



Between the Shop Floor, the Boardroom and the Wilderness

*How technical practice, entrepreneurial responsibility and personal experience shape
my work*

Not a complete CV

My professional path did not follow a straight line. It led through technical training and hands-on work, entrepreneurship, major projects and crises. Business and methodological expertise came later. At the same time, I repeatedly sought experiences outside familiar structures: on long journeys, in the desert and in the mountains - in situations where improvisation became more important than planning.

This document is therefore not a complete account of my career. It describes selected stages and the questions that emerged from them:

What remains reliable when a plan no longer works?

What distinguishes a visible symptom from its actual cause?

How does responsibility change when decisions are no longer abstract, but affect people, jobs and liquidity?

And what happens when the person who has always “functioned” reaches a limit themselves?

Today, these experiences collectively shape the way I look at people, organisations and change.



1. Shop floor: When function matters more than explanation

My technical foundation began early: with vocational training in electrical engineering, followed by automotive mechanics, military specialisations in engineer and armoured vehicles, and later training in automotive refinishing.

At first glance, these fields may appear quite different. Yet they teach the same lesson: on the shop floor, what ultimately matters is not how convincing an explanation sounds, but whether something works under real conditions.

- A machine is not impressed by a good presentation.
- An electrical fault does not disappear because the documentation appears plausible.
- A fresh coat of paint does not repair damage to the structure beneath it.

Skilled work demands precision. You have to observe, test, dismantle and be prepared to discard your own assumptions. The visible fault is not always the cause. A failed component may itself be defective - or it may simply be the final link in a longer chain. Replacing it too soon may repair only the symptom while overlooking the connection where the actual fault originated.

Organisations are not machines. People are not components. Nevertheless, one fundamental attitude from that period has stayed with me: before I work on a visible manifestation, I want to understand how it arose and what it is connected to.

2. Entrepreneurship: When decisions have tangible consequences

Hands-on work led me into self-employment and the management of businesses. I founded and ran a limited liability company with more than 200 employees, co-founded a construction company organised as a public limited company and served on its supervisory board. For many years, I moved between construction sites, workshops, financing, personnel matters and strategic decisions.

From the outside, entrepreneurial responsibility often appears more orderly than it feels in everyday life. It consists of decisions that have to be made with incomplete information. An investment may be necessary and still involve risk. Growth can create opportunities while simultaneously overburdening the organisation.

Consulting often ends with a recommendation. Entrepreneurial responsibility begins there. A decision has to be financed, explained and implemented. Its consequences show up in liquidity, contracts, the mood of a team and sometimes around a family's kitchen table.

I learned that a technically correct decision is not necessarily a viable one. People have to be able to implement it. Structures have to be able to support it. I also came to understand the distance between the different realities within a company: what appears logical in the office may be impractical on a construction site. What management regards as a necessary consequence may be experienced by employees as a loss of security.

For me, being an entrepreneur therefore meant more than making decisions. It meant perceiving and carrying their effects across several worlds at the same time.

3. Major projects and crises: When decisions must be made and implemented

Later, my path led into large public-private and military IT projects. At Toll Collect, I worked, among other things, on crisis management for the start of operations. I subsequently assumed responsibility at BWI Systems, within the Siemens environment, for teams, budgets and security-critical systems, including the stabilisation of the German Armed Forces' Military Message Handling System.

In projects of this kind, technology, contracts, suppliers and different organisations are closely interwoven. A later project illustrates what matters alongside specialist expertise: senior management asked me to take over project leadership for the West region in the "Next Generation Network" programme. The project had run into serious difficulty. Deadlines were at risk and trust had been lost.

The team was under direct pressure from both senior management and the client. Requirements and operational interventions reached employees through different channels. The team began to burn out between constantly changing expectations.

My condition for taking over was a clear communication and accountability structure: escalations and priority decisions had to be channelled through project leadership. This boundary did not shield the team from responsibility - it made responsibility unambiguous. The team gained a reliable working framework. On this basis, we were able to reprioritise subprojects, consolidate the schedule and rebuild trust step by step. In the end, the West region delivered the rollout of 75,000 end devices, including the associated backend infrastructure, on schedule.

For me, this once again made one thing clear: leadership in a crisis does not mean passing pressure straight down the line. It means creating a framework in which information converges, accountability becomes clear and people can work reliably again.

At the same time, reflection must not become a new form of paralysis. At some point, decisions have to be made and implemented. This tension still guides me today: looking closely enough to avoid working on the wrong problem - while remaining pragmatic enough to turn insight into action.

4. The turning point: When responsibility has to be understood differently

For a long time, my answer to difficult situations was greater effort. When a project came under pressure, I worked longer. When something did not work, I looked for another way to solve it.

This mode had carried me for many years. It helped me build companies and manage crises. At some point, however, this strength became a pattern. Strain became something that had to be controlled. Limits appeared to be problems that discipline could overcome.

Then my body applied the emergency brake. The breakdown was not a single event. It was the sum of many years. And it confronted me with a question that could no longer be answered by additional effort:

Do I want to carry on like this - or am I prepared to carry responsibility differently?

The way back consisted of two years of decision-making and three years of transition. Five years marked by uncertainty, setbacks and an honest examination of the part I myself had played in the condition I wanted to change.

I had to learn that responsibility does not mean carrying everything alone. That control is no guarantee of safety. And that performance loses its value when it is sustained at the expense of the person who is meant to make it possible.

I recognise this “Warrior Mode” very well today. It can take companies a long way. In a crisis, it may be necessary. But when it becomes the permanent operating state, it begins to wear down people, teams and ultimately the organisation itself. Since then, I have been cautious about quick promises. Change needs a sustainable framework, an honest assessment of the situation and respect for the people expected to implement it.



5. Wilderness: When familiar certainties disappear

Alongside my professional path, I repeatedly sought experiences outside familiar systems.

I undertook long-distance bicycle journeys, including in Georgia, Cuba and the Himalayas. I drove my expedition truck through remote regions, across mountain passes and through the desert - sometimes with my family, sometimes alone. I built bicycles for my children and myself, on which we undertook long tours together. The desire to share different realities of life was already part of this path.

Such journeys are not an alternative world to responsibility. They intensify it. When a vehicle breaks down far from support, no responsibility matrix will help. When the weather or route develops differently from the plan, you have to work with what is actually available. Preparation remains important, but it cannot protect against every surprise.

In such situations, what truly carries becomes visible: experience, improvisation, composure and the willingness to make a decision without complete certainty.

The wilderness also changes one's sense of proportion. What fills everyday life does not become meaningless, but it can be seen in a different perspective. Roles, status and routines lose some of their weight for a time. Silence makes thoughts audible that receive little space in the normal course of a day.

I do not romanticise these experiences. A special place does not solve a problem or change a person by itself. But a different setting can change perception. It can interrupt routines and reveal which assumptions still hold when familiar points of orientation disappear.

This experience is now part of my work. Not every question requires an extraordinary place. Some need a meeting room, a clear agenda and a consistent decision. Others gain a new quality through movement, a workshop or a few days of distance. The setting follows the task.

6. Experience is complemented by methodological craft

Structured project management, an MBA in International General Management from the University of Wales Cardiff, and training as a mindfulness-based systemic coach (MbsC, DGSF) later complemented my practical experience.

The MBA gave me the language for strategic relationships, conflicting objectives and business decisions. Not every solution that is desirable from a human perspective is economically viable. And not every decision that makes economic sense in the short term contributes to an organisation's long-term stability.

Systemic practice adds a crucial perspective: it focuses not only on individuals or visible events, but also on relationships, roles, expectations and interactions. Behaviour develops within a context that encourages, limits or may even make certain responses appear reasonable in the first place.

In this context, mindfulness does not mean turning away from commercial or operational reality. It means, first of all, perceiving more precisely:

- What is actually happening?
- Which explanation have we already turned into truth?
- Whose voice is being heard - and whose is not?

The path from hydraulic to social systems is shorter than it may initially appear. In both cases, it is worth understanding connections and pressure relationships before intervening. At the same time, the analogy ends there: people cannot be repaired, replaced or reduced to a single function.

Methods help me today to organise observations and test hypotheses. They replace neither experience nor judgement. And they are not the centre of the collaboration. The method follows the situation.

7. Between worlds: What connects today

These different stages have given rise to an understanding of work that does not separate technical, economic and human aspects.

This experience also shapes the way I look at difficult situations in organisations: visible behaviour rarely arises in a vacuum - it emerges from the interplay of people, roles and structures. Before I work on a manifestation, I want to understand how it came about. That applies to a machine just as much as it does to a team.

Conclusion

Change becomes sustainable when people can recognise more clearly what is actually happening, take responsibility and regain the ability to act together. This requires a reliable framework, an honest view of the situation and the courage to take the next sensible step.

That is what guides my work.

If you recognise a similar dynamic in your organisation and want to understand not only the visible behaviour but also its causes: Begin a confidential conversation.



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