

The State of Tech in Ireland

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Speaker 1: Tech Reimagined, redefining the relationship between people and technology brought to you by Endava. This is Tech Reimagined.

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Bradley Howard: Welcome back to Tech Reimagined. I'm Bradley Howard and today I'm sitting down with our very own head of innovation, Joe Dunleavy, who's based in Donegal in Ireland. As a self confessed geek, Joe has always been fascinated by what's next in science and technology. As he gets a lot of joy from helping people make a breakthrough, so innovation has seemed like a perfect fit. Hi Joe, it's lovely to have you here today. How are you?

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Joe Dunleavy: Hi, Bradley. Good. Thank you. Thanks very much for the opportunity.

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Bradley Howard: Can you tell us a bit more about where Donegal is in Ireland?

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Joe Dunleavy: Yeah, absolutely. Donegal is the most northwesterly county in the country of Ireland. So we're right up there in the corner. Basically. Next stop Iceland, if you're a really good swimmer or if you're a kind of heading due west, it's probably Newfoundland and north of Canada. So we're, we're right on the Atlantic seaboard in the Northwest coast. So very beautiful place. Stunning scenery, lots of beaches, lots of jagged coastline, lots of golf and that type of thing, but it's very green and it does rain quite a bit. So it's where I like to say as the Atlantic ocean and the power and the water comes across those clouds form. It hits the west coast of Ireland, has to dump that rain somewhere. So we take all of the rain for the rest of Ireland.

By the time that you get it in London there, Bradley you're welcome. We've taken all that rain for you. That's why anyone that tells me that London is wet. I go really? You want to come to Donegal. Cause when it's stunning, it's a really beautiful place to live and you're to hill walk and mountains, sea. And any of that stuff that's saying here is there's no such thing as bad weather, just bad clothing. Cause you can get all four seasons in one day, but it's a stunning place to live and, and to have a family.

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Bradley Howard: So what's the weather like out the window right now?

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Joe Dunleavy: It's actually dry today. It's literally bone dry and it's gorgeous. It's clear. There's very little cloud and it's roughly about it's seven degrees Celsius. So it's quite cool with a breeze, but there's no clouds in the sky there and there's no rain. So I literally contradict myself. But it's a nice day today.

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Bradley Howard: It's a real sign of the times when you ask what's the temperature at the moment someone looks at their watch straight away. So what's the tech landscape like in Ireland at the moment?

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Joe Dunleavy: It's very strong, particularly from a foreign direct investment perspective. And the startup ecosystem has developed a lot over the last couple years I was born in '81, went to college in 1998. So as I was coming out of college in 2002, there was a huge increase in the technology companies and foreign direct investment locating in Ireland. So from an Irish perspective, we are five hours teaching standard time. We have had a huge amount of people of my era that went to college. So an awful lot of people went to university of my friends and family because it was a lot of it was funded by the Irish government. So what happened was in abundance of people coming out of college, an awful lot of people studied software engineering and computer science. And over the last kind of 20 to 30 years, there's been a really big drive in a lot of US companies and European companies putting foreign direct investment directly into Ireland.

So we've had, I think it's around six or 7% of the GDP of Ireland now comes in through US foreign direct investment companies. So we have the European headquarters of everybody from Microsoft, Facebook, Amazon, Intel still fabricates chips here, which is really interesting. The company they've spent billions of euros investing in fabrication of the latest and greatest chips here in Ireland. So it's been really vibrant because you've got so many people coming out of college, a lot of jobs in software engineering technology, a lot of interest in it. And then you've got that whole dynamic of a lot of demand from those companies looking for good people. So what's happened is we've also seen a really, really large rise in the diversity of Ireland. Cause we had a lot of people from throughout the world come to locate to Ireland to make it their home and to work in technology.

And what's really nice about all of that is we've also seen a fairly large increase then in the startup ecosystem because people have had the experience of working at a large financial services company or Microsoft. And if they've had that itch from an entrepreneur perspective to maybe do something, they might roll out of the company to experience the startup ecosystem, some of their colleagues may join them in that as well. So what started to happen in Ireland is you're now starting to see a really nice vibrant community of the large foreign direct investment technology companies employing sometimes two and a half, 3000 people in Ireland. For example, Apple down in Cork, Amazon in the silicon docs in Dublin, for example, you're going to see those examples, people spinning out in the startup ecosystem. So you're starting to see the nice balance.

In addition to that, the Irish government have done a lot to incentivize R and D tax credits. And more recently they created half a billion, B billion, Euro disruptive technology innovation fund, that if you are a foreign direct investment company, a small startup and an academic partner, if the three of you come together to perform research, you can get like millions of Euros of investment matched by the Irish government. So it's really starting to be coast that I think people can be proud of and it's getting more distributed throughout the country, which is great to see.

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Bradley Howard: Yeah, that's lovely. So here in the UK and lots of other places in the world at the moment, there's a real shortage of talent in the tech industry. What's it like in Ireland at the moment?

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Joe Dunleavy: It's a very real thing, right? Like I mentioned earlier a lot of Irish people went to college and studied computer science and went into it. But what you've had is you've had more demand for roles and companies coming to Ireland and startups that have Irish indigenous companies that have grown themselves. So it's been a lot of welcoming people from throughout the world. My previous company that I worked at, we had 36 nationalities represented out of about 1600 people here in Donegal and Letterkenny. So it's a town of about 30,000 people. So to have that diversification of people coming in has been fantastic from 35 nationalities represented. So I suppose this really goes back to, there's a strong emphasis on creating the talent at the lower level.

So we've got kids coding at younger ages. We've girls who code, for example, would be an initiative that would be supported by volunteers where you're trying to get kids involved in the interest in stem or steam where you add the a in for arts. So that's been a very strong focus, but at the end of the day, I think it's Ireland as a welcoming country to bring people in from throughout the world. And it's great to see cause you're seeing that diversity in towns and cities throughout Ireland because in the Ireland that I would've grown up in the eighties from a diversity perspective, looks very different than the Ireland of today, which is more a modern Ireland. And it's fantastic to see the influence of other cultures, other people coming here. So it's been one of welcoming people, Bradley, to the country, but clearly in certain niche skills, artificial intelligence, data science, for example, there's still way more work than there is actual people.

The Irish government are doing a good bit though to incentivize people to study in those areas and universities and colleges are creating content and courses specifically like a masters of data science, for example, that probably seven, eight years ago didn't exist. I don't think anyone has a silver bullet for the bridging the skills gap, I suppose. It's just make it as easy as possible for people to jump into the technology scene. But yeah, there's an awful lot of jobs out there at the moment in Ireland. Like I suppose most countries in the world at the moment, especially after COVID so it's easier to position some people into roles than it is others.

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Bradley Howard: That's really good to hear. So you're working for Endava in Ireland and I understand you're looking for a few Irish companies to partner with. What kind of companies are you talking to at the moment?

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Joe Dunleavy: So I suppose it's within the Irish tech ecosystem companies that are looking for assistance maybe with innovation or adopting some emerging technologies. There's a lot of the foreign direct investment companies I spoke about, but some of the companies that we've been speaking to recently and locally have been more indigenous Irish companies that are maybe they're early on in the stage of adopting cloud, for example. So how would they adopt the cloud in a way that can deliver an awful lot of value for them, but are maybe not quite sure where to start. We've been talking to companies around that type of stuff. In addition to that, it might be data, right? Data science, artificial intelligence, lot of companies gathering a lot of data more and more data being generated. So how can you make value out of that data?

And that's not always data science, it might just be presenting it in something like a Tableau or a power BI dashboard to give people the insight that they can make decisions on. So some of it is what we're talking about is more the early stage steps to adopting

data and the value that it can bring to then jump into maybe more data science, artificial intelligence.

And we are having conversations with other companies around things like core ML. So machine learning, artificial intelligence for maybe companies that are more advanced in their own adoption of data science. But it's interesting. It runs the gamut, right? Some are more legacy, still carry some legacy tech depending on the industry and they're looking to transform. So how can we assist with that? And then some are more on the leading or bleeding edge of things as well. So it's really interesting talking to people on any given. I suppose the challenges sometimes are similar, but they're not the approach in terms of how you go about addressing them aren't always the same. So I think that's always the fascinating part.

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Bradley Howard: So Joe, you joined during the pandemic, what was it like joining a new company during the pandemic?

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Joe Dunleavy: It's a really interesting question because I never worked from home before the pandemic ever. I was in the office every single day. I didn't even do the Friday, every other Friday or every second Friday working from home. It just wasn't for me. So when the pandemic hit, we were kind of told here in Ireland take your laptops. We probably, before to six weeks here, you might want to take the laptop, switch you. I didn't really look forward to it at all in terms of it wasn't, I didn't think it was going to be for me. And yet here I am now as a digital native working for Endava London headquarter company out of Letterkenny. So the transition's been something that I'm surprised how well it's gone. I must admit, I love doing the working from home now.

The routine is going really, really well with it. So I, I run quite a bit. So I train in the morning. So the ability to get out and get a run in, get back home, get the kids to school and straight into work. Not that I had much of a commute before this, but every minute you kind of have, it feels a little bit more like you have a lot more ownership of it. So that's been absolutely fantastic. I'm blessed to be sitting at the end of a fiber broadband. So I've got a gig fiber to the home here. I also have a solar ray. So because of that, I've got uninterrupted power, which is really nice as well. So the transition's been better than I ever expected, Bradley, to be signed up now as a remote worker has been fantastic.

It's been a journey for me, but I think I'm definitely interested in the balance. Right? So how do you also get in person interaction as well? Because you know, going over to meet the folk, I still haven't got to Endava in London, for example, I've gone to clients, I've traveled for clients and I traveled to some other locations, but I haven't been to HQ yet, which is really strange. And suddenly, clearly I'm looking to address early in the new year with the numbers and COVID pending, but it's been really interesting, I suppose. It's surprised me how much I love now working from home. But I think like everything else, I'm a big fan of the middle, right? I don't think anything at the extremes works very, very well. So I think having an outlet maybe to go to a common workplace or a shared workplace here locally, or traveling over a little bit more to London and, and other Endava locations would, would definitely be nice. Surprised me more than I expected it would have made the transition.

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Bradley Howard: You have quite a unique relationship with Endava, because you were actually a customer of Endava a while ago. And now you work obviously inside the company. What's your observations like from inside Endava during COVID?

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Joe Dunleavy: It's really interesting. I lived in the US for three years when I worked for Prudential Financial, my previous employer. As part of that, I got a chance to work with some non-profits 5013C charity organizations within the US and I had to engage a digital company actually to do some work for this nonprofit. So I engaged Nickelfish at the time, which is a company that Endava acquired. They were really a great company. Nickelfish Knocked it out of the park. They Were fantastic to work with. I suppose the thing that stood out for me was the culture of the organization. And when I went to meet the team in person in Mendham, New Jersey, and I'm glad to say that the culture of what Nickelfish had and what Endava acquired is very strong. And obviously I'm slightly bias in that I'm part of Endava, but I'm in six months here.

So the reality is what stood out for me were one big staff of Endava more than anything else. And that was one third of the staff here, our here, two staff referral, which I think in fairness, when you think of a company's culture, if you really want to have a culture, that's something tangible that you can feel and experience that stood out for me. So when I had the opportunity to come on board and join Endava, I was really intrigued to see that culture and how it's stacked up. So it's been a blast. The people are absolutely brilliant. I know we talk about Endavans as like a family, we refer to ourselves as a family. I know there's a strong focus on that. And I do genuinely think, and again, I'm obviously slightly biased, but in coming in new, it has surprised me just how much the culture is so real. It's such a people centered company. It's a bit like the approach towards people centered technology. I think we're a people centered company, I think it's been really strong. It's been great to see.

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Bradley Howard: Back to the subjects about Endava now having more offices in Ireland, we're trying to establish a presence there for companies that are looking for a flexible IT partner. How are you working with the sales teams on that?

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Joe Dunleavy: So working with the sales teams in terms from a brand perspective, getting the endeavor brand out, particularly in Ireland, Endava would have obviously headquarter in the UK would be well known within the United Kingdom. In Ireland we've probably got a little bit more work to do. So I've been working with Dennis Nevin, the head of sales for Ireland on what our presence looks like, how we show up. I mean, I think that the idea is around to be relevant to people, right? So in order to be relevant, we have to get out there what it is that we do. So part of our focus, the end of this year and early into next year is around telling our story, who are we, what we do, what services do we offer and that type of thing. I think it's only fair that we need to be top of mind for people when it comes to, if they have work, they want to get done from a digital perspective.

If they want to engage a partner, to do artificial intelligence or something in the innovation and disruptive technology space. We need to be out there and more aware. So with a conscious effort recently in getting the name out there through the social media channels, we've also been showing up and started attending some of the key conferences

and, and luckily getting opportunities to speak at the conferences. But at the end of the day, the only reason we're doing that is, is to, to make connections, right? I think the power of business is the connections and being known to those organizations. So being better known in Ireland to open up the conversations with companies is going to give us more relevance within Ireland and certainly give us the opportunity to do more within the country, and we'd be excited to work with companies on their opportunities from a disruptive technology and an innovation perspective.

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Bradley Howard: We wish you the very best of luck for that. Thanks Joe, for joining us on Tech Reimagined and today's insightful and enjoyable conversation. To all of our listeners, hope you enjoyed this episode of tech re imagined and thank you so much for joining.

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