



INTERVIEW WITH NIKLAS HEDIN

CEO & Chief Architect at Centiro

Niklas founded Centiro in 1998 based on insights of the gaps in the market for Delivery Management that needed a new solution. He brings more than 20 years of experience of how to develop businesses using insights and hands-on-experience on supply chain and IT. He has led his company at the forefront of the industry, which has rendered Centiro several awards and status as a leading platform in Delivery Management. Niklas long experience as innovator and strategist catalyzes the conversation and inspires to get to the next level in business.

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1: What is the best professional decision you have ever made?

Niklas: Wow, great question. I guess the best overall decision I have taken so far is to found Centiro based on the sentence "This company shall be the best place for employees and customers". It has taken me and my colleagues on the journey of our lives, around the world, providing insight on the challenges many different organizations face and how we can help them. It was a big decision for a tiny organization at the time, but I have stayed true to the sentence almost twenty years now, and we are still exploring our potential with great appetite and fun.

2: What is the worst professional decision you have made and what did you learn from it?

Niklas: I guess the worst kinds of decisions tend to be the ones I don't make, or make late. I have to let go of blame practices, as much as I am conscious of being controlling, and learned great benefits from a positive focus. I have also learned and trained over time to be more decisive, and know when to speed up and slow down.

I'm sensitive to when I create obstacles in my decision-making. More often than otherwise, you don't get wiser by over-analyzing. Make a short and crisp analysis, and then go. Dare to make mistakes, learn, repeat. You'll succeed faster."

3: What are the three top values/ characteristics for success and why?

Niklas: Leadership in combination with their respective organization controls, at least 50% of the impact on the business value created by the organization. Which is why, culture to empower, organizational design to make it easier to achieve desired results, and strategy to drive focus as well as alignment between these elements are my top three. Or perhaps four.

4: Centiro is known for its work friendly culture and qualitative services. What were the challenges and benefits faced in order to create such culture?

Niklas: There is always a challenge when you challenge status quo and the perceived normal way of designing an organization and workplace. But what is normal anyway? As a leader, you need to carry daring patience with you and remind yourself that leadership is about listening, understanding, and two-way communication, to understand the difference between the state of now and the desired tomorrow, and to create excitement and positive tension so there is a desire to move together. Today, it is a well-known fact that our organization creates results above and beyond the expected. I believe there is a fear from leaders of letting go and a misconception that a soft focus and a human centric view blurs the boundaries of structures, processes and discipline. We have proved this to be plain wrong; a strong culture with high levels of trust and positive energy is your best companion if your desire is to achieve crisp results in process and value for customers as well as your own organization. I believe more and more organizations are waking up to this initially counterintuitive fact when the need for change is pressing more and more urgently on organizations.

5: How do you encourage creative thinking within your organization?

Niklas: Two important elements are to identify every individual as equally important as a potential contributor, and to allow for mistakes. My father taught me that a pecking hen achieves more than the sitting one. Once in a while, you pick up a bad seed, but the important part is to learn from mistakes and extract the positive value, and refrain from blaming and punishing. We also train the organization in various techniques such as design thinking, but it is really a leadership exercise in highlighting good examples that others wish to follow, and to structure for innovation. Unless you achieve what is called psychological safety and trust, colleagues are reluctant to bring good ideas forward - ideas are brittle in early stages and you don't want to see your baby get squashed by bad feedback. Understanding fears, desires, drives and personal profiles, and building a strong feedback culture with positive focus is central to our work on creativity.



6: What is the vision of your company?

Niklas: “Our purpose is to empower commerce for companies with winning aspirations, who seek to make a difference”. This sentence is about the choice we have made to enable our customers to play at the top. It also reflects the implicit consequence that we have to both understand our customers really well to help them succeed, as well as having high ambitions and standards in our own organization.

Centiro stems from the latin word Sentire meaning “I sense, I understand.” It’s the very core pillar that underpins our curiosity and drive.

#7: How are standards helping you achieve this vision?

Niklas: As we work with world-class brands and customers, demands on quality and security are always very high. Organizing our management system according to standards has harmonized the discussion internally and externally about what we mean, and gives us a cycle for risk-management and continuous improvement. Standards make it easier

for us to communicate. Before the certified standards, we still had high quality in our work, but we had to spend a lot of time to explain and communicate.

8: Centiro is certified against multiple standards* on security and personal data protection including ISO/IEC 27001 Information Security, ISO/IEC 27017 Cloud Security, ISO/IEC 27018 Protection of Personally Identifiable Information, ISO/IEC 27032 Cybersecurity, ISO 22301 Business Continuity, and the GDPR.

What benefits have these standards brought to your company?

Niklas: In a world challenged by increasing cyber-security threats, we have a greater readiness and awareness of the risk-landscape, and perhaps more importantly, how we can mitigate risks and react promptly. Also, putting us in a different league when speaking to customers who understand what these standards mean, it’s much easier to prove we’re serious about our craft, removing doubts on our relative small organizational size. It is also important to mention the pride we instill in colleagues who want to be associated by the highest levels of professionalism.

What challenges did your company face to implement such standards?

Niklas: As always, you need the company to operate, implement change and document all this simultaneously. Anyone who has tried knows this can drain energy and focus. But we quickly found a model on how to organize both processes, risk-framework and management system that mitigated the risk of standard-fatigue. My colleagues deserve kudos for the drive to finish, and moving well beyond the target. We also had a unique alignment from the board, through senior leadership all the way to the individual colleague, which I know is perhaps the toughest challenge in many organizations. We talked a lot about why this work was important to us, and created a shared vision to overcome the alignment risk.

9: Centiro has successfully established a green workplace, green culture, and the use of efficient energy and transportation; overall you are an environmentally responsible company. What is the key role that standards have played in the achievement of this status?

Niklas: From board-level, we have issued a multi-pillar policy, defining our ambitions on operating a responsible and sustainable company in the society, for employees, customers, and partners. Culture and a strong operational foundation enables us to work to achieve these ambitions, and standards allow us to organize our process and communicate how we are doing. Our new office building is certified towards Swedish Environmental Building Gold, the highest attainable standard in Sweden. Standards help us reach higher, and our mindset is to go further. The energy reduction target in the building standard is 25% - we reach 80%. The toughest international standard declares a minimum 10% share of renewable energy – we reach 100%. In the end, it's about who we aspire to be as a company, our strategy and the tools we have chosen to reach company goals. Standards are components in a multi-faceted thought, aiming towards achieving higher goals than pure profit. Profit is just one result among others, easier to achieve if the other

pieces fall into place, which may seem counter-intuitive to a lot of excel-driven decision makers.

10: Among the standards that you have already implemented, which standards would you highly recommend to other organizations and why?

Niklas: It depends on your specific situation – for most organizations using IT, I would start with ISO 27001, alongside any other compliance standard such as GDPR, which is demanded by the law. If you have issues in the work-force, I would start to look at ISO 45001, which addresses good practices in the work environment. My recommendation is also to not stop at one, but consider a selection of standards that represent your ambitions as a company.

11: Are you looking forward to the implementing other standards?

Niklas: The latest addition is our certification against Privacy Shield, which addresses information exchange between EU and US for our customers. With eight ISO certificates and the recent PECB award, I think we deserve to celebrate and think about your question for a minute before we move on. However, we are always open for future relevant standards implementation that will help us further development.

12: The 14th of October marks the World Standards day, a very important day to the globalized world. Can you tell us what Centiro plans in the global market are? How can standards help to answer the market needs?

Niklas: We are building a global, leading company, and I foresee we can continue doing that for a while, considering the tremendous success that standards brought us. Thus, we have thought for our future plans and we signed up for the UN Global Compact program two years ago, and work to implement the ten principles of a sustainable organization. Our ambitions and plans, above our commercial goals, are to inspire the world around us to think differently, reach higher and do more.

Our latest office building uses four sources of energy, 100% renewable, including our own solar production. Our plan is to continue to work with customers in relevant markets that have equally ambitious goals for making a difference alongside their commercial ambitions, and to have fun while we push the boundaries of ourselves and our customers.

#13: What advice would you give someone entering into a leadership position for the first time?

Niklas: My two cents circle around people - once you become a leader, you need to be authentic, and able to remove yourself as a factor from a conversation in order to be present and help others. It's so easy to put yourself in the way of helping others succeed, making yourself important. Prestige is a scary currency, best

not dealt with, in my opinion. Understanding yourself, and being confident enough to remove yourself from focus is the first key. Second, I coach freshmen leaders to first listen to the organization, and learn something about the human beings you are asked to lead, above and beyond their professional skills. I believe in servant leadership - how can I help you? Third - if you can combine your insights of where people come from, their views and ambitions, with insights of where the organization needs to go, and your own focus on how to best encourage people to get there, you are on to something. The most common mistake I see early managers and leaders do is playing pretend - they step into a role because they think they have to. Relax, be yourself and lead with all three parts - heart, mind and backbone. People sniff if you are not authentic, and you risk diminishing your leadership effectiveness.

