I think it's Skramstad. So she did her master's in Human Computer Interaction and Design, and she spent her master's degree with D&B, going in and interviewing all the users of the data platform or all the personas of the data platform, and split it into 10 or 12 different personas, which people think of producer and consumer. And it's like, no, there's a lot more, and there's even the risk officers and the data protection and privacy officers and all that stuff. But how do you get budget relative to the data work, to go and do the necessary work? How do you get the budget to have people spent on going and asking these questions? Because traditionally, people have had a very, very specific role and there isn't somebody that's like the data transformation person.

Does that need to be a specific person? Does that need to be an office underneath the digital transformation office? How do you think about... 'cause people are like, "Well, they have to be super value generating," and people don't think of going and collecting this information as value generating, right? User research, fewer and fewer of those people are doing user research. Most companies are cutting back on user research when they should be investing more, in my view. But that's just part of product management. But how do you think about that conversation of, "We have to do all of this prep work to do this right." How do you get the budget to do that when it's a weird ask from a budgetary standpoint, to, "I need a head that is just going and

0:59:01 Nailya Sabirzyanova
So I think that it is very political question and it also, I would say, depends on how the cost structure and the culture of the company in this regards built up. But so generally, at least for the fundamental parts of the data mesh, if it is a base of one of the global data strategies, or if it is part of the digital transformation strategies, so it already has enough high level management attention and dedicated budget for that. To get this framework evolved, that means also when this foundation is built, you need to run it in the way so our target view that we will constantly improve our data products and generate new data products and publish it. And it is not free of charge, so we need to pay for that. So for that, so budget motivation, it is a very, very good point. Definitely, as I was already saying, that there is no definite response that if we are... For example, as my domain producer of this data product, of a new data product, he could not be 100% sure that it'll be very demanded data product and it'll generate a lot of value.

It is the field of experiment for that. And some of them will be successful, even some more than we expect. Some of them maybe will not be used at all. But without that, it is prerequisite to build up this data-driven culture. And it is the prerequisite in order to try to do with your data, more than just support some of your existing functions and operations if you would like really to have this instrument of leveraging the data to, I don't know, to experiment with new data models, to open new potentials, to try new technologies and so on. So you need to have that. And so definitely, the value realization of that, it is some long-lasting thing, but the potential value behind it, it is much, much more and it should be understood on the top management level and understood the budget request and why investment is required.

1:01:51 Scott Hirleman
Yeah, it's unfortunately that it keeps coming back to, "It sort of depends, and you've got to talk to people." And people are like, "No, I want to do the tech side, I want to do that." But yeah. Well, we've talked about a whole heck of a lot of things today. Is there anything we didn't cover that you wanted to, or any way you want to wrap up the episode?
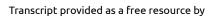
1:02:12 Nailya Sabirzyanova
So I think that it was extremely interesting conversation. Thanks a lot. I think that we covered a lot of interesting points.

1:02:21 Scott Hirleman
Okay. And I'm sure there's going to be a lot of people. I fully agree, don't worry. Yeah, I

really enjoyed it as well. But I'm sure there's going to be a lot of people that would love to follow up with you. Is there anything specific you'd like people following up? Where's the best place for people to follow up?

1:02:39 Nailya Sabirzyanova
Of course, I have usual social media channels like LinkedIn. You can follow up or write me direct questions. I'm currently preparing one of my papers about one digital transformation journey. Maybe it will be interesting for you. I also will be happy to share and to know the opinion of audience, especially your audience that are working in this area or interested to learn about this area.

1:03:12 Scott Hirleman
Awesome. Well, again, thank you so much for your time here today, Nailya. And as well, thank you everyone out there for listening.
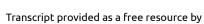
1:03:21 Nailya Sabirzyanova
Thank you.

1:03:22 Scott Hirleman
I'd again like to thank my guest today, Nailya Sabirzyanova, Digitalization Manager at DHL and a PhD candidate around data architecture and data-driven transformation. You can find a link to her LinkedIn in the show notes as per usual. Thank you.

Hopefully that interview episode was really useful for you. Please do consider getting in touch with guests from the show from these episodes. Most have said they'd really love people to reach out to them. And please, as well, if you've got a minute, rate and review the podcast somewhere. It really is honestly super helpful for other people looking into kind of data podcast to kind of get this in front of them. Data Mesh Radio is again, provided as a free community resource by Data Mesh Understanding. It's produced and hosted by me, Scott Hirleman. In April of 2023, I left DataStax who are wonderful in getting the data mesh community stuff started, so give them a shout for streaming and real time AI needs. But I left to start my own industry analyst kind of information as a service firm. Our offerings are affordable, and you can do them on a one-off or a month-to- month basis. Read, kind of throw it on the credit card. Don't worry about going through purchasing and things like that. The services include lots of practitioner roundtables, one-on-one data mesh kind of planning or feedback sessions, and tailored introductions to other data mesh practitioners that are focused around your topics of interest, what are you actually running into challenges with? We also have some free programs around introductions and roundtables that people can kind of check out as well.

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