Abstract:

This dossier features 18 interview transcripts with ICT professionals working in or for firms located in the National Technology Park (NTP), Limerick. Conducted by Dr. Anthony D’Andrea (ISSP Research Fellow, Dept. Sociology, UL) over the year 2009 until early 2010, these are semi-structured ethnographic interviews lasting an average of 90 minutes (varying from one to three hours each). Following ethical research protocols, the identity of all interviewees and their firms are protected with the use of pseudonyms. The interviews explore and register three sets of questions:

1) biographical questions about the individual’s background, professional trajectory, basic work function, family and lifestyle;

2) work questions about daily work activities and their integration with new technologies, new forms of employment, mobility, connectivity and networking practices and regimes at local, regional and international levels;

3) institutional questions: firm choices over location, perceptions of quality of services and interaction enabled by regional and national agencies, and socio-economic changes in Ireland, particularly during the “post-Celtic Tiger” years.

This dossier provides empirical grounds for research conducted in the project “Nomadic Work/Life in the Knowledge Economy” co-directed by Dr. Breda Gray and Dr. Luigina Ciolfi, respectively from the Departments of Sociology and Computer Science and Information Systems at the University of Limerick. The project was sponsored by the Irish Social Science Platform, funded under the HEA Irish Government PTLI4 (Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions) and EU Regional Development.

Keywords: labour, lifestyle, work practices, employment, mobilities, high-tech professionals, ICT, software firms, technology park, Limerick, Shannon region, Ireland.
Describe your lifestyle and family, about yourself.

I am a remote worker. I work at home, living in West Kerry, and we have an office in Plassey, where we have a number of software engineers. So, I have a home office and do a lot of my work from there. I live with my family, I have a wife and two children. My wife is an artist. My kids are under 10.

Do you like working at home? Do you prefer to be a remote worker?

Yes, most certainly so. I’ve been working for 25 years plus, I’ve worked in the US and Ireland, and corporate offices, and so on, so I’ve tried it all. Obviously it doesn’t suit everyone, but for me it is just perfect. Because lifestyle-wise, we live in a fantastic area, and school-wise, there is no traffic, school is around the corner literally, and it is a wonderful community for living. And for the purposes of work, I find that the advantages outweigh any disadvantages, our client base is everywhere. This means we can provide support for them, not practically 24 hours, but I can respond to support an issue at 11 pm, having the ability to do that. Whereas some people in their office, it is a situation that means that the door is closed at 5pm and stuff like that, and that’s necessary in some instances. But my type of work, I like embedding our work in what we do, so it is fairly seamless, and we don’t mind doing it like that.

Do share home choirs, being flexible, but also that you work more hours than at an office?

Yes, but it is wonderful because you spend more real time with your children, and also do the household choir aspect, which is shared better, so we share dinner and that kind of thing. So it does broaden your skill set in terms of traditional role model of male, working model. As I just said, taking children to school and so on. That’s extremely positive. We see a big increase in that where I live. Before we used to see the mom at the school gate, and now at our school 50% are like that, which is a good thing.

Certainly I work more hours by being at home. But as I say, the way I approach work, I embed it in my lifestyle, so I don’t necessarily have a defined divide between the two things, it doesn’t bother me to get up and answer some work at 11pm, if I need to. It is different than I used to do things in the past, when I had a divide. But that’s because I am a company owner now.

Is it source of stressful to work more hours and at home, in comparison with other arrangements?

There is no comparison, it is imminently superior. If you compare the amount of time that you spend sitting in a car, having to deal with issues that are not related to the growth of your business, such as non-relevant meetings and that sort of stuff. There is no comparison. I know a lot of other people who work in a similar way, and they would echo that. That the time they spend on things is much more focused, as opposed to doing the time as regular work.
So you don't see any downsides in remote working?

Not for me. I can see... We have a team with whom I work remotely; other people might say that there are disadvantages that you are not there face-to-face. But to be honest I don’t see that as a disadvantage. We have another guy in San Francisco who works in an identical capacity to me. I may meet him once a year, if at all. There are people I have been working for five years plus, and I have never seen them. And it has no effect upon the quality of what is delivered, or... even, as you would be able to pick up the phone and sort something out. I’d say, and it is common, that I work with people that I have never met, and then having a continuing work relationship.

Is this more related with people overseas (because in Ireland you could meet them)?

Yes, we could meet, but is just my personal preference not to travel. In my past corporate life I did lot of travel, and I am kind of allergic to travel. It takes me a lot to make me move, that applying both in Ireland and outside of Ireland. I don't go meet people if I can, because the level of effort is very high.

But what about issues of trust, that you have when you have met the person once in person, in order to develop a better working relationship afterwards?

No question that it would, but again, I always compare the value of something like the return and the level of effort. Whereas it may increase trust to some degree, that extra amount does not always require making such a meeting necessary. I can see how it has, but the question is how much, and not as much as people think it would.

You mentioned that you traveled a lot and have various work experiences. Could you describe your trajectory, say from your childhood, college and work?

You can see my LinkedIn profile? Oh, thanks for letting me know it is not working. My mother was a science teacher, and my father was a civil servant, an architect at the Office of Public Work. We had a very large family, with 9 kids in the family, I am in the middle. After college, I got my degree in Mathematics, I went to work in the US for a software company, and came back to Ireland. I set up their R&D facility for them here. In 1992, I set up my own software firm, and in 2000 we sold it. And after that, we set up this online research and marketing company that we are currently doing. So, that is a very fast overview.

I went to US East Coast. After college, I wanted to be in a software business, and I wanted to work for a software company, so when I left college, I looked at software firms that were hiring, as I wanted to gain that experience. And I responded to an ad in Computer Weekly, and they were hiring people from UK and Ireland, so I was one of the two people that were chosen. I went to work on software development and technical, which is my background. That was 1985.

I am asking the year, so I can situate your story within the Celtic Tiger years.

Well, the Celtic Tiger years, I don't know when that was. But I came back here in 89. And I set up my company in 92, in the middle of the recession (or, what we thought, it was a recession). So, that's our timeline I guess.

How does your company require people to be mobile (or not)?

We don't make that a requirement. Technologies allow us to work remotely, but I also think that an attitude that is required, that we've learned. At one point, we had 60 plus people working for us in various capacities. But we also had a number of very talented individuals who wanted to, say, work two or three days a week and do other things. And my experience with them was such that they convinced me that that was an excellent way to work. This is because one day of working of those two or three days, they did more in those days that some other people would do in ten, because they knew they had a focused time in which to have something done. And based on that experience, I've always made that an extension even of our infrastructure. You know, there is some
excellent talent out there who, for a reason, have their family, or have to do other things, aren’t available to be sitting in an office from 9 to 5. That experience was basically what got me out of that idea that everybody has to be in the office and work from 9 to 5. It is more about what are the goals that you achieve.

Describe your daily routine, and how you use the technology?

My daily routine is, usually, I drop my kids at school, sometimes we take the bicycle, otherwise the car. Then I go to my home office, and use things like email and Skype, like we are doing now, we also use social media tools like Tweeter and LinkedIn to keep in touch with people. And in the office we also use tools like Yammer, collaboration tools like that to share documents and stuff like that. That would be generally the set up. Then I get my children and have lunch. So that’s basically how we work.

My contact with IT employees, salespeople and clients is done via email and stuff like that, usually once a day, but I also pick up the phone and speak with them every second or third day.

But as you said, sometimes you also work late at night...

Yes, but for instance, again, this is something that not just home workers experience, but anyone who has a Blackberry could get email, a call, while not working. It is not much different than that.

Oh, I have experience with Blackberry, in which it was a source of stress, by my bedside at midnight. That doesn’t seem to bother you.

Well, I’d certainly keep the Blackberry out of the bedroom for sure. In that case, you do have to have and set up rules when you don’t let that interfere with your personal relationships. But in terms of just checking in from time to time, to make sure that nothing is being left, that clients are not left hanging, then that’s ok.

Can you elaborate a bit more on the rules that you just mentioned?

Well, not bringing your Blackberry to your bedroom is a start. Absolutely, I have rules to separate, when we have dinner time, or together time, that’s the rule, when we are not working. So, yeah, we do consciously think about putting things aside, locking things away, in that sense.

So, your family members don’t complain about you working at certain times or places?

No, because... No because I would not do something like... I would make sure the voicemail is on when we are having meals. I wouldn’t let a phone interrupt me over a meal. If we are having together time, the same thing. I would let it go to voicemail. That’s my personal preference. Again, my wife is an artist, so she paints at all times. She may decide to paint from this time to this time. So, we organize our lives, so that there is clear differentiation as to what is working and what is leisure. You need to be disciplined for that.

I admire your discipline, because sometimes work overtakes people, and everything becomes critical and an emergency at work, and as a result you are always checking email, Blackberry, talking to people. How do you deal with that risk?

In every business there is stress. But it is just because of my experience, I’ve taught myself not to do that. But your point is extremely valid, in that I think work specially when you enjoy it, work can become addictive, and follows all of the patterns of addiction. I am conscious of that. I make a very conscious effort not to get stuck in the workaholic track. [self-mastery]

You mentioned traditional roles of men and women when taking kids to schools. Do you see differences in the ways that men and women use technologies or as they work in the IT sector?
Yes, it is obviously difficult for me to tell, because I can only tell about what I perceive as opposed to what the reality is in regards to what a woman experiences. But from what I perceive, women tend to use the tools from a function capacity, the same way you’d use any physical tool. They want to buy a book online, they go to Amazon, search the book, click buy, and turn the computer off. Whereas I think men are more gadget oriented, and play more with their toys more than females do.

This refers to men and women as consumers. As workers, do you see any differences in the way they use technologies to communicate, to connect and to work?

I clearly see difference, but it is very hard to generalize. I am seeing more and more women using them, in particularly, if you are talking about online tools, using them in the same way as men do. But they use them differently, but I think you are going to have to ask them that.

In terms of nationality, do you see differences in the way that Irish men and women use technologies in comparison with UK and the US?

My opinion is no, in my experience. But I’ve seen people saying quite the opposite.

Does a female software engineer differ from a male software engineer, or would gender play no role in the IT workplace?

I am not sure I understand your question. It certainly does not play a role in terms of how I’d interact with them. I guess I don’t know. Well, there are... but as I said, I am seeing from some of the females in the sector, that they are using it in a much more traditional male way than before, so we are converging towards a non-gender way of use. They would use it for a functional job, women are much more able than men to focus and get the task done, and move on. If that’s a difference, I’d say that’s it.

You mentioned your experiences in the US in the mid to late 1980s. Do you see any changes throughout the years in terms of work and life rhythms, and how technology impacts on lives on people, in the past and now?

We are much more connected, and the speed of things is much faster. Is your question related to how people interact? It is a lot more... Well, I can only talk from our perspective. As I said, not everybody needs to be in the same building to get things done. You break things up and allocate them to whoever can get the task done. So, it doesn’t really matter where they are. Things are changing in terms of speed things up.

One big difference, on the web side, in terms of dealing with people and network, it is moving towards a transparent web. In the 1990s, people had their websites and email, but you could never really see the person behind. Now we see tools like Tweeter, Facebook and LinkedIn, that we are now seeing the people behind the business, and that’s a really good, positive thing. I am not talking about Goggling necessarily, but what I mean is that we don’t have a problem in saying this is who we are, this is our background, whereas in the early 1990s, you didn’t see that. Now people are being more transparent, which is actually contrary to what some people are saying about the web. It is much more open.

Americans worry about loss of privacy and overexposure. How does this transparency relate to that?

I don’t agree with that, with the line that people may lose privacy. I don’t think it was really ever true, than it is today. It is true that if you make a mistake, people in the sector may find about. But if you take simple precautions are all that is required. The guideline is to consider that any email or anything you post will go for all audiences, and modify your behavior accordingly.
What do you think about the idea of concentration of professionals and businesses in the city, such as global cities? Would you have more opportunities if you lived in London or New York; why you don’t partake in that?

I don’t necessarily don’t partake in that. Clearly there are hubs, in places like San Francisco. But I personally think that the reasons that… people think that… if you take a hub like Silicon Valley and so on… if you actually look at the history of that, it was all around the necessity of having infrastructure and people to make things. Apples, machines, chips and stuff like that, whereas in the knowledge sector that’s less so. And if you look at the market in the US, it is a huge market, and pretty much all on the same language. So it is much easier to create a critical mass there, than it would be here in Ireland or in the UK. So, I wouldn’t necessarily agree with it.

So, you don’t gain anything by living in, say, London or San Francisco?

San Francisco is a nice place. We actually had an office there before also. But, no, I don’t.

If you could make one improvement in your work life, what would it be? In regards to government and business, how they could facilitate your life?

Better broad band maybe. Yes, improvements can be made, and I’d be happy to pay for it. Any structural changes they can make to facilitate the Irish knowledge economy is critical, and particularly in being less reliant on manual, low cost jobs. However, I think they should… like, the roles, just go so far. We, businesspeople, should not be as reliant on the government for all of these things, and not automatically turn around and say, ‘why doesn’t the government do something about this?’. I see more and more businesspeople actually going and doing something and sorting it out, and providing a service that is superior to what a government agent can provide. Having said all of that, you know, there are basically infrastructural things that have to be there, that business on their own simply can’t do. So we actually need them [laughter].

I’m still curious about the location issue. You don’t see advantages in living in Limerick as opposed to where you live now? Wouldn’t it improve your business, work or life to move and live in the city like Limerick or Cork?

No, I can see the difference when I visit Limerick or Cork, which are rare indeed, you can immediately see the difference, in that people are busier, and, you know, I have a saying that, sometimes people confuse activity with progress, and you spend a lot of time moving around and doing things, but not really adding up to a lot. So, I guess the lesson I learned from my previous working life was that the effort involved wasn’t really amounting to much. So, the answer to that is a negative. Especially for families... If you are single guy, a single person, and starting off in your business career, then, you know, that might be a more fun place to be. So it depends on the person.

Yes, I recall our first phone conversation that you said that people confuse mobility with progress, and that, in your business, you actually try to travel as little as possible.

Yes, yes.

So we completed the interview. Is there any question that you think I should have asked but I didn’t?

Not that I can think of. There may be, but I can’t say it now.
Amendment submitted by interviewee (Feb 20, 2009):

Thanks for the material. I did have one change. At the end you asked "What one thing would you change" and I mentioned broadband. On reflection that was a little reactive (a CATI research flaw, in my opinion).

The one thing I would change would be to overhaul how the teaching infrastructure operates:

- Introduce more male teachers back into the system. There are none at my children's school and so have no male role models in that space.
- Infuse the teachers with more science, technology, mathematics and engineering skillsets
- Accountants won’t grow an economy alone but with scientists and engineers we will.
- Balance the curriculum above to create students with high emotional intelligence and great communication skills.
- This must happen at primary level as it is harder once kids reach age 13.

One other point I wasn't clear enough on was your question on clusters. I do agree with this idea and in particular think that generating clusters in different regions works. Our problem in Ireland is that we are a “city state” and so do not have the critical mass that make[s] similar ideas work in the US. We could learn from the Israel approach and tap into the wider network abroad.
OK John, thank you very much for your time. OK, so would you describe your lifestyle, family life, tell a bit about your life?

Where I come from and that sort of thing?

Yes.

I - say if I take a very quick snapshot of where I left school at 16, say, and then I went - this type of thing?

Yeah, this is an ethnographic interview so the interviewee defines the interview.

Funny, my daughter, who is term was doing a project for a competition in County Tipperary and it was to interview an entrepreneur, business man. And it's a similar interview, this only happened last week, it's slightly similar but in a very condensed form.

Basically, I left school when I was 16 after my intermediate cert as it was at the time. I went into the army apprentice school. The reason I went into the army apprentice school was because my father had a garage and I was going to train to be a model mechanic come whenever. And I would serve my time as an apprentice in the army, and so I spent three years in a school in Nass in County Kildare in an army school. You go to school every day, all this sort of stuff. And then you do your trade exams, and then after that you move into the regular army. So I moved into the regular army for a short while and then I went into the - got transferred to the navy, the Irish navy, small navy. So I spent two to three years there as well. So this was after five to six years, you signed up for eight years and three on the reserve. That's what it was, something like that. And then, but after five or six years you could buy yourself out. So you had to pay the army and they let you go.

Then in the meantime, what actually happened was I saw an ad for IBM who had, they were looking for interservice engineers for, that had a mechanical electrical or electronic background. So it was a walk-in interview. So I went into the walk-in interview, I didn't do too well. But then I spoke to them and they sent me for a second interview. And then they offered me a job there. They were taking on some new people. So I left the navy and went to work with IBM where I spent ten years as a service engineer initially in the office products division which was typewriters, copiers and electronic recording for printing, printers, that sort of stuff. So after ten years, IBM sold their office, after about nine years really, IBM sold their office products division to resellers. Before they used to do all this business themselves. Like they had their computer division, and they had the office products division. So in turn, worldwide then, decided what they would do was they would set up resellers. So I was involved in the training of the resellers engineers and all that in the latter end. So then...

Was this in Ireland?

This was in Ireland. What happened then was a number of engineers around the country left IBM and set up different, set up businesses. Number one, they saw that they were now giving all - IBM was giving all this business to other resellers who had no historical relationship with the customers or whatever. So they set up business and they started to build their business on the office products area. And then the PC came out, the IBM PC came out and then a whole new business model appeared in the world. So everywhere – we’ll say, that was in the ninth
year and around the tenth year I found this was an opportunity as well, so I left and set up [COMPANY], this is 25 years ago now.

**Was that in the late '80s?**

Late '80s. Well no, '84, '83 – '84. '84 really, the end of just '83, December of '83 I left, and then we started up, I now say '84 so 25 years so from '84. And the PC was there and in the meantime, I had been taken from, I had, for the last year of the ten years, I had now gone into the computer division, become a service engineer in the computer division of IBM, which was a total different change. And it was nearly less skilled than the office products division because it was all map reading, you know, following books. You just had to follow "yes, no, yes, no, yes, no" and then "oh, the drive is gone." There was very little, not a lot of thought process, I felt anyway. So I left there in the tenth year and set up [COMPANY] with a company who brought Wang, remember Wang computers? Wang – W-A-N-G, from the States? No, you're too young maybe to remember this.

**Well I'm from the age where the computers would store data in a cassette player. Yeah the 2 8 6, the first PCs.**

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well in the mini computer business, there was a big word processing, they were called Wang computers – W-A-N-G. Wang from the States. And they had gone worldwide and they had a factory just down here. I did, got involved with an existing company on a fifty-fifty percent basis where the Limerick company was owned by fifty percent them. They had a company in Dublin. So we traded for a number of years and then the company in Dublin went into liquidation and ran into financial difficulties, but this was a separate thing. So I bought their interest out from them and we traded on since then, to make a long story short. So...

**What types of services and products did you...**

Products we were selling. We were selling PCs with accounting systems, payrolls, general business applications, we'll say, like productivity, you know, spread sheets, word processing, all that sort of stuff.

**So your company developed these applications?**

No, no. In [COMPANY] as such we don't develop anything. All we do, we're a reseller, and we provide engineering, we provide engineering services, networking services, infrastructure services and we provide applications from – we provide and support applications belonging to other companies, be it an accounting system, be it a payroll, be it document management, back up and all that sort of stuff. So that's [COMPANY].

I have an involvement in another company, a small company, called [COMPANY], which has developed a management information system, which sits up on top of the, of the three up here, and it's different levels of management then, it takes information. If you look at a company and their KPIs, we'll say, you know, the Key Performance Indicators, and each level, we'll say there's four levels, and you have the shop floor, you have the supervisor, you have the middle management, then you see you have the management director, but what they've devised is a system where it picks information, be it in accounting, be it manufacturing, be it whatever, to come up along the line so that the management director has five daily pieces of information on a page. So if one of those is off kilter, he can drill down to see if a machine is out of action or it's not producing as much, as an example, or people on holidays, all this sort of stuff. And then you have right going down – everyone can go down the level below them, but the information's coming from the bottom up in that sense. So it can pull information from Oracle, SAP, all the big systems in that sense. So it's installed, it's developed totally here and there's, we have maybe fifteen sites of it in Ireland, that's as much at the moment. We're hoping to take it farther. There's about four people involved in that.

**So fifteen sites within the country? None overseas?**
None, no. No. We need to get really – it’s a powerful product and we need to really try and move it beyond that, you know, but that hasn't happened. I’m not involved in the day-to-day running of it now. So that's E[COMPANY]. [COMPANY] then is general – we just moved out here since Christmas time. We were based inside in Limerick. So we have a very strong relationship with Sun Microsystems, with Sun – we'll be one of the biggest resellers of some equipment and services in the country. HP, we've now become partners with Dell, and we have EMC, VMware, the top brands and such. Five, six years ago I got ill, and I got prostate cancer.

Oh, sorry.

No, it’s no problem, but what I did was I decided I'd take some time out. So I went to Spain for a year, but the one year became five years, so I'm really just back in in the last – I'm back about, nearly a year now back. So, I lived in Spain for three years.

Where did you live in Spain?

Aveda. We were down outside of Marbella. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Do you speak good Spanish?

Yes, I do.

Yeah, very good. I'm very little. My daughter, my young kids are quite good at it, you know. And did you work out there?

I was doing field work, my prior research. I was a doctoral student at the University of Chicago, so I did my field work in Spain about expatriates who go to Spain to live there.

Oh, yes, yes. Of any type, in any field? It doesn't matter what they were doing, is it?

Well, no, they were involved in more artistic sectors, tourism, you know.

Yes, yes, yes.

So in Ibiza, there is a very strong artistic, bohemian scene there, with Americans, English, Germans, Italians. So I was studying their expatriate culture. Like, why did they go to Spain to live there.

Yes, yes, yes. So that was, I'm back here a year and now part of the coming back was trying to reorganise the company. I had, some of the guys, like I owned the company 100 percent, but we've had guys kind of running it for the last four or five years. But I used to commute back and forward maybe once or month, or maybe we'll say three weeks, this type of thing. So we're now back, and part of this move now was coming back. When we were in Limerick, as I said, parking and everything was an issue, so this – we've been to go for a place in this general area for quite some time. We were told we were going into the science building, which was on development, but that didn't work out. But this is a better venue anyway.

Yeah, that’s a good question, actually that I would ask you later. Why did you move from Limerick into the technology park?

One reason is because to be associated with technology. I just felt I would like to come in here because it was having the address of the technology park nowadays is because we're providing more services rather than just boxes and hardware that it would give us a bit of an umpf, we'll say, in that sense. Number two, it suited. I live in Killaloe, you know, and it suited a number of people as well, this particular area. Casteltroy, if you go to Raheen, as an example, it's just very, very closed in and the companies are on top of each other. Whereas out here, there's a little bit of a, it's like a park and, you know, it's less density out here, and you look out the windows here and it's very conducive to work and this particular building became available and it was a lift from our own point as a
company, which got us motivated as well. We were getting very stale as well I think, you know. And, as I say, the technology park because there's a lot of companies here doing things, there's some synergies maybe, you know, this type of thing. So that's in a nutshell.

**Before we talk more about your employees and their work style, how they travel and move or commute, I'd like to know a bit more about yourself, your family life?**

Yeah, my family life, in a personal sense, I've - I'm in my second life. My first life, I was married for fifteen years and we didn't have any children. I was very much involved in the business. My first wife had her own business, and we just tended to do our own - not our own thing, but that. So then we went our separate ways, and about two years later, I met a Scottish girl. And we got married and now we have three children, and their ages are, what, seven, ten and twelve. And my life, like my general life, I live, as I say, we moved – when I got ill that time, we moved away to Spain, but the whole family moved to Spain. And they went to school out there for five years, in a little national school. And they're now back in the normal school here.

**And your wife, does she work?**

No, she doesn't work, no, no. She looks after the kids, well you know. No, she doesn't work. She used to work in financial services in Edinburgh. She was involved there in administration, and in (inaudible). So, day-to-day life then?

**Yes, how is your typical day, if you could describe it.**

In family life? Or just in general?

**Both.**

Both. Well I think I'll give you an example from yesterday. We went to the Hunt Museum.

**Oh, I love it.**

Yes, it's very nice. I haven't though, would you believe this, I only had been in the restaurant, but we were with the kids so we went there yesterday from 2 o'clock until 5 or whatever it was, and there was an excellent guide there, Anthony Harper, I think is his name. And it's just I wouldn't have a huge interest in antiquities, but he made it very interesting, and the kids enjoyed it as well. So sometimes what's on your doorstep, and I was saying this this morning to some of the people that like these things are there, and you travel lots of distance to look at something, but sometimes you never look at what's close by, you know?

**Yeah, but you're from the Limerick region.**

I'm from the Limerick region.

**You grew up here?**

I grew up here, yeah.

**Your college degree was through the army then?**

No, I have no college degree. I have, we say, in the Irish system, you know, you have your junior cert, you have your leaving cert, and then you go to college. My academic would be junior cert, and then going to school, it was more of a trade, learning trades and exams than anything else. I have no formal training or management training.
I mean, you ended up getting a formal job engineering at IBM, right?

Yes, but I'd been trained by IBM, but not – there's no formal qualification involved there. They do all the training for you, and all that sort of thing. But I have no formal, I have no academic qualifications whatsoever. My only – as I say, I went to the university of life.

OK, sorry, we moved away from the Hunt Museum. So your typical...

Typically, that was – but typically, like this morning, I get up at 7, half 7 in the morning. I would drop the kids to school if they're going to school, and then I come in here, so I'm here for 9, quarter past 9. And then I just manage, in a sense, Monday mornings we have meetings, we have sales meetings, we have – there's a sales meeting because I don't get involved necessarily in the sales meeting, and then there's a management meeting, and that goes on for a short time and we plan the week or whatever. But it's very much, the people here are very much self managed in their own way. I try and facilitate people as opposed to sell anymore myself directly. There is one particular part that I like is document management. You know, scanning in all sorts of documents and retrieving, so we have a system that does that, and we have a guy that we work with who's quite an expert in that area, and I would go to demonstrations and set up demonstrations with him, this type of thing, because I like that area myself, because I think it brings huge productivity to companies to use this. Like a simple case in point would be companies who have lots and lots of delivery documents, say you have ten vans, and bring it down to a level now, you have delivery dockets. They have to be signed, and then they have to be brought back up. They have to be filed away, and what, and then there's a query about payment, someone has to get up out of their seat, go and find that docket, then maybe fax it to the client. Whereas, what we're saying is you bring back those dockets back, you scan them in and they're indexed under the number or they could be barcoded. You can run a report to find out what dockets are missing as an example, and then you drive yourself to make sure everything is brought back. So then next week or the week after there's a query, and it's on your, you just go in and you can find it immediately. And you can e-mail it, fax it, whatever it is from your desk. So it's very much productive type.

So you're trying to make a paperless office?

Exactly, right. This concept, you know. But particularly in issues where people have a lot of hassle. So that's one way. But then on a day-to-day, I try to meet people that are, that I can network with to get business in some shape or form, and then maybe less contact between engineers or whatever it is, this type of thing.

So potential clients?

Potential clients, that's really it. And just using my contacts that I have, now that I'm back in the company and such, that it's more looking for opportunities all the time.

OK, so you're not here from 9 to 5?

Not necessarily. Not necessarily.

Do you work from home?

A little bit, but not – at the moment, I'm in here most days, because I just want to – we were taking on some, one or two new people, and I just want to get the whole, you know, importance going. But tomorrow, as an example, I'm in Dublin tomorrow in meetings with suppliers and Sun, to see can Sun maybe put us in the way of getting more opportunities, you know. Last week, I was in Dublin on Wednesday, with Sysco. We got an award from Sysco for – it was five companies, British Telecom, BT, and DATAPAC, ourselves, and there was two more, we got an award at a dinner last Wednesday. What else? On a day-to-day basis, it's just really being here, being available, you know, this type of thing, and trying to drive the business forward in some shape or form. It's – I don't really
have any full set pattern, because it’s sales manager to salespeople, and they do all the selling in that sense. So kind of here, I suppose it’s the guiding, you know, the fall back guy in a sense maybe.

But the strategic sales, it’s you who make it, right?

No, there’s salespeople who look after that. We have a lot of clients, big clients, a good few big clients who we would deal with on a day-to-day basis, they’re dealt with individual. Like we have four salespeople and they’re dealt with on an individual basis. I will meet these clients maybe a couple times a year or twice a year, whatever it is. We’d go maybe playing golf, and the guys would, we’d set up maybe a golf thing or something like that. But the strategic sales called them are looked after by the salespeople, but at a senior level, in that sense.

So your company operates only within Ireland.

Only within Ireland, yeah.

You don’t do any business with the UK, or...?

We do a small bit, but how it’s done, it’s done with existing clients, Irish clients, that would have an office in the UK, like for instance, we’ve supplied equipment to the Isle of Man for a particular client. We’ve supplied equipment to India for a particular client. But we really have no involvement, only in calling, getting it set up, or currier, organising curriers to deliver it to India, wherever, you know, in that sense. We’ve delivered stuff to Poland, but again, it’s only as a result of a local purchase, an Irish purchase. In some cases we would have, we have to invoice – we’ll say, we have a couple English clients, but they’re Irish, they’re part of Irish companies, but we have to, we have an English vat number, so we trade callers, we invoice those directly in that. But outside of that, that’s it really.

So if I understand your company’s business, you sell big brand applications but also adapt these applications to the client’s environment?

A little, but depending – yeah a little. The adaptation would be really not on the higher-end applications. The adaptation would be on the lower-end of the applications within [COMPANY], like our payrolls, we look after payrolls. We would have a payroll account in Vistakon, you know Vistakon down here? Vistakon, you know, Vistakon, the company down here? Johnson and Johnson. Just down at the end, when you leave the technology park. That’s a big, you know, Johnson and Johnson, they make contact lenses. We’d have their payroll, but yet again, we could have a two-man payroll as well. In a sense, there’s also something like that. So it’s a mix, it’s a mixture of type of clients, and we would, in payroll as example and account systems, we would do reporting, specialized reports, all that stuff. But it would be the SME market as opposed to the enterprise level. Like Sun and Oracle, that would be at the, call it, the enterprise level. So we’re kind of a bit, we’re kind of, there’s two kind of areas we work in. And that’s really it. Is that confusing?

No, no. It’s clear. So you travel like once a week, twice a week and just go to Dublin?

Yeah, myself, I would probably travel once a week. The salespeople could be in Wicklow, they could be in Cork, they could be in different areas.

And so they are the ‘road warriors’?

They’re road warriors, to a point. One of them, the sales manager, he lives in Mallow. You know Mallow, which is near Cork? And he commutes here most days, or he will be out going to see clients, you know.

And your technical personnel that provides assistance to the clients, do they have to move a lot?
They would move around mostly in the greater Midwestern region. Our technical services really, we subcontract some other services then for people from Dublin, we'll say as an example, who has specialised, we would subcontract those into our clients then. Our old technical people here would be more, I would say, the greater Midwestern region of, I don't know, maybe a 60, 80 mile radius, 100 mile radius of Limerick as such.

And what about Dublin? How do you cover Dublin?

Dublin, the Dublin market, a lot of the product we would sell there, we would subcontract, if we needed, sometimes we would subcontract an engineer maybe once a month, twice a month. We work with a company who is specialised in units in all those area.

OK, and how do your employees keep in touch with your office.

All Blackberry. It's all, they have, like they have their e-mail on their thing, they have mobile phones, and they have messaging, you know, on the thing. But it's e-mail mostly, you know. It's – they have Blackberries, they all have Blackberries. Any field engineer or sales person has a Blackberry.

So, would they be 9 to 5 employees Monday to Friday, or are they remote workers that never show up at the office?

One, one in particular would only come here probably on a Monday morning. He looks after payroll and accounting systems, he's out with clients all the time.

Selling, or providing support?

Support. And he would sell a bit, also. His first thing is support, second he would sell as part of being in a situation, you know, this type of thing. He'll always be looking for an opportunity to up sell what we have, be it hardware or software in that sense.

So how many employees?

I have fourteen at the moment. We used to, at the height of the dot-com, in '99, 2000, 2000-1, we had about twenty-eight employees. But it was, it was a very buoyant market at the time. Any of the dot-com sites had to have Sun Microsystems equipment, and we were nearly the default supplier, so it was just nearly money for all drop, you know. It was very easy, we had to log engineers, all that stuff. But the market at the moment doesn't demand that, you know.

So of these fourteen, how many are on the road?

If you take it, there's four ... and five ... that's nine, five ... there's five engineers, sorry, let's say ... about nine.

So nine, and about five are always here in the central office?

Yeah, if I take it in here, there's always somebody here in support, taking calls and all that. Now that might not necessarily be the same person, but mostly it's the same person. Then there are three, I have three people in administration, which consists of accounts, sales support, goods in, goods out, that type of thing. So there's three girls, three ladies look after that. And then we have four salespeople, one, we have one and a half people, we call it, involved in accounting payroll, and then we have four or five engineers as well. So there's about four of five people here all the time, including myself. You know, so.

Your company has only this office here in Limerick?
No, we'll have, what we have, we call it a sales office in Cork, which in reality is now a number with a service office. So if you ring Cork, it's answered here. In Dublin, the software company has a small office in Dublin which we use, but it, there's nobody permanently based there. So for all intensive purposes we have an office in Dublin, we have a sales office in Dublin, sales office in Cork, but here is really where everything happens.

The only physical location?

This is the physical location, yeah. And a shared office with the software, with E[COMPANY] in Dublin.

Yeah, you mentioned that the holding company would have fourteen sites? This is what you said in the beginning.

No, no. No, no, no.

I heard you, I thought you said that E[COMPANY] had fourteen sites.

Oh, no no, yeah about fourteen customers, sorry. Not sites, but I call them sites, they're customers. Sorry. What they have, E[COMPANY] has is based out of Dublin, and sometimes here because the guys come, they're non [COMPANY] people, but they have fourteen installations of this particular product. Like I say, you're talking big money for it, you know what I mean, in that sense.

OK, so you say that your employees keep in touch with the central office via Blackberry.

Blackberry and mobile phones, that sort of thing.

OK, and laptops?

Laptops, yeah, they've all got laptops, yeah. They come and they plug them in and you know, they have, one or two of them have the wireless Internet access, you know.

OK. In terms of gender, how do you see men and women differences in terms of the high-tech sector?

Well, our engineering manager is a lady and she has four fellows reporting to her. In accounts and admin, we tend to have ladies, always tended to have ladies. In sales, we used to have, over the years, we've had one or two salespeople and they've been very good, but now at the moment it's all male salespeople. So, it's never been an issue, you know what I mean? The only thing I do find is now, that, pregnant is, you know – the sales, the engineering manager was going, is in six weeks time, will be going for six months because she's pregnant, she's due to have a baby shortly. So that's an interruption that you can do without, but I mean, that's part of business really. So, it's never, it's not really an issue.

In terms of work style, do you see any difference?

I would, I would see, there's often I find a commitment to children and a commitment to work, and you have to, there's not a lot you can do about that, because if you, if somebody has, if an engineer, as an example, has children and they're in a crash, and they have to be picked up at 6 o'clock or half 6 in the evening, whatever, then work stops then at half 5. And therefore if that is a fellow, he can always work on. That's the difference in the engineering side. And it's the same with sales, you know. It limits, sometimes it limits travel, you know.

Unless the couple shares picking up the kids.

Yeah, yeah. That's, yeah, unless that arrangement is there, and sometimes that's not necessarily there, you know. Because maybe sometimes I think we're a little bit easier. We take, we would take the brunt of the excuse for it,
and even be a fellow or a girl, you know. That if kids have to be picked up or something has to be done, be it a fellow or a girl, we're easy about. Just do it, you know, there's no point. It's not going to cause a great hassle, you know.

Yeah, you talked about external things, right? Pregnancy, kids, and school. But in terms of intrinsic work ethic or style, in terms of IT, do you see any main differences between male or female, or is it totally gender neutral?

I think it's gender neutral to a point, but I think it's good to have a mixture of ladies and gentlemen in a company because it creates a better atmosphere, a bit of banter, you know. And that's, you understand banter? A bit of, a bit of flow. And one thing we found since we moved here, in Limerick we were on three floors, so sometimes you wouldn't even see people. Whereas here, we're all on the ground floor here. And the coffee area is down there. People are coming, people are moving up and down. We have an awful lot more interaction with ourselves since we moved here. And the whole work ethic is a lot better because people can have a cup of coffee, they're talking about what's going on. It's all, everybody, there's a lot more communication with people, with each other. And I think that's a very good thing, you know. Because with the other building, we could afford to have twenty-eight people in it, and as we became, say over the years, came down to about fourteen, then you had less people on floors, so there wasn't that much, very little, little or no interaction really between people, whereas here I find it very good. And everybody has, that's the big comment around here, that were a lot more closer to each other again, and I think it helps a lot, too.

OK, and in terms of using technology, gender plays no role there?

I don't think so, I think it's irrelevant really, you know. Everybody here is fairly good.

Like a female engineer or a female salesperson selling technologies. Would she see technologies differently than a male engineer or a male IT person?

I think sometimes in the female sales, it depends, depending on what they're selling, but it can help, because like to me, sales is all about buying from people you like and those that you can relate to in that. And sometimes, over the years, I've found that female salespeople at a certain level can be very good, you know, and they can generate a lot of sales, especially if they're dealing with male, you know it's a lady thing, from that point. Engineers, I've had no, we've had two engineers over the years that have been female and one now, and I find that the lady we have now, excellent customer relationships, all this sort of stuff, and unflappable. And that's not, you know, very calm, very organized, compared to her predecessor, who was a male. And just seems to get an awful lot of work done, very business – good head for business as well. But I think that's particular to her, maybe in a sense.

OK, not because of gender.

Not gender, I think she's just good at, she learned, she's been with us maybe ten, fifteen years, but she's having come from just, call it a simple product engineer, she's now, as an all-around person, become very good, you know. We've not necessarily any major form of training of any sort, you know, but just as it's good, innate, built in, you know (inaudible).

So because the stereotypical idea is that IT is predominantly male, do you agree with that, or do you see it differently?

Yes and no. Funny, this actually came to mind last Wednesday with Sysco. The management director of Sysco in Ireland is a lady. Our account manager is a lady. One of the speakers that was over from the UK was a lady. And we were just, and also the marketing lady, marketing who was over from the UK for the day as well, she was a lady as well. So out of – and then one of the awards, one of the companies that got an award, the managing director of that was a lady as well. So we actually made this comment that of, let's see, of maybe ten speakers, no,
it wasn't ten speakers, I'd say eight speakers, the majority in that particular day were ladies. And that's within Sysco, you know Sysco? A big international company, you know?

**The “human network”**

Yeah exactly. So it was quite surprising and maybe just my reaction to it. I know you say predominantly, but I find then, software engineers, there's a lot of lady software engineers as well. I suppose, in general, I suppose you would probably say that it is more male orientated, you know. Because we've advertised for an engineer now, and we've had no lady applicants. It's all male applicants, which shows the market place as well. But the Sysco thing, it's something we commented ourselves on, that it was all - the majority of the speakers would have been ladies last week.

**And this group, they were all Irish? All Irish ladies?**

No, it was one was American, actually there was only one Irish lady. There was an American lady, there was two English, and one Irish. Yeah. And the marketing, yeah. Irish - there was only one lady that was Irish.

**OK. So you also attend networking events?**

Yeah, there's always - like you could go to forever to networking, but the likes of Sun, Microsoft, all those people have events every month or every two months where there's something happening, new products, announcements, all this sort of thing. I go to some of those. The lads would go to a lot more of them than I. But, I like to keep ahead, or keep abreast of what's actually going on, you know. A number of years ago I used to go to a lot of events in London with Sun. Sun Microsystems would have a lot of things that I just felt that it was worthwhile going there, you know. Nowadays, there isn't as much travel. Before, we'll say, I remember one time I went to San Francisco to a big Sun convention. Then there were other things. But even again, last week, I know I'm quoting Sysco a lot, but just as an example, over the last three months they have cut their travel down by 90 percent, and this is worldwide. And it's taken them three months to get it down 90 percent from what it was.

So all companies, like with communications now, we've just - there's a new conferencing product, what is it, video, it's phone conferencing product where, you know the normal voice conference, where you can join in, but there's no fees in this one. You can do it, you can set it up, say for instance you have five guys worldwide, you can, and they pay to come into it, they just paid the telephone charge. So communication has become so easy now and at very little cost. Whereas before you would have to buy conferencing software. You would have to run it from here, and then get everybody to dial in and catch up from telephone. Whereas all this is all Internet-based now, and it's very simple, very, very simple. And even if you you want to do video conferencing, you call up your little camera on your notebook or whatever it is, that has become so simple as well, you know. And if you take Skype as an example, it's all built into Skype as well, with video conferencing.

**Yeah, communicating with my wife, she lives in Chicago, and we communicate via Skype so we can see ourselves in the video while we talk.**

Yeah, it's very good.

**Yeah, so you keep in touch with your employees using Blackberry, telephone, laptop, e-mail, but you also keep in touch with your suppliers and clients in Ireland.**

Yes, in Ireland.

**And your suppliers, these companies are in America, some of them.**
Yes, but they would be, they would deal through, we'll say Sun would have an outlet in Dublin as an example, and we buy - that's how we would buy. There's one or two distributors in the UK that we would buy from but they would have a representative here in Ireland as well. And suppliers come to visit us, you know, and our account managers, as we would call them, they would come here maybe once a month, maybe once every six weeks, just for a half an hour chat, you know, just to get more business.

So your communication channels are within the country, within Ireland. And eventually with UK, right?

Yeah, a little bit with the UK, but really, it's more, as the years go on, it's less and less from the point of view that they, their representatives now are here. They have on-the-ground representatives, you know, from that point of view.

So you have no plans to go internationally.

Not really, no. Not in the time, not in terms of [COMPANY], but in terms of the software company, I would love to, you know, partner with somebody in the states or whatever the place, that would maybe take this product on and move it on, you know. And that's something we have to look at and see, because it's, the product is developed and works and, you know, all this sort of stuff and it's really lack of marketing and lack of money for marketing really. So I'm convinced I'll come across somebody somewhere that will, you know, maybe look at this and say "oh this could be a good idea," and take it on in some shape or form.

Yeah, this in part is an issue of networking, of contacting. So back to the issue of locality, your company moved from Limerick to the National Technology Park. So I'm trying to understand your decisions for moving, like, why not Dublin, right? Why not not moving everything to Dublin? Why stay here, and why the technology park?

Well, this would have been our third or fourth move over the last twenty-five years, and this out here is the last move, we'll say. The technology park was one part of it, but if the name “technology park” and association with the college, you know this type of thing, was one part of it. But in reality it was just for convenience, you know, totally for convenience. The, like for me, my life is based here, family, all this sort of area. I wouldn't move, how would I put it, I would have no like or whatever to graduate to Dublin or to go live in Dublin, or anything like that. About setting up in a college or sub-office, and all that stuff up there, I feel we've done that, but in a virtual way. We have a lot of our big customers would be in Dublin, you know, or Wicklow, or whatever you know. And we get the same benefit as - the fact that we're based in Limerick is irrelevant to them, it seems to be irrelevant to them. We've been doing business with those people for the last twenty years, you know. And, but maybe because we're specialised in - a lot of those clients now would be Sun, you know are at a level, so it's just a relationship we have with those people over the last twenty years or so.

So you have no business advantages by being in Dublin, because you already have the virtual office in Dublin, and it would suffice.

That's right, would suffice that. And the reason we set up a virtual office in Cork was because EMC, five or ten years ago, said we should have a presence in Cork at the time. And we set up this presence, and it sufficed for them as well. Now, if you - the only reason when it set up, got to take it a stage further in Dublin, is you would employ people in Dublin and then you would run another organisation in Dublin. Plus some companies similar to ourselves who are a lot bigger would have done, have done that, you know. But in the climate that's in it at home with any base, something you would want is more retrenchment and take advantage of what you have and not expand too much because the market place in general is not very buoyant at the moment. It's buoyant, but not very buoyant, you know. And companies don't have as much money to spend at the moment, you know.

So, by virtual office you mean it's a phone number and some salesperson designated to the area?
Yeah, but from, based out of here. So you take it, we'll say, there's one of the guys here could look after ten customers in Dublin, who would be bigger customers. Another guy might look after another five of those as part of their overall country-wide stuff. And they, we can, in Dublin we can use the office in Dublin, but we never really do because people are so mobile now, you know. People can have their – you don't need – with a mobile phone and your laptop, you don't necessarily need to be sitting at a desk or to go to a desk. You can park your car or you can go into a hotel, you can get wireless Internet, or you can plug in your GSM or whatever, 3G card, and you can be anywhere and you can do your quotation or you can do your e-mails. Like the Blackberry, you know, you're just virtually anywhere at this stage. Like for instance, two weeks ago, there was some snow and one of the guys, who down in Cork, it was too difficult for him to come up so he just worked from home. Some of the guys will work from home now and then. And we don't have an issue with that.

**So you have employees living in Dublin and employees living in Cork?**

No, we'll say I have one or two – one living in Cork, well nearly in Cork, and the rest are really in this region, you know.

**OK, so they would have to travel to Dublin?**

They only would travel to Dublin to service clients there. And they would do that once a week maybe.

**Would they have to stay there overnight?**

Sometimes they would stay there overnight, depending if they had a number of calls because it's difficult to get around Dublin, you know. But mostly, they would not overnight. So that's the type of mobile work that we would have you know.

Yes. So going more widely as you touched on the issue of mobile workers, the knowledge economy, right, the Celtic years in Ireland and Ireland becoming more knowledge-based economy, what are the main transformations, the main changes that you see that happened in Ireland?

If you look over the last five, six years, maybe more, one of the biggest changes is, I would say, everybody has become very – salaries have increased quite a lot. That means people have their lifestyles have increased, you know. If I go back, we'll say two years ago, going back five years from that, the quality of car, the quality of houses, the quality of – generally people eating out at restaurants, and it all followed then. This is the type of thing that you are interested in, yeah? So if you take Limerick as an example. How long have you been in Limerick?

**Since September. Six, seven months.**

OK, if you go back to Limerick three, four years ago. In the last four years in Limerick, the amount of construction, the amount of new restaurants, the amount of hotels that have grown out of all this kind of Celtic Tiger, all this area, and the use of those then, we'll say the use of the restaurants and by all the people who were earning quite, very good money, all this sort of thing, has created a huge importance but now suddenly the whole thing has stopped because Dell is an example of that, letting so many people go, and the subsidiary companies to Dell.

So this came to light to me this morning during an interview, one of the guys works for a multinational in Cork, and is earning what we would consider very good money for the level of engineer. And we were just making that comment this morning. The salaries increase, increase, increase, and it was good times for everybody. But now we have a situation where we're probably pricing, it's so expensive, our employees, everybody's so expensive and it's very hard to come back down. So, some of the multinationals, because they were so generous with their – and part of the generosity was because they couldn't afford to lose people, you know, the qualified people. That's all very fine when it's very buoyant, but now it's everywhere, and I'm talking about the big multinationals around
here, and this is talking to some of the guys as well that would be working with them. That their cost base has come up, and this is Dell's problem, that the cost base has come up so much, and shot up in the last five years, that it's a totally new model or whatever you'd say for all of us now, because I would think our standard of living would have been far better. My case is different because I left, we'll say, and I spent, nearly retired for the last five years, and now come back, but I would say my standard of living today is less than it was we'll say five years ago – less money, less money available to spend. And I think that's the same thing for everybody. And that's the impression I get from everybody now. There's less disposable income in general around, because everything has got a lot more expensive because of, as a result of demand. And nobody queried pricing, but now it's starting to be queried because – I remember listening to an interview last year when things started to get a little bit tighter where nobody actually queried the price of anything because it didn't matter, because you were well able to afford it or whatever. The supermarkets, general food stuffs, price, price, price, and in reality, the difference between the UK and Ireland, there's quite a big gap, outside of the currency fluctuation. And the bank's the same way, if you think about this. There's no regulation, very little regulation, it was just a kind of a free-for-all if you understand. And maybe that's a bit of an exaggeration, but if you look at what's, if you look at this weekend and read what has happened to the banks and what the banks are doing for the last number of years. And they've been shoving money out to people and therefore driving the economy, driving the wage demands. People are buying more so the need more and all this sort of stuff.

Ireland in particular at the moment, because I think we built up this very highly skilled and highly qualified people, and even to be, even if you look in UL, the people who went for computer degrees start of the fall '08, over the last couple of years because they felt that the demand was going to be less. They were going into other things. And now there's going to be a shortage of computer engineers and all this sort of thing. Unfortunately that's going to be, to feed the, on the rebound if you understand what I'm saying, when the new companies come in. So I'm trying to – that's a very complicated way of answering your question, but it's just my feelings on it.

Yeah, you mentioned the topic of cost of living and salaries. What about in terms of work rhythms, life rhythms over the years, has that changed in relation to five, ten years ago? You talked about Limerick becoming more stylish in terms of restaurants and amenities.

Oh absolutely, yeah, yeah.

In terms of work, has work changed a lot?

Yes work has changed a lot because the level of, I think the level – if you take our company as an example, when you started out we would fix printers, we would fix this, we would fix that. We really don't do what we call “break and fix” anymore. What we're trying to do, we call it the food chain, get up the food chain and leave that there for the one-man, two-man show and don't get dragged down there because there's no money down there, this type of thing. Where before we used to make money down there. But now, you have somebody let go from Dell, you have somebody go from Mallow or wherever, and they, because they're made redundant, they can afford to do that work at a way cheaper price than we can. So, that type of business – we used to have vans on the road, we had maybe five or six vans, with [COMPANY] on them and engineers running here, running there fixing printers, you know, doing this. But because all that has got so expensive, you can't do that anymore, and now we do an awful lot of fix from our laptops. We say with – we have a couple of programs there that you just, the person comes in into the Internet, and we take over the machine. So if you have a problem on your laptop, you can ring our help desk if you have a contract or whatever it is, and they'll tell you to go to there with a pin number. You go to there with a pin number and now he has access. He just does it.

Any laptop, or only those computers that have applications that you sold?

Any laptop. Any – a friend of mine, I'll give you a simple example last week, good friend of mine in Spain never saw a computer until I met him five years ago. He now is doing his bits and pieces. So he has all these viruses and everything coming out. So I said, "Jack, talk to Brendan, one of the engineers, and he'll tell you what to do." So he
talked to Brendan, then that, finished the conversation. He went onto the Internet, onto, I'm trying to remember, Go To My PC or something like that, and puts in the pin number that Brendan has given him. And now Brendan can extract it to him. So, and fixes – gets rid of viruses, gets rid of – so what's in an hour or less, whatever it is, he says “thanks very much.” So before, he would physically have to get, now I know that's simple technology nowadays, but before he would physically have to get that machine, call it or bring it into us, or bring it to somebody in Murcia, and say “can you sort this out because it's riddled with viruses?” But from Ireland, we can do that, and it's so simple because of the Internet structure. But there are these programs coming out that it's so simple, you know what I mean? That if by, you know you asked about the use of technology, and by using technology like that now, we keep our overheads down, down, down, and it's all part of the thing, you know?

Yeah. I have a final question for you, but before asking, just to recap some of the things you said. The five years you were in Spain, you were not leaving the company...

Yeah, not really because I was back here every month, but it was really being driven by the sales manager. Yeah, and we got reports every week and all this sort of stuff.

So it was not retirement.

Not totally because I set up a property company over there separately. It was with this guy I was telling you about, this other guy from England. We sold property and did mortgages and all this sort of stuff. So it was something to keep me occupied over there. But in reality, in hindsight, we went for one year, we stayed for two years, three years, in reality, in hindsight, it would have been better if I had come back. I would feel that I stayed too long, you know?

Oh really. You didn't want to stay down there? Many people just go and live in Spain.

No, no, no.

You were coming here every month.

That's right, that's right.

So, didn't you like the lifestyle to come here once a month, and then...

No, I was away from my family. The family didn't like – the kids, as they were growing up, they preferred for me to be there and at the later end I started to come here, we changed sales managers in the, about eighteen months ago, and one guy left, another guy came on board. And I really had to spend a lot more time here then as well, and now only last December, the guy who left has now come back so they're all back together, all this sort of stuff. It was great, I just feel that my heart is in Ireland. The kids had a great five years. When they came back, they got involved in hurling, soccer, rugby and all. They just love it here. Weather, it doesn't matter. And a lot of people say to you “do you not miss the weather?” Not really, no, because there's something about here, the magic of Ireland, is I just really feel – even though my wife is Scottish now, she loved Spain and that, and she'll be as easy to live either place, but financially and from a health point of view, coming back here I think was better as well. But because the later end in Spain, the property market was dead, there was nothing to do. Like we’d get in the morning, drop the kids, we’d go and have coffee, it was just, go and have lunch, then pick up the kids. There was just nothing to do, you know. And then a lot of people started to leave, like friends and acquaintances, because they were totally dependent on their living in Spain, maybe involved in the property market or something like that, and they were from the UK and they had to go back. So the whole thing changed about into, about four years, and then people got very tight about money because it was getting more expensive to live there and all this sort of stuff, you know. So, unless you had an income, it wasn't a good place to be because there was no family infrastructure or anything like that.
Didn't you have the income from [COMPANY]?

Oh yeah, for me it wasn't an issue. The issue we'll say was for all our friends.

For you colleagues and your friends. Did you go after the peseta or when it was still peseta?

Oh no, no. After the peseta. It was euro, it was all euro.

Yeah, because I was there during the transition, and the peseta was so cheap. The cost of living changed, it was extremely cheap. When the euro came out, Spain became very expensive all of a sudden.

I'd say in the five years, I could see it that we in the five years, but it was still cheaper than Ireland. But it was still became very expensive. And I just found the bureaucracy (inaudible) and I still – you probably found the same, especially if you were working there. It becomes like, and you can't seem to get a straight answer out of anybody to do anything. And then they just, so, be it a car, we'll say, or car insurance, or taxing a car, paying your taxes.

Yes, it's very complicated.

Very complicated. And very frustrating. And also, to a certain extent, in the quality of euphoria, or whatever it was, the first couple years, it was great. But a lot of the people, expats, now I don't know if you found this or not, but a lot of the expats in general, you could never really take them at face value. No, maybe it's not in Marbella, but a lot of the people we would have met or been friendly with, they were never what they seemed to be. It was always, as you got to know them or got further into it, or in stories, there was always something, they were running away from something. You know, all this sort of thing, you know?

I found lots of that in my studies, too.

Absolutely. And long term, that was something we didn't really like. We didn't want to...

Actually, I use this expression, "running away from something," in my publications – either psychologically, or financially or legally, for whatever reason, people went there for some reason.

That's right. And whatever it is about Spain, they just felt that they could be a totally different person, you know? And at the end of the day, the reverted back eventually to what they were, you know? And, like we had no bad experiences really with anybody, but it's just that – and people when they went there, they might buy a bar as an example. But if they were in the UK, they never ever had any experience with running a bar, or a business in fact. I just think there's nothing different really, except there's more bureaucracy, but you either, you have to know what you're doing in some shape or form. And then their house, they would have sold their house in the UK, and they would have sold a pup, and when I say a pup I mean something that's not of any value in Spain, and I found that people tended to make decisions, and even myself at some stage, without, you know. What you wouldn't do in Ireland, or Chicago, or wherever, you would do there, for whatever reason, without maybe thinking it through or looking at the downside or the upside of things, you know? Maybe you felt you couldn't be caught there or whatever, but I mean, everybody gets caught.

There's this whole thing now of trying to recreate who you are, recreate your identity, or feel liberated somehow, feel free to do things that you're not allowed to do back at home.

Yeah, yeah. And you're living in kind of a limbo because you're not really – in where we lived now, there was a lot of expats. And the kids went to expats school, so we didn't really integrate very much with the Spanish people, for no reason except for in the school, it was half and half Spanish, and half and half, well wealthy Spanish because they were having to pay good fees. But they never, they never really gelled together. The Spanish kept to one side, even at the school gates. They never really – or all the Spanish ladies would talk to each other, or the
gentlemen. The English, or English-speaking – and you say, like an enclave nearly within a country, you know? Yeah, and I didn’t like that at all. I didn’t like that at all.

Are your kids fluent in Spanish?

They are fairly fluent. They go once a week now to a lady from Bilbao who lives in Killaloe just for an hour. Just practise conversation Spanish. Not necessarily grammar or anything like that, but just purely conversational Spanish.

Yeah there are some Spanish students here at UL. Sometimes I overhear them talking in Spanish. They come here to learn and practise English, but then they do their own enclave.

I know. It's amazing, isn't it?

Talking about UL, like you mentioned something about UL. How is UL relevant to your business? Do you have contact with professors?

Not really, no. But we do a bit of business, do a little business, a little business with UL, but far not enough. But as part of all this, like of being out here, I'm trying to see can I get involved, not involved, but in network a bit more with UL, and all that sort of stuff, and see if there's – there has to be some synergies in some shape or form, but I don't even know what I mean now at the same time. And that's why I agreed to this so easily, the fact that it is part of the computer, it's part of the computer section as well, that I saw that. And I'm saying that there's the Department of Computer Science and Information Science here as well, and I said, "oh yeah, and maybe through you there might be somebody else." And that's really, you know?

I mean UL has so much to offer. And the companies, from a business point of view then have so much experience to offer as well. The, like things should grow out of here. I know they do, to a point, but there should be more growth out of here, you know. This type of thing. I mean there's phenomenal talent in UL from both students' point of view and from lecturers and all that sort of stuff.

Yeah, this is something that I'm exploring now when I talk to Shannon Development, and when I talk to UL people, TTO, the Technology Transfer Office, and business people here. To try to understand what types of synergies can be developed with industry segments - science, government, and business.

Yeah, the channels of development need to look at a bigger picture of smaller companies as well, I think. I just have, I've never had any deals with Shannon Development. A little bit with the other software company. But even in, when I was looking for the building, in the science building and all that, and I just found it's so, you know, difficult, coming back to UL and helping – I wasn't looking for any grant aide or any money, you know what I mean, I was just looking for a building that they might have and at a reasonable rent, you know. And in reality, I'm paying, this is a private building, I'm paying here, let's – I'll give you an example. In the science building, you know the science building down in UL at the back? They were looking for 17euros per square foot plus 3euros service charge. Here, I'm paying 12euros 98 on average. That's a huge difference, you know? Now we're looking at a government body or whatever to help companies. The only help I would – call it subsidized rent or whatever – but it's not really subsidized when you can get this building with all the same facilities and more for, you know, half the price. And it's all very well saying we're looking for market rates, but if I can go out and find this for half the price at a market rate, then there's something wrong, you know? That's what I feel about it. And I was very disappointed. Now I'm very happy and I'm delighted that I didn't go with the building, science building, because I just felt, I now feel that it's in the wrong place. Whereas up here it's where a lot of things happen. But I just felt at the time, they just made it so difficult. There was no room for negotiation. We're employing fourteen people. We potentially could employ more as we go on. It's just that type of thing, you know? Help these companies or whatever.
You said many things happen here. What type of things happen that you like?

I go down to the Innovation Centre for lunch maybe and you know there's a little cafeteria, small cafeteria there, and you might meet somebody there and have a chat with whoever it is. The fact that we're here, we're now back to the market. We deal with some of the companies, but we're actively marketing to all the companies around the general technology park a lot more. There's a feel-good factor about the whole...

So are there events where you can go and present your company?

Well there is, say for instance there's an annual, an AGM, or an EGM, next. I think it's next month I think it is, or it's the end of this month. All the companies from the technology park meet under the offices of Shannon Development, and I'm going to that. And again, it's an informal, kind of formal way of meeting. I don't know if there's anything for networking, but that's the only thing I know of at the moment. But the – it's just, like I'm involved in soccer, you know, football with my son every Saturday for a team. And one of the guys, his father, I just saw him here the other day driving down and I said "oh are you in the thing?" And it turns out he is, he's tied with Telecom, you know. It's just that – I try and see him now and try and get into tango. Like just, there seems to be a lot more openness, I think, here for people to try and talk to each other I think. Whereas when we were in Limerick we were on a street where there was no other companies, nearly. So that's what I mean really. I think there's opportunity out here. But the networking, the synergy thing through UL and all that, I really, if there's anything to come out of that, I'd really like to, you know, from the point of view of making contacts and that, you know, that's really it.

You mentioned India, at a certain point, some of your clients in India, but you never go there or your employees.

No, what actually happened there was EMC, you know EMC in Cork? The EMC, you know the big storage company? Yeah. They have, they're setting up a place in Mumbai or one of those places. And basically, they bought equipment from ourselves to ship out there, and I think we shipped it out there, this type of thing. So that's really the only involvement that we have there.

OK, my final question is a question about improvement. If any improvement could be made in your business or location, what would it be? What's your priority that you would like to see improved?

I think it's the networking. That is probably one of the biggest things. Location, I'm happy. I have no problems with location, I'm happy, I'm very happy with that. The improvement I think we have to do ourselves in a sense of bringing product to market. Like the change, we're changing in our outlet, we're changing the company to a certain extent as well. And also not trying to be all things to all men. Our attitude kind of before was we can do anything, you know. No matter what you want, we'll get it for you. Now we're trying to create a bit of focus. And I think that's the biggest improvement we're trying to put into place over the next six months, is narrow our focus and become a bit more specialised. Because, as I said to you earlier on, at the lower level, there's too many lesser players, call it, in it.

To spread more and do more things, or you need people to do, to be multitasking. Whereas if you have lots of people with lots of skills, then you can specialize.

Yes. No. What I mean is, we'll say, the demand for product, there's demand for services a lot more now. And we're trying to build our services organisation bigger to provide people into companies to do jobs where they won't necessarily employ people themselves. Built around VMware this virtualisation of hardware based on VMware and storage and that because data just seem to grow, grow, grow, grow and to get, to become more involved in data repositories, we call it, and become a bit more expert in that area. The one thing we do find is if you've lots of people, then you're really scrambling for work for those all the time. Whereas if you have a nice level of skilled people, a good tight sales force, you can sell that skill set. That's what we find at the moment. That's what we're coming to, you know. Like fourteen, we may have sixteen people next year or eighteen. But
there might be more, they'll be higher skilled than at the lower level. Because at the lower level, PCs and entry-
level service, there isn't a lot of skill any more in that. You know, everybody's an expert at a PC now, you know, for
all intensive purposes.

Yeah, every college kid can assemble a computer and sell it.

Absolutely, you know. Yeah. So there's no magic anymore there. And if there's no magic there, you can't get, you
can't charge for it at the extent where you could before. So the magic now is in virtualisation, in specific, you
know, tasks that people want to do. And that's really what we're looking at, you know.

I see. In terms of networking, can you elaborate a little bit more? Like who would be in charge of doing that?

Well, what, as an example, I'm in charge of it, but then I get to get the guys out networking as well. Like the
Chamber of Commerce, we're members of that, and to get the guys to go to a function here or a function there.

The guys, you mean, are your employees?

Yes. The salespeople. To be willing to go to – like I really look at it and say I built a business over the years on
contacts, just going out meeting people and going to functions and getting involved in not necessarily charity
things, but things that were, you know, clubs of a different sort or networking clubs, you know, just being,
generally, being out there. So therefore, so when somebody wants something, then you're the person to say "oh
yeah, he can do that for you." And it's localised stuff in that sense, outside of the specialization stuff we do, you
know? And aligning ourselves then to good brands, like Sun Microsystems, HP, the ones that we do, just align to
those and they in turn would help get business as well. That type of thing. And to work with some of those more
closely, you know, than before. I'm sure that's it really.

Is there anything that you'd like to say? That I didn't ask, that I should have asked?

Not really, no. I don't think so. I think you've gone from the personal side to the business side I suppose in a sense.
And at the moment everything is a bit fluid anyway, the way the world is. So I think it's just all about survival from
everybody's point of view at the moment. Because all the markets are constricting, you know. So it's very
important that we all keep our heads down, you know? I don't get involved in all the negativity that's out there at
the moment, you know? All right?

Yeah. Thank you very much for your time.

No problem, no problem. Pleasure.
INTERVIEW 3
Nomadic Work/Life in the Knowledge Economy - UL

Anthony interviews John (technical director of [scientific software development firm]) – 16 February 2009

So, John, we’re going to cover a series of questions, and some questions are more personal lifestyle, so would you please describe a little bit, tell me about your position here and how, talk about your family and where you live?

OK, well, [scientific software development firm] is a small SME. We used to be a public organisation, now we’ve privatised, and then we bought the company out, so it's not a private company. My role, technical director, and I'm involved a lot in EU projects, looking at the application use of technologies. We're also developing technologies, ourselves. We're developing high-tech distributor systems and so on, software and hardware. So, that's what we do. So a lot of my work involves quite a lot of travelling around Europe. My family, I live close by, and we have four grown-up children.

And your wife, does she have a career?

Yeah, well she works part-time. She works part-time as an administrator, not here, at another company. Three of my children are in college – two in UL and one in Dublin, and my eldest girl is now working.

What are they studying at UL?

The boys are doing, one's doing mechanical engineering, the other's doing computer engineering, and my daughter's doing architecture, my other daughter, in the IT in Dublin. And our eldest girl did event management in LIT.

And what about you, your college degree? Did you study at UL?

No, UCD. I did engineering at UCD and I did my PhD there in software engineering, telecommunications engineering, and I did an MBA there subsequently, at UCD as well.

OK, and where did you grow up? Could you describe a bit of your family from childhood, like?

In Tralee, in Kerry. I don't know if you're familiar with Irish names, but my name is very much a traditional Irish name, so would have been my – the people back would have been very much based on farming in the west of Ireland, Galway down to Kerry, on both sides – my mother's side and my father's side. So, background is very much agriculture, in farming. Well I didn't grow up on a farm, I grew up in town. But my background, my family, cousins and all that, have all been farmers.

What are the reasons why you chose to study engineering and then business?

Why'd I do engineering? I did engineering because I liked fixing things. I liked mechanical things. I liked making things and solving problems, that sort of stuff. So engineering seemed to fit too well rounded than say science or whatever. Did the MBA because I did all the technical stuff and I did the PhD, and I did lots of technical stuff and got all that stuff out of my system, and then found that I needed business training. I really wasn't that keen on working in big companies. I much prefer being more entrepreneurial and innovative. So that's – you need to have the training if you want to learn these things.
So you have a PhD in engineering?

Well, software and telecommunications. And when I did engineering, there was electrical engineering and that's it. Now there's electrical computers, software, electronic and so on, but at that time it was just electrical. But I streamed in mostly into the software area, so the PhD I did was it was simulating a satellite system, so it wasn't telecommunications, which I hadn't actually done, ever. But the actual, what I was doing was writing code, developing systems and so on. And the interesting thing was we simulated a particular satellite that the European space agency put up and we predicted that they were going to have certain problems with their telecoms, and they did, so. I was delighted. Tough on them, but.

Did you have to travel to do this work elsewhere?

No, no. This stuff was all – one thing I discovered while I was doing all that was the power of the Internet, and online and all that sort of stuff because I was able to get all the data that they were picking up at the various ground stations, and able to get it on my – it wasn't a laptop at the time, in fact it was an IBM 360, but I was able to get it, yeah.

That was your PhD topic?

Yeah, I simulated a particular satellite, the communications part of a satellite system.

What years were that? I'm thinking about the Celtic Tiger years.

Oh it's well before that, oh god no. This was 1981, no was it earlier? No I think it was about 1980, yeah '76, '80. I suppose the main reason I did it was when I finished work, or when I finished my degree, my primary degree, as a dare there was one plum job that came up, a French company called Schlumberger, doing wireline services in Venezuela, and as a dare I went for it and I got it. And at the time I mean I was earning more than the president – it was an incredibly high power, high paid job. And I found I wasn't, after a couple months, I wasn't terribly pushed about that.

Did they send you to Venezuela?

Yeah, yeah. So I was working there for a couple of months. Work was straight forward enough. What they considered high pressure, I didn't think was – it was OK, it wasn't that big of a deal. But I got the opportunity to work with a particular professor in UCD, and I thought life is too short, so I went off to do that.

Yes, I also have a background in going back and forth from business to sciences, back to business, and now I'm back to academia again.

Yeah, well as a sociologist, what you'll really appreciate is the power play, and the empire building and the politics of academia. It's if anything worse than business, I think.

Oh yeah, that can be tough.

But anyway, that's – so I finished a PhD, and before I was finished I got a job in RTE, which is the Irish TV, radio TV company, doing – there was a big development at that time. They were expanding the network out and they needed a lot of R&D done, so I did that. I finished my PhD and did my MBA there. And after that then, I was tired of the big company, so I joined a small software company. And at the time, you know the dot-com boom? There was a previous boom back in the '80s called the software boom in Ireland. And that was great fun, it was great, absolutely. Nobody was over thirty in the company, and that was great fun.

So your assignment in Venezuela, you were still a student?
No, no, no. I graduated. I got my degree and all the rest of it.

**And then you came back and got the RTE job?**

There was a whole bunch of interviews and so I got it. So I went out there to Venezuela for a few months. Then I came back and did the PhD in UCD, and that took about three years, and then I went and did, joined RTE.

**And then you got involved in the software boom?**

Well I left RTE and I joined a small company called Intelligence Ireland, we were developing communications software, like the sort of stuff I did with the PhD. And that was great fun. The company ran out of money, mind you, but it was great fun.

**What years was this software boom?**

That would have been in the early '80s, and there was no more software companies that came out of them. I suppose the best known one would be, your man out of Trinity, what do you call it? Iona, they'll probably be – all the other ones are gone. But it was a bit like the dot-com boom, I mean it was like boom time.

**You're talking about Irish companies?**

Yeah, in Dublin, yeah. I remember a guy came into us and we made our pitch, and he gave us a check for a quarter of a million. And we had no business plan, nothing. We lost the whole lot, mind you.

**Oh it didn't work out?**

Not as a business, no. We got bought over then, by Dermot Desmond, who was putting together a group of companies to pitch for a big – and back at square one like, big company again, same sort of craic, so. I then joined [scientific software development firm]. I joined [scientific software development firm] about twelve years ago, I suppose, about thirteen years ago. And I joined as MD, but my brief was ... It was '90.

When I joined [scientific software development firm] it was a semi-state, a semi-state company. So it had a board with government appointees and all the rest of it. And my brief was to commercialise it and sell it off basically. And at the time what we were doing was we were helping entrepreneurs to develop products, hence the name, Microelectronics Application Centre. So when the company started, it was Microelectronics, hence the name. But very quickly it became apparent that if you're developing products, I think the electronics of them has to have software. But more importantly than that it has to have information – competitive analysis, competitor information, you know, raw knowledge.

So we actually got very good at [scientific software development firm] at doing online stuff, because that was the biggest thing for entrepreneurs, they didn't know what competitors they had, or what the market potential might be, or what's happening in the market segment. So we actually got very good at [scientific software development firm] at doing online things. And we got a project in the states for Bank of America, to develop, to do some software development, and we outsourced it to some folks at UL. It worked out terrific, because at the time, Ireland was a low-cost economy. So the guys got what they considered terrifically paid. The guys in the states thought we were dirt cheap. Great. But in using that, in that particular project, we used this thing called the Internet, do you know? This was before it went commercial. And I remember thinking, “wow, this is the way things are going to be.” Because we never met them, we only dealt by teleconference. We delivered the code electronically. So location had nothing to do with the job. It was ability and solving the problem.

**Was it already a remote project?**
Yeah, they were in San Francisco, and we were here in Limerick. But I remember I was onto the bank at the time to get them to go onto the Internet, and I remember having a long session on the phone trying to persuade a guy, a senior guy in the bank, that it would be worth their while, being on this Internet thing. But he said “what will we do with it?” And I said “well at least we'll get our job done.” And eventually that's why they went with it, to get our job done.

Yeah I remember my first, well I was one of the first Internet users in Brazil. At that time people called it TelNet. It was very scientific, it was not commercial at all.

That was a big problem. It was an academic network, because there was two – there was the defence network, which of course nobody could use, and then there was the academic network. But commercial business just didn’t see the point. And if you are using commercial things that were like TelNet and stuff which were awkward to use, expensive, and really only the techies could use them. They weren't really for the greater unwashed.

But we did that project anyway and we delivered it and ran the tests remotely and I thought “gee, this is great.” So that got us into the whole area of information, or what I call now the e-services and e-working and all that sort of stuff. So because we were a semi-state company, there's no way our owner, essentially the government, would put money on us. So we started getting involved in the EU projects for funding. And of course this whole information society and all that then took off big time, and we got new projects then.

So I'm a bit confused, because in the beginning [scientific software development firm] was to foster endogenous business, and then you mentioned you were doing this project for U.S. companies.

Oh, our brief was we had to run commercially, so they weren't going to put money into us, our owners, or the government. So we had two lines of business. One was straight commercial, where we did straight commercial consultancy for whoever wanted it, I guess. And then we had entrepreneurs. Now we could not make money off the entrepreneurs. If the thing we developed was successful, they paid us our fee and they became wealthy. If it wasn't successful, they simply didn't pay us. We took all the pain and no gain. So we had commercial projects then to compliment, to actually pay for the business.

So there was no funding from the government?

No. But that's fair enough, I'm not complaining. I understood that was the deal and it was good because it kept us very sharp. Because if we were just funded, I don't think we would have been as sharp. And one thing an entrepreneur needs to deal with is sharp people, because they just don't have the time or resources to be otherwise.

So one of our briefs – we were located in UL, see it's still on my business card. We were actually located in the complex, in the actual complex. Because UL was one of our original shareholders. And the intention was that we'd act as a sort of an in-between academia and industry. So we'd go to industry, find things to be done, either for entrepreneurs or for companies, and then we'd channel it back in to people in UL to do it. And that's how we did the Bank of America project, because we knew nothing about it. It was about re-engineering code, which we knew nothing about. But it was a team in UL who had done an EU project and just that. And they did a super job on it. The guys in the states were very impressed, to put it mildly.

And what happened with the entrepreneurial line of work here?

Oh we did that. Oh god, we did hundreds of products and we developed some products all the way from scratch, idea right through to product. Others, we'd maybe develop the prototype and then the company would develop the product. Others we'd do the product, while they did the prototype, whatever. Now we always did it on a commercial basis. The fundamental problem is the start-up companies are a pretty high-risk market to be in
because if – a lot of them go bust, and if they go bust we get nothing. You know what I mean? And if they succeeded, we never got the upside. So what we did do then was – and I think what happened as well over the years, the environment changed. Like our original role was to go out and persuade companies they should use technology, they should use this, and they should use things like the Internet, or electronics, or software, or whatever. And that's not required anymore. People know that now. They might not know how to do it, but they do know that they should do it. So our role strategically changed, so the board agreed that we'd privatise the company.

We got very good at the EU projects. I forgot to mention that. And OK, originally we got into them because it provided funding, but actually what started to happen was they provided us two really wonderful things. They provided us with know-how, because we started working at the edge of various areas, whatever you're doing tends to be on the edge. And you work with the best in the business. So it's very interesting. So that meant we could attract good staff and keep them. Because, you know, we'd be working with the best, and if you want to develop your career as say a software engineer or hardware engineer, if you could hack it in [scientific software development firm] for a few years, you could definitely, you could move on to bigger and better things. So, the EU projects actually became quite an asset to the company.

So eventually when we did privatise, it was a group of investors bought into us who, they got previews on technology opportunities, basically. Because one of the things that comes out of the EU projects is we begin to see things that maybe would be five years out, which in the ICT area is like forever. And that is an asset we still have. We still build quite nicely on that.

**Doesn’t most EU funding require that applicants be a public authority?**

No, no, no. Well, on the EU side what happened was, as I say we got into it because we wanted some funding. And then we were actually very good at managing and productising outputs for managing technical development product out there, that's our business. And that means we were managing products very well. So we actually got, we ended up being very successful in EU projects. But what we tried to do was be in various projects. So there are some programs where you have to be a public agency to be in them, such as say Interreg and so on. But in Interreg, we tend to be a subcontractor to somebody. Whereas in Framework 7, they just love us. And, so there's different programs, and we got very good at that. So there's a big call at the moment, like there's a big ICT call at the moment, closing in April.

Well I did it all on the science parks and stuff as well, because I was on the innovation committee here on the park, and the innovation centre here and the whole technology park concept in the early ’80s was absolutely cutting edge. People were coming from all over Europe to see how it's done. And unfortunately they let it slip, so I did, I actually did assessments of science parks and things like that. The big thing I looked at was, a big area of interest I had is the use of ICT in technology or in regional development.

Are you familiar with the whole EU scene? Well under the, they're reforming the cap and they're going to have, it's now, it's the (inaudible) culture policy in regional development. So they're diverting a lot of the money from the primary sort of agricultural subsidies to secondary regional development. And then the regional strategy guidelines up about two years back, they were totally explicit about the use of ICT for regional development. So we did a study for DG Agri that, we put together a consortium. What we did was sixty or seventy case studies across Europe about using the take up of ICT in rural areas.

**Shannon is involved in infrastructural projects at Interreg, such as [project name], on how to disseminate broadband Internet into the rural area of Ireland. Interreg still does lots of projects about how to expand infrastructures that develop regions.**

Yeah, we did, we just finished a project called Citizen First where we looked at that, about Citizen Centric and dealing with hard-to-reach groups including people in rural areas. Yeah, it's – we did a lot of, in our study for DG
Agri, we looked, and one of the things I’m very pleased about is that they’re focusing a lot more on the take up and usage, but not the infrastructure. Because the infrastructure is easy. Like we found in our study, anybody on the planet that wants broadband can have it if they’re willing to pay for it. That’s the problem. But how do you persuade somebody who is in traditional industry that they could actually be viable by using fairly basic technology. So the study we did, we did a very much bottom-up. We did about seventy small case studies across Europe, and they ranged from like a B&B in Slovakia that started putting their stuff - a bed and breakfast in Slovakia that started putting their stuff on the Internet so you could book it, right through to a huge infrastructure project in France which was like 40 million or something. So that was one of the things we did. So personally, I’m actually quite interested in technology and particularly its take up and use and its impact on people’s lives and competitors and so on.

I find it very interesting because what [scientific software development firm] was doing, say ten, fifteen years ago ...

Well, now this stuff I’m doing on the rural thing, quite frankly, I personally enjoy it. One of things I like being in a small company is I can do what I enjoy. I mean I get paid for it, yeah we got quite a lot, we got paid for it and we got lots of (inaudible), I got to give lots of talks and stuff about it.

For example, how would you relate what you did and what you do now with what UL is doing? Like the TTO, the Technology Transfer Office, and what Shannon Development is trying to do, like when you open all these business incubators. [scientific software development firm] was doing that type of ...

Well [scientific software development firm] was one of those instruments. I mean we were put in place as an instrument for regional development. Our shareholders were Shannon Development, IDA, University of Limerick, and the National Board for Science and Technology, which is now essentially, I guess, Forfás. They were our actual shareholders, so we were a semi-state company. And, yeah, I mean as a model, we had loads of people coming to see us and discuss how the model works, and does it work, and should they do it themselves, all this stuff. But what basically happened was, quite frankly, the world moved on and different things had to be done. I think this sort of model, as it was, was not the way it needs to be. Funny enough, I see the same wheel being reinvented, mind you. I think people are trying to do the same things we were doing. And for the same sort of reason, they'll have to move on as well.

Like it's interesting, I mean, you might find this, we were set up the same time as the National Microelectronics Research Centre, which is in Cork, which is now the Tyndall Centre, and we were the Microelectronics Application Centre. And it was interesting, they focused on research and developing new technologies, so they ended up working with large companies, and they are a part of the university. They're about developing technologies – big R, little D. Whereas we're an application centre, so we are little R, big D. So we worked a lot more with entrepreneurs, start-up companies, small companies, endogenous companies. So we developed totally different. And in fact, even though we were in UL, we developed quite apart from UL. And the fundamental reason, like we looked at it, was that we have to respond too quickly. Like an entrepreneur, time to market is everything. Take if you're a start-up, you don't have the money to have a long time to market. And time to market is the best predictor of profitability, much bigger than investment or cost or anything.

**Time to market being what?**

Time to market, from the time you dream up the idea to have somebody actually buying it off the shelf somewhere. To have it in the market, yeah. Now that also applies to e-services as well, or to any service. To the time when people are paying commercial revenues for it. It’s the best, anyway, time to market is the key predictor of profitability and success.

So, as I say, when we were set up originally as [scientific software development firm], the intention was that [scientific software development firm] would have no development people, technical people. It would be all sort
of sales, marketing, and the university would do all the development. But the snag is people need very fast response time. And academia worked to a different heartbeat. You're based on semesters, and you're based on class times. It's a different heartbeat. Whereas in business, if a potential customer wants something, and they say they want it at 9 o'clock tomorrow morning, they actually mean that. Five past 9, you're gone. You're not going to get it.

So, what we found in [scientific software development firm] was the original model was say we'd have no technical staff, we'd basically get the work and UL would do it. And it couldn't, wouldn't work, particularly once you went online. Because when it got to the point that people needed information like now. And you go to the library at UL and you say "well, could you get me some information on" – this is before the Internet when they're using things like DataStar and things like that – and you ask them for some information, and they'd say "well, I could have it for you this day next week." Well what we had in mind was we needed the answer like now, as in like here and now. So that got us into the whole online thing. And as I say, we got very good at it before the Internet hit. We started to use it in academia, but we were on the academic network. And as I said when we did the job then for Bank of America, it just struck me – this is the way it's going to be.

Because I remember I did a project with Cranfield University, you know, Cranfield, the university in the UK. We did it with the library there. And it was, I don't know, a two or three year project. In the space of a year, we had been looking at information access, at how technical people accessed knowledge. That's what the project was about in the aerospace industry. And in the space of a year it went from absolutely you always went to the librarian, and he or she mediated getting you the knowledge. And it cost an awful lot of money and all the rest of it. And within a year, once the Internet went dot-com, it flipped the other way. Everybody was doing it themselves. And it happened in less than a year. So it made for a really interesting evaluation on the project.

It would have been late '90s. Because I did a lot of work with libraries at that time, and the impact of information technology and particularly the impact of massive network technology on libraries. And what is a library in an information-age society? What is it now? It's not what it was, so what is it now?

**Now it tends to be more self-service, right? You go online on Google yourself, and try to find it yourself. You're going to have to have the skills to do that, right?**

Well that's what happened in the research, because Cranfield, we were dealing only with their research people, you know, post-grads, post-docs. And in a year it flipped from non of them had a clue how to find anything online – these would be post-grads and post-docs – to a situation where they're all doing it themselves. And that happened in less than a year in Cranfield, and it was just a total shift about. So from the project's point of view, it was great. God, our evaluation was really interesting.

**Yeah, although at that time, Google was still lists of Web sites.**

Oh god, there was no Google. Oh god, there was no Google. But there was no Google, it was – what had happened in that year, it was a service called AltaVista. It appeared, and that changed everything. First of all, we got the Web from CERN, what was it called? Mosaic. And then AltaVista, and that changed everything within a year. So that was interesting. That was fun.

**And what does [scientific software development firm] offer now in terms of products and services?**

Well we're doing our own thing now. We're practising what we preached. And we're developing a family of distributed – we developed a series of technologies and they're basically built around distributor systems, where we're using wireless inter networks, which are based on something called ZigBee. Because I think what you're going to have is we have the Internet at the moment, but the Internet of things and the Internet of entities is going to be the way things are. So everything will be smart, everything will be interconnected wirelessly. So we have developed skill sets in the near field wireless, the wireless inter network stuff. Then on the wide area of
communications, and particularly on the back end, so we've gone with an architecture of the SOA type model, the Service-Oriented Architecture, where we have Web services that are loosely coupled to each other. We're starting to now look at Semantic Web, to see can we make that smarter. And this is where the EU projects are great, because these are the sort of things we were working on. So that's our sort of, shall we say, core commercial work now. But to get us, keep us abreast of the knowledge and also to get us, keep us funded, we're still doing the EU projects to get both knowledge and funding. And under the seventh framework it's great. They're paying SME 75 percent, which is great.

**Because Interreg is also 75 percent co-funding.**

4C is. 4B is only 50. Yeah 4A and B is only 50. But 4C, it's a twenty-one hit rate. There's twenty proposals to every one they get through.

**But can [scientific software development firm] apply for Interreg? Because Interreg, they have diverse tricks about being public.**

Well we go in as not as us. We go in a subcontractors, so we're working with, we were then with Capurture in the UK and Midwest Region 30 in Ireland in a 4C proposal. And we're looking at a 4B one at the moment with the Midwest as well. To be honest though, Interreg is not really – I mean I'm interested, but as a business, we need more of the techie stuff. And we've applied our distributive systems to both, the power industry for power grids, for power distribution grids, and also for the environmental monitoring. And under the current FP7 call in ICT and energy, there's some really good homes there for those sort of technologies. So we're busy at the moment putting together proposals.

**Can you give an example of how your information service works? What [scientific software development firm] is offering now?**

Well what we're offering now? We don't work with entrepreneurs anymore in that sense. We work with them – well the EU projects have actually been very very good to us. Say, they gave us funding when our owners wouldn't, and they gave us know-how and they gave us really good networking with the best of the best. So that's really, we're using that now to go and develop – well first of all to get technologies, well no sorry. What I'm coming to, we got very good at two things. We got very good at partnering with others to do something, rather than competing with them. And also at managing projects. We were very good at managing distributive teams and so on. And that's really what we're using at the moment. We're not actually doing product development for entrepreneurs anymore, we're doing it for ourselves. And the products we're now developing is our own products for us. But we're doing that as a collaboration with various people both within EU projects, and outside of EU projects.

**These products are about the assimilation of information?**

No, no. No, no. It's distributive management systems using ZigBee, right area communications, and back end SOA model type Web service based management systems. Our sort of core product line is that sort of intercommunications, so we're working with partners who do the actual sensors. Because we're not really interested in sensors as such. Communications we use, so we don't really want to develop them. So the things like GPRS, WiMAX, GSM, and then the back end, where there's a lot of value add, we tend to use standard platforms, like Microsoft.net, or Java, or other platforms.

**And what type of sensors? Like microchip sensors?**

Well again it depends. For the environment, we would use, say dissolved oxygen sensors, temperature sensors, humidity sensors, level sensors. So we've done a system that's running up in Newport at the Marine Institute, and
it basically detects events like flooding or pollution events and the dissolved oxygen sensor would pick up pollution, and the level would detect the flooding event.

In the power industry, our landlord here, (inaudible), they have a sensor technology, it's in there somewhere, for detecting current in cables and that's the sensor we use there. So it's their sensor, we're focusing on the communications and the intelligence, the decision making, and interfacing into legacy systems, things like that. So that's our core business, but in terms of the EU projects, our core thing is our project management capability. We're good at managing projects, particularly with desperate groups. And we also get technology off them.

So you manage projects on software development?

EU projects. Well, I'll give you an example. We had a big meeting in Skovia on Friday on a project called E-Participate. And E-Participate is Webcasting and multimedia interaction system to allow citizens to view local council meetings, and then interact. We've started to add Web two zero type tools and so on, and really thought about getting citizens to participate with their local democracy, because local democracy has the biggest impact on people's lives. It's what decides who collects the garbage and who cleans the streets. The big things.

So we worked with a UK company who had a system called Public Eye, and then we managed the project under protocol to E10. And what E10 is about is to see can you take an innovative e-service that's running somewhere and expand it up to Europe. So that's what we did. They were running it in the UK. So we did a project where we did the market validation for four member states. We did Ireland, Slovakia, well the UK is where it came from, and Spain. And it turned out very successful. So then we got what's called an initial deployment project, again under E10, where it's about can we deploy this across Europe on a commercial basis. So we're running a project there with eighteen partners, eight of which are business partners who have member states, and then we have ten user partners who are local authorities, regional authorities and so on. And so we'd manage that and coordinate it.

So we had – Skovia, the municipality in Skovia bought the system there and formally launched it last Thursday. Skovia is about a hundred kilometres north of Madrid. We had a meeting there of all leading partners, and we had some other people who joined us as well, because they were interested, they weren't getting any funding, but they were very interested in taking this service. But the UK partner were the guys who were doing all the technical stuff. So we're just managing it. So that's what we're doing there. So that's just an example of how we do these things.

Yes I know. Back to yourself, like after this big introduction - can you describe your typical work day?

Well what's happening at the moment is, as I say, I'm pretty well looking after all the EU projects because what we're doing as a company is we're practising what we preached. We've seen major opportunity in distributing smart systems. That's the way things are going to be. No doubt at all about it. It's just a matter of who's going to do it, how it's going to be done. So what we're doing is, as our sort of core commercial business, is to develop that system for the power industry, for environment. And to support that then we're running EU projects, which has mainly evolved into managing them. So that's where I spend most of my time at the moment.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, the way the EU projects work is if you're successful, you tend to be very successful because you get other projects and you get invited to the consortiums, and we have. So we're very busy with that at the moment, which is great, because it has nothing to do with the economy. So the downturn in the economy just doesn't affect us, it just has nothing to do with us. But, we'll say, means to an end. We're only doing it because it gets us revenues, but it also gets us technologies and know-how. So, I spend most of my time on the EU projects, so I do a lot of travelling.

So you don't work in the, at an office or at home?
Well that's my office down next door, but I work just so much at home, or I work in the airports. Like most of my work last week was down in the hotels in Skovia, and there during the week.

So you've been travelling a lot? Can you give an example then of a typical week?

Well OK, this week we had our meeting in Skovia on, well we had a series of meetings on Thursday and Friday. So I had to prepare for those because I'm the project manager. Eighteen partners and another five or six that came along, and we had on Thursday morning, we had a business partners meeting, which was totally business – pricing, markets, all that sort of stuff. And then at 12 o'clock, we had the official launch by the municipality of Skovia where we had the TV cameras along and journalists and all that sort of stuff. So we made the front page of the local newspaper. And then in the afternoon we had our European User group because we had launched the Spanish User group for the E-Participate service. And then we had a project meeting after that, a short project meeting. And then Friday we had a full project meeting. So I got back on Friday night, and today now I have to try to put together minutes and do a post-mortem and all that stuff, because it was like loads of presentations. So I have to put them all together on a site, a Web site, so everybody can see them.

So your coming weeks will be like that as well?

Yeah, well this week – we have a very big review next week in Hanover where we're being reviewed. And this is our big semantic Web project, Ockham. So it's a two-day review and a one-day preparation, so it's most of the week, because it'll take most of the day to get to Hanover from here. And, so this week we have to prepare for that. So we're having a meeting in Brussels on Wednesday, and we're probably looking at commercial opportunities for the service, the operating service. So I have to prepare for that, which is in preparation for the thing next week. And I have to post-mortem the other one.

So you're working in multiple projects and some of them in different stages. Some are kick-off meetings, and some are ...

Oh yeah, yeah. Oh we launched a project the week before last in London.

And the others are kind of finalising, brief meetings and ...

Yeah, yeah. Ockham is about half way through. E-Participate is in its last quarter. So they're in different stages, yeah. And then we have a project that finished just before Christmas, so there's a sole administer wrap up of it, and final costings and all that sort of stuff as well. So they're at different stages, yeah.

So all these meetings, there are deliverables, like reports, you have to prepare and organise data, read materials. From where do you do that usually?

It depends. Where I have wi-fi access I can do it. My key tool is the laptop. And I don't have a desktop. I just have a laptop and that's it. And I work on wi-fi, whether here, at home, or at a hotel, wherever. So, that's my office.

So how would you describe your situation? As a mobile worker, as a remote worker?

No, a mobile worker, a mobile worker. No, I'm not a remote worker. Again, that was another area we did a lot of work on – what used to be called teleworking and commute working. And I was actually on the government's committee, or on a board, it was a group – anyway, they had a group anyway that looked into that. Yeah, no I'd be a mobile worker I think, working in airports and places like that.

In terms of a family, so you, do you spend most of the nights of the week either with your family or you spend it in airports, travelling, hotels?
Well, it depends. I mean, most of this week I'll spend at home, because I'll just fly out on Wednesday and be back Wednesday night. Last week I suppose I was three days away, four days away. It depends on the meetings, yeah. I try to sort of, like Saturday and Sunday are off.

**OK, and that was going to be my next question. How do you organise time?**

Well, again, like things like Outlook and that is great, do you know? Outlook, you know, you can actually organise your time. The great thing about – my main communication mode would be my e-mail, and the nice thing is it's synchronise. So if I don't answer the e-mail, I don't. Whereas if a phone rings and you answer it, you've got to talk to the person. So, no I would use things like Outlook to organise time quite a bit as well. And it's just a matter of being organised really.

**So you don't have a time where, say, you stop working at 5 pm and that's it? Or is your time so flexible that you can see yourself working late nights and early mornings, and the next week is different?**

Yeah, totally. It depends, yeah. Because like, these are the meetings. We also do deliverables to finish things and so on. So I could get e-mails at any time, yeah.

**Your laptop is your main tool.**

Oh yeah. Well the laptop and connectivity. The laptop on its own isn't much use. The laptop connected is.

**So you have to have Internet capabilities, strong wireless capabilities on your laptop to be able to work conveniently anywhere?**

Absolutely, yeah.

**Is that a problem for you? Is that technical ...**

No, because I bought a laptop that does. But the previous laptop I had just wasn't good enough. So it had to go.

**So you have connectivity wherever you are?**

Yeah, pretty much, yeah. Well I mean I organise it that way. I mean I just booked some hotels there now for when we were meeting in Slovakia. Big issue, does it have Internet access? Does it have wi-fi, yes or no? No? Forget it. You know? I need electricity, water, wi-fi. You know, yeah. So it's pretty fundamental, yeah. I couldn't do this now, because before, I looked at this before of productivity of ICT people and so on, and it is amazing now. Once you have these sort of technologies, your productivity is just (inaudible) so much higher, it's phenomenal, absolutely phenomenal.

**And what's the cause of such high productivity?**

We just get things done. I mean we had a meeting, we had a board meeting on Friday, and the decision was we'd have a review meeting in Albacor near Paris. I e-mailed the project officer on the commission and he gave us an answer back. That before might take, you'd have to send a formal letter, you'd have to get a formal letter back by registered post. It'd take two weeks, then you'd have to go and contact everybody to see that they day they come up with is OK. So we'd know before we left the room. Things like that.

**But does it mean that people are now working eighty hours a week?**

Probably.
Are they working from home?

Well, unfortunately I think – I remember when I looked back ten or fifteen years ago the prediction was that the whole EU working and teleworking would allow us lots of flexibility, you know? And we'd be so much more productive. And they were absolutely correct about the productivity. But what's happened is one bunch are working eighty hours a week, highly productive. And the other lot are redundant, unemployed. Yeah, that's what happened. It hasn't quite distributed out. That was the implication, that everybody would benefit. I'm not too sure they have. No, I must say, just from a practical point of view, that and in terms of software development, some of the Web service tools, like dot-net tools and all that are just, productivity is phenomenal in what you can produce. Now you need a machine that has multi gigahertz processor and gigabytes and ram and all the rest of it to run it because it's an absolute dog of software. But god, you can produce it quick and change it.

The fact that your business is located here in the technology park, does it facilitate, being located here? Why not in Dublin or why not in Limerick centre? Why the technology park?

That actually, yeah, that actually came to head to us when we moved out of UL. We moved out of UL about three years ago, and we actually had that discussion. And it is actually very important to us to be in the park here. A few things, at the time connectivity was a huge issue. It's not as bad now. You can pretty well have broadband where you want it now, not quite, but nearly. So that was one. The other, the proximity to UL was a big issue, because we do do things with UL and people in UL. And being in the technology park just fits our profile as well. So it's all sorts of soft things. It was data hard. We needed broadband. Because we can live without electricity, but once we lose the Internet, we're not working anymore. So it's, yeah, oh yeah. Because I've often gone home, because they dig up a wire here, take out the electricity or whatever, or they take out the Internet. So we all just go home and work from home. So at the end of the day, it's our life blood.

So why do you come here? Why don't you stay at home 24/7? Why do you come here then? I'm trying to explore the relations between technology, mobility, connectivity.

No I see what you're getting at, because it has come up. Well I suppose because the team is here. We do actually have to meet sometime, even though I haven't spoken to them much today and I've been away since Tuesday. And also what we have here is we have our own Intranet, to our own sort of network internally, and that I can't access from home. We could, but it would be too expensive and security wise it would be a nightmare. But the main thing is just to meet the team.

You don't like to do that over the phone?

Well the main thing, the reason I came in this morning is I had a teleconference with some folks in Greece and Italy at 10, so. I could have done that at home, but. I don't know, I just come into the office, it's handier. And all my files and stuff is here, the paper. The main thing is to meet, is to meet the team, because like it isn't just me managing the projects. It's about the guys doing the Web site, or software, or hardware, whatever. So it isn't just me.

So you also value the face-to-face interaction, because some people do that remotely, right – phones, Skype.

Well you can do – what I've found is that there's a spectrum of interactions and ultimately to get things done you have to actually work with other people because you can't do it all yourself. Either managing them, or you're cooperating with them or you're collaborating with them, and there's sort of a spectrum. There's certain things you can do online. So for instance the Ockham project, we have a virtual room in a system called Meritech. And we've all entered this virtual room, and we've got a white board, and we can all see this white board and write on it, and we have video cameras, we can see each other on it, all that sort of stuff. And that works for certain types of meetings.
The teleconference this morning was pure audio. And that worked for what they were doing, which was very much a focused technical issue. It was a specific issue we got to do, so we didn't need to get to know each other or build relationships or trust, or any of that sort of craic, we'd just sort the problem out. Teleconference is perfect for that, and in fact, with the team here on Friday, a few issues came up on another service we're running, and I was able to deal with it while I was at the other meeting by e-mails, because we didn't need to have a big long chat. So there's a spectrum for sort of e-mails all the way through to sort of face-to-face. But you do need face-to-face meetings. If you're going to build trust, and if you want to collaborate with teams, specifically if they're distributive teams, you've got to build trust and understanding and so on, and you do that eyeball-to-eyeball and that.

So, is that better in person?

Yeah. Now what we do normally in the projects, or what I try and organise, we'd have one of those sort of big meetings every six months or so. And the sort of more emotional stuff can be dealt with. Because there are issues that build up, I mean amongst eighteen partners, there's lots of issues. And certain of them can be dealt with by e-mail, but there's other things that simply have to be sitting around a table.

Yeah, eighteen is a large number of partners.

Oh yeah, tell me about it. Yeah. But that was the point of the project, to show that you could scale the thing out. Another thing we're doing that you might be interested in is the Ockham project, this is a very highly technical project. And our big role is, OK we're running the service. This is a semantic Web project, so it's pretty high tech, lot of blue sky stuff in it, but incredibly high power technical people and research people and so on are in it. But what we're doing is we're running the service because we're good at sort of productising stuff and so on, but what might be more interesting to you is we're running a distributive management platform called G-Fort, and that's based on a – you familiar with open-source software?

Yes, like Linux?

Yeah, but the open-source software movement and how it works? OK, well, so what we're doing is we're using the open-source methodology and collaboration distributed management approach within our own close space because in the project what we have is about fourteen, fifteen partners, so about eight developing teams across Europe and they range from universities to, there's one in SAP, S-A-P. And, so it ranges from commercial right through to academia. So we're actually managing the development process, and they way we're doing that is using the open-source model. But it's not open-source because SAP won't allow the open-source software.

Is it open-source within the consortium?

Well I'm using open-source methodology, not so much that's it's open – I'm hoping it will eventually be open source. I'd prefer if the damn thing were made open-source, but SAP don't want an open-source.

That will be an EU requirement, right, that it becomes public good?

No. Probably deliverables have to public, but the source codes needn't unless we say so or unless we agree to it. But in the nature of what we're developing here, it would make sense to have an open-source, it doesn't make sense to have it – but anyway ...

So what's a semantic service?

Well what we're doing is we're developing a thing called – well, you have the Web right, and the Web is fundamentally made up of, you know the World Wide Web, it's fundamentally made up of inherently of accessing documents. You're accessing a screen or a PDF document, so it's always documents. So what we're looking at is
taking that further to a Web of entities, so it could be of anything, it doesn't have to be just documents. And to do that, you need an identifier to identify that this is this, not that. And that has to be done as a priory rather – if you're trying to do that after the event, it's incredibly difficult. It needs massive amount of intelligence and knowledge, knowledge management.

So we're trying to create what's called an entity naming service. It's where we would in priory assign unique identifiers to everything. So we're in that service. But it's based on – semantic Web is, what used to be called artificial intelligence where you're looking at, not data, you're trying to look at it as knowledge. So you don't just sort of record a name for something, you actually record the relationships within a particular domain and you record, so you create an ontology so you define a particular understanding or a particular space. So when you ask for something, the yoke is smart enough to know then what it is you're looking for.

So for instance, examples would be say Google. Google is a very very simple semantic Web algorithm that they used where they actually were able to, they ranked what you were looking for by the number of links to it. Just that – very simple algorithm. And yet it blew away AltaVista, because you got much better results all together. Because the system sort of knows what you're looking for. It doesn't, but it appears to know what you're looking for. And they do that by actually kind of counting the links, where AltaVista just did a simple flat free-text search. But as I say, a teensy-weensy little difference meant that Google is now Google and AltaVista is no more.

So there's sort of, the semantic Web is where you don't just pick up the words in the document, you actually pick up the knowledge or the understanding of what those words mean. So you begin to see it – Google is starting to use these sort of techniques, where you're actually asking about something. And it knows enough to know that maybe you might be interested in this too, or maybe here's a cluster of stuff you might be interested in.

So the meaning, they try to improve the meaning of what you're looking for.

Yeah, so it's not data, it's the knowledge, it's the actual meaning inherent in it. And that's normally codified into what's called an ontology, and then you can store that and triple, RDF triples, and now the things called semantic Web.

Well that's quite interesting, and very complex too.

Incredibly complicated. The problem, because meaning – we humans are very good at being able to deal with very very fuzzy meanings. I mean people will know when you're talking about Paris the city or Paris the girl, just the context. Now to do that by machine is really difficult, because the context could be like anything.

So what you're trying to do is a new algorithm?

Well no for this particular project, well it's not us now. The heavy guys are semantic Web dudes or all the others. What we're doing is we're actually running the service and managing their development. But to do that, we're doing it using the open source methodology, because on source forge, you have this crazy arrangement that people don't get paid, they develop software and they contribute it for free, under sourced for it, and then they fix things that are up there, they download modules and test them to blazes and fix them and put them back for free. So you get a whole developing environment, and it's all about peer group pressure and peer group recognition, not salary. It's a totally different way of doing things.

Peer pressure from what groups?

From within. If you're – in the software open-source community, if you're good enough to be able to pull down say part of Google and make it better, you're now a hero amongst all the other developers, right? And that's why you do it. And you will work your tail off. You will work months to do that, just to get that recognition. There was
a meeting in Brussels there recently called Fasda where all these heads get together, open-source heads. And it was like, you know, they're just idolising each other.

It's a bit of a counter-cultural ...

Yeah but it's all very real, like. It's a hundred thousand projects on Source Forge. It's not trivial anymore. So what I'm trying to do in Ockham is apply that methodology and approach here, so it'll make a nice case study at the end. Because the others, some of them get it, but some of the partners don't know what I'm at, why I'm doing this. "Why would anybody volunteer to do this?"

It's fascinating. So your ultimate goal is to commercialise that?

Well our goal isn't, I mean what I want to commercialise is not the product, but the methodology of managing the folks to do it, this G-Fort. That's really one of our key ... It's actually the same software from Source Fort, but they give you their own software as well free. It's open-sourced.

OK so you do the PM work through a software application.

Well in Ockham, what I'm exploring is about managing the distributive teams using this platform because what you have to do is you develop in this different way in the sense that we have a running system, but you believe you can make one of the components better and the way you do that is you pull down the source code off G-Fort, and make it better. But of course you have to prove it's working right before you commit it to the main system, because once it gets committed to the main system, it's now part of the main service. It's now part of the actual service itself. So we are managing that – how you commit it and how it's accepted or not accepted and so on. And yeah, that's how the open-source thing works, I mean that's the methodology, but it's a different, it's a different way of doing things, yeah. And that fits with what we'd like to do ourselves because that's the sort of methodology I'd like to use on our own commercial products. It's nice, I can get a couple hundred developers out there to do the work for you, or test it for you. You can ask them question as well, you know. But anyway that's ...

From semantics to gender, do you see any differences between males and females in the IT sector as workers?

No, I don't think so, no.

The way they use technology, or the way they develop technologies?

Well from the development side, no. No, I think raw ability doesn't have a gender. You know, a great programmer is a great programmer wherever they show up.

And in terms of working style?

In terms of working style, then yeah, perhaps. Because I mean in the whole Web two zero space and social networking, which is what we're exploring in another project, there probably is the social networks that ladies are involved with are different from what men have been involved with, yeah. Well you know the whole Web two zero, social networking: Facebook, MySociety, Bebo, LinkedIn and all those.

They're pitching very different – you can see ones that are intended for women, and those that are intended for men. They're different. Well the social network for women, they tend to be more I think softer, whereas the men's ones tend to be more businessy type things and so on. I don't know if they're right or wrong, but that's what they've done. I mean most people on Bebo are not men. Most people on Bebo are women.

Yeah, but what do you think about the claim that now women use technology more functionally, whereas men get more involved in the gadgetry of the electronics.
I think that was the model. I think we've gone beyond that. I think Web two zero has definitely moved beyond that, yeah. Because I see it with my own kids now, the girls, they'll spend hours on Bebo. The boys wouldn't even dream of even having a site on Bebo. It's a different ...

But do you see girls using the Web as a utilitarian means to connect with people, so the goal is to connect with people, not the Internet itself.

Oh no, media interest in the two. I mean that's just true for everybody. I mean for techie geeks, I mean we like the Internet and we love IP6 and all the rest of it. Whether that's gender, I don't know. I mean that was the model that girls just didn't do these things, and yet that's not true. Because the social networks, some of them are pitched absolutely dead straight at women, and they're very successful, and women spend an awful lot of time on them. Now, whether it is that they want to connect with people, well the products are being adapted to that. I mean their social networks are much softer, more on the emotional side. Whereas the men's ones are much more rational, sort of LinkedIn and so on. But then there are women on LinkedIn as well.

So no, I – I mean you could put it one way like the kids have to be on Bebo because they want to connect with pals. Another way of putting it is they have to be on Bebo because they don't exist in the social mainstream. Because when we did our rural ICT studies, or the rural ICT study for DC Agri, we actually looked at what actually is the driver of the take up of the broadband. Because you have the commission on one side and the driver of the take up of broadband is e-health, e-education, e-participation, e-government, and yet we talk to families, and that is not the driver. The driver is the teenage daughter has to be on Bebo or else she will have no friends in school. So they get broadband. That's the driver. It has nothing to do with education or whatever. Now where that's her being functional, I think it's more peer group pressure. I'm not to sure it has anything to do with gender, I think she wants to be part of the group so she has to have this, she has to be in this.

OK. Again, as producers, as workers, do you see differences between a female software developer and a male software developer in terms of outcome, in terms of the way they work?

No, in my experience the biggest differentiator is not the gender, it's the ability of the person and their personality. Now when you have a development team, you will have different role plays in it. You'll have the social person, you'll have the joker, you know, you'll have the different roles. But I would have thought the predictor is not so much gender, it's much more their actual personality and raw ability. You know, it's more that I think than gender, per se. Now there are sort of social things, as I say about the kids being on Bebo, and all that. But I don't think that's gender either, I mean that's just the socialising of the sort of ...

Well even in terms of jobs candidates, when interviewing somebody. Now you've got a job for engineer, and all the candidates were male, so then that pushes back to the education system, like why all engineers, or 90 percent of the engineers are male and not female.

Because you need maths, and the powers to be decided girls don't need math at some point. Nothing to do with any sort of raw difference between them, I think. Girls schools just didn't do maths. And if you don't have math, you can't do engineering. So girls didn't do engineering. No, my experience of actually working with, because I work with a lot of software engineers, and a lot of times it's sort of like half and half.

Unfortunately, it's all males are in [scientific software development firm] now. But I was involved in big development teams, and at one stage it was about half and half. And there was no, you know – there was nothing to do with gender, it had to do with the actual personality and the ability of the person that dictated how they operated differently. But I didn't, I couldn't say that the girls produced prettier code, or nicer code, or stronger code, or weaker code, no. You get a great programmer and produce great code. That's it. It won't tell if they're male or female.
Moving more widely, now on the topic of society and the knowledge economy, like what types of main transformations do you see happening in the workplace over the years here in Ireland?

Well I suppose the big thing would be that the whole game is now set up from an administrative point of view, the tax point of view and a legal point of view to not take on staff. If you take on staff now you're putting a millstone around your neck as a company.

I mean the last thing we want to do is actually hire people. We would prefer to have people on sort of doing part time or spoke work or whatever. But the system is actually set up that way. There's so many rights and laws and costs and bureaucracy. So it's cheaper not to simply hire people, which is unfortunate. And technology now has conspired with that in that people can now work quite happily not in a job. You can actually be a virtual worker for a virtual company. I mean what I'm doing I could be doing on my own, I wouldn't need to be in [scientific software development firm] to do it. Like I said, I could be at home doing all this stuff.

It's not just a remote worker. It goes a bit beyond that. You actually don't need to have a company as such if that's what you want to do. Now I think that, you were talking earlier about Shannon Development, their e-towns is a good example because they're trying to sort of blend the work-life balance into a sort of a community or an ecosystem that works. But it probably works the other way, quite frankly. Because as I say it tends to be, it's not that everybody gets more free time, one worker gets loads of free time because they're made redundant and the other lot are working eighty hours a week at home. Because once you let the work into your home, I mean, it's a two-edge sword. It's now in there.

So I think they old model of where you got a job, worked for fifty years, and then got a pension and retired, isn't quite that anymore.

Yeah, that's what some sociologists call the end of labour.

Really it's the end of labour, but if it's a knowledge economy and what you're selling is your knowledge, then people will seek out your knowledge, and they can seek it out. I mean, I can send the Internet from here to Mexico just as well as I can send it to the guy next door. So it doesn't just have to be here anymore, it can be anywhere. And likewise I can be found if somebody wants me. But again, that's quite insidious as well because if you're in the game, that's fine. But if you're not in the game, tough luck. You're absolutely out of it. So the gap is sort of widening to some extent. But the only thing that is happening is I think amongst the kids and that, particularly with the whole social networking scene, they're starting to accept that. That that's the way life is. I mean the stuff they put up on Web sites is just phenomenal, like the blogs and so on. The stuff they reveal there. So their life is actually online. That's where their friends are and so on. So I don't know what impact that's going to have, but it's definitely a change.

You started your answer talking about the legal, state apparatus. What are the main transformations happening in the high-tech sector in terms of work rhythms, and work rhythms of high-tech workers over the years?

Well, I suppose in the high-tech, yeah, I suppose – like one of the big things I discovered at [scientific software development firm] was that we didn't attract staff by our salaries. We attracted them because the work we were doing and the fact we were in UL, big issue that. Because some people joined [scientific software development firm] because they wanted to use the sporting facilities. I mean, straight off, that was a big issue. It had more to do with it than salary. So lifestyle, now that's changing at the moment. Our crash has definitely hit home in the last six months. But definitely, high-tech people tend to be driven much more by the inherent motivation of what they're doing. And I suppose to some extent that's what we'd be exploiting in the open-source methodology. Other than that, I suppose the other trait would be that people are much more open to short-term arrangements and less formal arrangements. Like it isn't about getting any sort of pensionable job, hanging in there until you retire. And in the high-tech area, particularly if you're good in the high-tech area, you know damn well that, "OK if
I don't get a job here, I'm going to get a job there," even in a recession. Because fundamentally there is a shortage of really great high-tech people.

While you can actually get away with it in other industries, or even in traditional industries which are much more mechanistic. So the high-talent person and the less-talent person, their productivity is much the same. If you sit somebody in front of a screen, they're either sitting there thinking wonderful things, or just sitting there. It looks just the same until they're finished. So there's no hiding it, I mean, great programmers have great output. Bad programmers have bad output, you know. It's much more I suppose in the high-tech it's much more visible. And the talent gets to be converted into valuable outputs more directly.

So do you think people join high-tech careers because of the lifestyle, or ...

Well it's not the lifestyle now, I mean I don't know if you know software developers, but a lot of them don't have lifestyles in the normal sense of the word. No, they're just very very motivated by what they're doing because it's a bit like pure maths. You're dealing in straight algorithms to solve a problem. And particularly if you're doing it at a very high level, it's very abstract. And it's highly motivating, highly motivating. It's a bit like playing a computer game. I mean it's the same sort of operating conditioning type of thing. It'll suck you in, into the scheme or the world. And then you're spending hours and hours on it. And the same thing happens to the software development people.

But then you also have the very tedious step of boring code writing.

That's what I'm saying, with the high-level stuff. You can go click, click, click and produce five hundred lines of code type of thing. Not like there was simply code writing, you know, if A then B and so on. So with a lot less effort, they were producing a lot more, their productivity was a lot higher. Where you do do the tedium is it doesn't work right and you've got to debug it. That's tedious.

Yesterday I was reading something about Indian IT workers who were brought to Germany, and they'd do the low level type of coding work, and debugging, and very tedious, very hard – so that's not the high-end product development. How would you see the Irish IT programmers and IT workers?

Well I suppose I couldn't say there's any sort of, I mean there's definitely nothing – I mean Indian programmers are just as good as any, there's nothing about them being Indians or being Irish, I mean there's nothing to do with nationality. But if you're pitching for offshore working, yeah I guess that's what you would get. But that has to be done too, I mean that's all part of it. I mean it's not all just doing upgrade thoughts and it works. But say working with those sort of offshore, it would be actually, as I say this comes up in our distributor management. Somebody's got to actually manage the whole process and tell those people what to do. Because if they're only doing software technician work, they'll do exactly what you tell them. So that means you better figure out what you want them to do. Whereas if you want a senior software developer, you wheel in a user and he or she figures out from the user what the user needs and provides it. That's the difference.

The technician work is a different – I mean we can outsource that just as anybody else can, either here within Ireland or externally. It's just a different level of work. It has to be done as well though, I mean it's – but I don't exactly, it's just a different job. Like they're technicians, they do what they're told, but the won't solve a problem as such. But having said that, a lot of the Indian outsource places now do solve problems. They do have high-level programmers. Likewise here in Ireland, we have software technicians and we have high-level programmers. I think it just depends. Where we would actually, we would take the approach, we'd use high level sort of design approaches and so on, but then the tedium is in the debugging. But you can accept that, I mean it's, it can't be all happy days, you need grey thoughts.

Talking about happy days, a final topic here, improvement. If there were anything to be improved say in your business or in the high-tech sector, what would it be? What would you see improved?
Well I must say easier access to funding would definitely make life easier, better investment of funding. How to make the high tech better? Well we did have a problem during the Celtic Tiger boom, that all the kids, all the bright young things were off doing law and business and stuff like that. And they weren't doing, like there's going to be quite a shortage of engineers. It's already happening in Japan, and the states, and Germany and so on. And we're going to have it here big time. It's not so much the shortage of people. It's the shortage of the top people. So to some extent if we could persuade young people to get more involved, that would be good. Because definitely it's in the high-tech that talent really does have an impact. I mean if you put talented people into a factory, the productivity might be two or three percent better. Have a talented programmer versus a less talented programmer, and the productivity could be like a thousand percent, do you know? It's not just a little bit better. It's just phenomenally better. There's no – like they're on a different planet.

But beyond that, no I suppose that'd be the biggest thing, if you could attract people into it more. And we're not, in Ireland, we're not. And it's not as, it's even worse than the numbers suggest. You know the numbers have dropped in the technical subjects, but it's worse because the better people are not doing those technical subjects, they're doing other things. So it's even worse than the number suggests. So people like Havika and that in Dublin have been saying this. They're starting to hire from abroad now because they can't get good enough software people here. You know? And I think that's a trend that's happening. Now it might reverse now with the recession. So that'll be one thing. You know to make science and engineering more attractive to kids.

But other than that, Ireland isn't too bad. I mean we'd all like the broadband and have it for free but, that's getting there too. Slowly, but that's getting there. But I don't have, no I don't have anything major. As I say, it would be great if we could get large access to funding.

Right. I have just a few residual questions based on things you said before. Like, you talked about people coming to work at [scientific software development firm]. So how many employees has the company have had in the past and now?

There is, yeah. We went up to forty, and now we have six. Yeah. We were at forty, then we averaged around twenty for a good bit. But our basic model is we outsource quite a lot. And that's one of the things we learned, that it's better to have a small core team, and a good core team, and then outsource as required. And that's the sort of model I'm trying to get a bit more effective through say the Ockham project and things like that.

So you have a bunch of contractors out there working for [scientific software development firm].

Yeah, or partner with somebody who does it. So for instance in the E-Participate project, even though we could have done the technical, the technology in that project, we deliberately didn't. Where the UK does all the technology, they just do it. We just don't get involved. Now we did the Web site. It was just handier.

But that's the nature of software business. There is lots of job hopping, like even if you hire people they stay until the end of the project and then they find something more interesting to do, right?

Yeah, but what we find is say in product development, it's the second one where they really have their big impact, not the first one.

If we take on some development say in ZigBee, even if they're experienced, the first project they do will be OK. It's the second and third one where they'll be excellent – very fast, very productive, very in tune with what the user needs and what the user says they want and so on. So the trick is try and get, keep somebody for the second and third project, and that's why the EU projects are great. Because you have one and then there's another one rolling up behind it that's even more interesting, then they'll stay. If it's not, they won't.

And how long is the life cycle of a project on average?
Well a development project for a product or something could be six months to two years. It depends on what it is. EU projects, typically two years. We had one that went for five years, then we had an injury one that went for five years. That was too long, absolutely too long. About two years, I guess, yeah.

**So the thing would be how to keep these contractors that work for [scientific software development firm] to do the second and the third project.**

Correct, yeah. That's definitely where we score.

**Do you have difficulties in keeping people working again for your company? Or you see lots of people you'd like to keep, moving?**

Yeah, it depends. I mean, I won't say it's difficult, it's just the nature of the business. Like if you have great people, they tend to be headhunted by somebody, particularly when we work for other, subcontract work, because people begin to see who's who and what's what, so they know who to take off. But if they're just, if they're just temporary staff anyway then that's not such a big problem. I think it's just nature of the work, just nature of the business. I can't, I mean there's no way you can lock people in. And it depends so much on people's talents anyway and their raw ability that you can't sort of, you can't tie them into contracts and stuff like that. Because if they're not interested, they won't produce. If they are interested, they'll produce wonderful stuff. So it has to be driven by motivation.

The highly talented people, are they contractors because they like to be a contractor, or because that's the only option they have?

No, no, no. I mean, no, well in the software area, some of the incredibly talented people don't even know they're that good, and they're not trying to do anything with it. I mean it's not like they're trying to make themselves millionaires or anything. They don't even realise just how good they are. And then others are.

**I mean would they prefer to a regular employee or they have to be a contractor?**

Some people do, some people love to be a regular employee where they have absolutely nothing else to think about except the code. Whereas other people prefer to have the big picture. It just depends on the personality. Because some people, some of the software people, they would never be an employee. And then other people could never imagine looking after themselves at all. It, you know, it just depends. I can't say there's a fixed model.

**Sure, yeah. And all these contractors, they are remote workers? Or they go to an office, or they're hired for a while?**

Well the thing is because we're in the EU projects, they can be anywhere. Like we did a proposal there recently with a group in the Czech Republic and they were using people from Slovakia. So it's not so much the highly mobile, it's just they can work anywhere.

**But are they Irish software developers mostly that work for you?**

No, that's what I'm saying, we did more with these bunch in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, yeah.

**But usually they are from anywhere in Europe?**

No usually they'd be local in the sense that we tend to meet them, but we'll use people abroad if they've got special skills or we need the special skills or whatever, yeah. And the beauty of the Internet is that that works fine,
you know. The code doesn't have to be particularly produced anywhere in particular as such. So no one can be quite distributed, yeah.

Yeah, OK, so I don't want to keep you any longer, so a final question about UL, you said that at the beginning, the time to market is very slow to work with the university. They have a different tempo, right, a different timeline. But on the other hand you said that you like to stay within the park because of the connections with UL. So isn't this a contradiction?

Well I think that the – when I was talking about the heartbeat of the academia, like if we hire a professor to do something or a post-doc or whatever to do something, they have a heartbeat of their particular modules or whatever they're looking after. So the day job fundamentally is the semester or whatever. I mean that is their day job fundamentally. That is the career that you’ve decided you wanted and so on. So, and that's OK. It's very difficult to have that person work right through the night or through the weekend to have something running on Tuesday morning because there's a demonstration somewhere. You know, it doesn't, they just don't match.

So what we find is the university's very good for dealing with people on certain types of consultancies, either design, architecture design, maybe research. We’ve used people on research quite a bit and so on. But for the nitty gritty, get down there and get it working, not so good. Except some people are. I mean some people are very good at that. I managed a project for UL called Caliber where we worked on open-source software, and we had level academic institutions across Europe, all these prima donnas on open-source and me as project manager. And some of them were absolutely excellent, produced absolutely wonderful stuff. Others weren't. And it’s down to the individuals again, it had nothing for UL to do with the organisations as such. And of course the other thing is of course being associated with UL definitely helps. It helps our credibility and the nice thing about the Net is, most people only meet us on the Net anyway. So if we have anything to do with UL, that makes us, it gives us much more credibility.

So in terms of networking, you network through UL, with UL and also you network with EU ...

Well most of the networking would be directly with EU people, yeah. And UL could definitely do that themselves an awful lot more. But having said that, we do make contacts and stuff through, yeah. And sometimes we outsource work to people in UL who do very good work. But as a sort of institutionalised arrangement where [scientific software development firm] would get work and then institutionally pass it over to department X who would then implement it, I'm afraid the time scale just absolutely didn't work at all, at all, at all. They just didn't get it. And even dealing with administration in UL, it was just, they had no idea at all the sort of time scales.

In terms of knowledge transfer, hasn't this company ever sought to transfer knowledge from the university? Because now they have, you all have the TTO, has lots of legal services, for example, on how to patent ...

Oh yeah, I'm aware of all that. We should do all that, yeah.

So is [scientific software development firm] and the TTO doing the same thing?

Well we're not now. We're not now. We used to, yeah.

So the TTO is doing work that [scientific software development firm] did in the past.

That's OK though, as I say the environment changed, the context changed. So strategically we move on. And when we stopped doing it, other people did it. Because we have an interesting project at the moment. I don't know if you're aware of these SME projects in FP7 or anything.

The arrangement is you have two sort of people in an SME project. You have SMEs, as the name suggests, and then you have RTD performers, Research Technology Department performers. The RTD folks get 100 percent
funding, and the SMEs get nothing. But we get to own the collective property. So we have a project like that at the moment. But funny enough it’s not with UL, it’s with universities in the UK and in Spain. So I mean we could be doing stuff like that with UL, but.

**Have you heard about this, it was in the news the other day about Cork Science Park. What do you think about this idea of them creating it by the city council in conjunction with IDA, Enterprise Ireland, and the higher education institutions to develop a science park with business incubators.**

Yeah that’s great, great idea. I mean, as I say, I was heavily involved when the innovation centre got going here and the thoughts about the park and was very much just looking at the sort of, as a pole of development and how we’d make that happen here and so on. But I suppose the thing that saddens me a bit is that if you go to LIT, Limerick Institute of Technology, they have set up an incubation centre just like the Cork one. In fact all of the ITs have set up incubation centres, and now Cork is doing one. I suppose the only thing that saddens me a bit is that makes, they’re reinventing the wheel. They’re making the same mistakes again. It’s an awful shame they don’t learn from each other.

**Shannon Development …**

Shannon Development were not involved in the LIT one. Yeah, they did the thing here and all of Europe was coming to see it.

Yeah because Shannon Development decided to create a number of technology parks, in Ennis and Kerry, here, so that was smaller technology parks rather than concentrate everything here, they decided to spread out.

That was their way to diffuse out for regional development.

**There are pros and cons in each strategy, right. So you think that, you favour de-concentration, or you think that concentration is a way to, is a solution to strong …**

Well the thing about diffusing it out to the region, you really have to make sure you've got the actual services then, the broadband, the electricity, all the rest of it. And it has to be there day one, not at some point. It has to be there and it has to be at the right price. Well, both work. I mean if you look at Germany, the model is absolutely the big ones. Put a cluster in a cluster, very big. I think both. I mean I think the trick is to keep innovating and doing things. I don't think there's a magic answer.

**Because if you de-concentrate you miss, you lose the networking capabilities derived from concentration.**

Yeah. Well, again we looked at that here, and I found it quite interesting in [scientific software development firm] that we were in the main building, and the university was quite a bit smaller when we were there. So simply walking down to the restaurant, you'd bump into people, you know. So it's like the physical proximity. So you'd meet someone to have a cup of coffee. So there was a lot of diffusion and knowledge transfer, and information transfer just by bumping into people. And the minute there was a new building built that was like only fifty metres away, you didn't bump into those people anymore because they had their own restaurant. So fort of fifty metres away or five hundred kilometres didn't make a huge difference. Once they were outside a certain sort of zone, they were gone. You just didn't meet them. And like we're here, and this is something we discussed. I mean you've probably found it here today, I'm sure. Did you drive down here?

Yes.

So you get into your car to drive down here and all the rest. It probably would have been just a little bit more hassle if I was in Cork, but it would be much the same thing. You get in your car and you drive here, you know? So
once you move out at all, the networking falls apart and this is where the Internet is wonderful because that doesn't happen. Because a social network on the Internet is totally, it's not anywhere.

**So it's not physical proximity that's important?**

Well physical proximity is terribly important, but physical proximity is a lot more local I would think than a lot of the studies I've seen have suggested. They suggested that if you get a cluster of companies together in a park like this, we would knowledge transfer and innovate. I've never met the guys across the way there. I've no reason to meet them. Now if we're on the Net trying to put together something or doing a particular project I might meet them, but you know what I mean. So the proximity thing, it works, but it's got to be very, very – so the innovation centres I think work on that sort of basis and for that reason they have to be very small and you really have to be careful how you set up the building, you know that people will actually bump into each other. It has to operate as a business and so on.

**So all the institutes that are opening, incubators, you were kind of lamenting that they would not be successful.**

Oh no I'm not saying they're not being successful, but I was at the one in LIT now and I mean I did all this stuff, I don't know, ten, fifteen years ago, and they're learning it new out there, brand new again. And I thought, "god, couldn't they just sit down with Shannon Development, some of the Shannon Development folks and just learn from them?"

**So what could they be doing that they're not doing?**

I think they could be sitting down with the right people, like people – I think Shannon Development, in what's now called the innovation centre, or what's it called?

**Innovation Works?**

Innovation Works, yeah, some of the original people who were involved with that learned really hard lessons and did really really good work on entrepreneuring courses and entrepreneuring development and business development and so on. And what's happening now is there's a whole new group having to learn the whole thing all over again and I have no doubt they're going to make the same mistakes and probably end up in the same space, place again. And that seems a shame. It seems a shame they don't share more. Because I went out to LIT, and it's on the other side of Limerick. I might as well have been in Slovakia. The people didn't know about this. They knew it was here, but they didn't know who the people were, or they didn't know they had certain sorts of courses, or they had done certain sorts of projects or, they didn't know any of that. I thought, "oh god, what a waste." You know, here's a wheel being reinvented all over again. And in that case, I mean, it's a wonderful building, it's well put together, but I think they could have learned, could have done – now that probably needs to be done, not just Shannon, that probably needs to be a more networked thing.

But I think that would be useful, yeah, if they could network together, and quite humbly learn from each other, you know. I mean because there has been mistakes made and there's been screw ups, but they're going to do exactly the same. That seems a shame. So that was the saddest thing. I thought it was good that they were doing it, it was great to see that they're generating entrepreneur activity, particularly for Ireland now. I mean, we won't get away with sort of pyramid selling houses anymore. So we really are going to have to create wealth and I think innovation and knowledge economy is definitely how we can do that. So I hope they, I hope they do. I mean it's not that I want LIT to stop what they're doing, but I'd like them to maybe just talk to the folks here.

**More of an advisory, of a sharing of knowledge, of experiences.**

Sharing, networking and sharing, yeah, absolutely, yeah. I mean this is one of the sad things that's here on Interreg, you were talking about Interreg earlier, I mean one of the most wonderful things on an Interreg project
is when you begin to see regions seeing other regions doing things that they hadn't even considered were possible, you know? I think that's wonderful. That's genuinely advanced for everybody. Because it normally isn't one way. You learn some things, and then the other regions will learn other things. But you've got to sit around the table and be willing to talk and share, because if you don't, you won't.

**How would you keep the cutting edge of technology parks, as you mentioned?**

Well I think the issue here I think had more to do with Shannon Development. Like Shannon Development, when I came down here first was a highly innovative organisation. Highly, highly driven and willing to try things out. Now that of course had two impacts, being willing to try things out tended to have big screw ups. But you also got big successes, but you also do have big screw ups. And the big screw ups started to dominate and they were cut back as an agency, and that whole sort of can-do ethos moved to being transparent and accountable, and basically not doing a whole lot. And then the whole thing just grew to a halt, because they had highly innovative things, and that sort of happened here. Maybe these things have life, you know? Maybe it's just a natural sort of – you can take it so far and then you've got to do something different, maybe a new organisation or something.

I did a study for the Atlantic University Alliance, they were sort of putting it together. And I compared Galway, the Shannon region, and Cork region. This was about ten years ago. And the Shannon region and Shannon Development and its interaction with the university and the entrepreneurs and everything was like orders of magnitude, better than the ones going on in Galway or Cork. It just wasn't happening because the folks in Galway and Cork were working for Enterprise Ireland, fundamentally their career was in Dublin, and they saw their stint in Cork as a way to get to a better job in Dublin. So they didn't give a damn about Cork. Whereas the folks here were absolutely, they'd do somersaults to help a business go ahead or grow or do whatever because it was their region and they were going to make it work. And that's all gone now, because Enterprise Ireland is I know, well Enterprise Ireland, I mean they recognised it themselves that they had a problem, so they tried to make it, it was part of the quid pro quo for them taking over say the functions of (inaudible) and Shannon Development is that they had to be more regionally motivated. But I don't know, I'm sure it will be, I'm not too sure – it might work, yeah, it might. One of the things we found in that rural study we did and we did some other work on the take up of technology in less favored regions is you can always track back to a champion and that champion is always an individual. So if they can get the right sort of champions, if they have the right champion in Cork ...

**Like Brendan O'Regan.**

Brendan O'Regan was the highlight here, but it wasn't just him. There's a set of champions that do different things. Like a good example is the E-towns now, which I think is a wonderful initiative by Shannon Development. And again, talk about being quiet about it, they're not telling anyone about it. But I think it's a wonderful initiative. That can be traced back to one or two people as well that actually got it going, moved it along, got the funding, and put it together with someone.

Well have a chat about the, especially about the Etowns, because I think that's a good initiative, a very good initiative. Because in the study we did of the seventy case studies, that was one of the ones actually that got quite a bit of notice and a lot of people wanted to copy it. And I was thinking "and nobody in Ireland gives a damn about it."

**He called my attention to the Kerry technology park, that is an emerging case of a technology park associated with a technological institute.**

KIT is more a technology park like here. It's based on the technopole model of regional development, where you have a pole of knowledge, which is here's your university, and then you have sort of a technical pole, an innovation pole to build around it. And they're doing that in Kerry now, the same model, exactly the same model
except on a smaller scale. Now the E-towns, it's more work-life balance and fundamentally using ICT e-working as the fundamental model.

Yeah, they are residential models with some office annexed to these houses, and then the house of course has this fantastic telecom structure.

That's basically it, but from a sociological point of view, it's going back to this sort of village type model, where the tradesmen work and live in a community.

Exactly, yeah. I've been detecting this type of thing from the remote workers.

No they don’t want to move, but they want to be where they want to be. So it's more of a life plan than a business plan. You'll find that they do actually do a quite a bit of travelling, because you do, you actually do have to meet clients and so on. Some of the consultants we were talking about earlier, they would tend to be where they would want to be as well, you know, living down in Kerry or down in Cork or wherever.

Consultants?

Yeah, the sort of people we would use. Like one of the guys, he lives out in the mountains in Slovakia, one other guy is in Norway, western Norway. So, it's where they want to be.

Well John, thank you very much.

There you go. It'll be interesting to see your report.

Yeah, is there anything that I didn't ask that you think I should have asked? Any topic that you, main point that you would like to point out?

No, I think we're pretty well at this stage flogged it. No sorry I hadn't more sort of definite suggestions on improving things, but maybe you'll get something out of all that.

But the one big thing I think would be to get more of the kids involved.

And some of the stereotyping, the gender stereotyping, I think has to do more with just the structures of how the kids got to be where they are, you know? It's not that girls are, I don't think they're particularly brighter or dumber or anything, just different. And unfortunately they go to schools that tend not to teach them maths, and then it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.
I saw a reference to your company in the book *Shannon Departures*. Have you seen that?

No. How old is this, how recent is this book? I must, I must have a look for it.

It's in the chapter about the technology park.

Yeah, well we would have been one of the first companies, one of the first indigenous companies on the technology park.

So anyway, the questions are open-ended questions about yourself, your position here, your family, your lifestyle and the work and travel, and then you know, your workers here and then society in general, and then some questions about society. So could you please tell a bit about yourself.

About myself? In the context of the company? I'm with the company a long time now. I'm with the company since 1990. And I'm originally, I'm a chartered accountant by profession. I trained with Pricewaterhouse of Coopers. I joined [Dreams] as a financial accountant in 1990. I was appointed to the board of the company, I think about '94, '95, and I became CEO of the company in 2000. Becoming a CEO coincided with major fund raising that we did. We took in a venture capital company, who are now Bank of Scotland. They were called ICC Venture Capital then. So they invested about 2.5 million Euro into the company in '99, 2000, in that time frame. And I was appointed CEO in that time. So I guess I'm still here nine years later. The investment didn't really work out. We, the time was a bit unfortunate for us. The dot-com bubble burst pretty much in our second year of our business plan, which set us back really, and meant the investments, most of the investments was lost. We subsequently, we sold the company to an Indian company, which is called Nest.

Yeah I saw online. Before I came I took a look on the website.

So we sold the company in 2006 to Nest. Nest is a pretty large conglomerate. It's about twenty different companies. They're in the process of incubating them all. It's headquartered in India, although the owner and chairman resides in the U.S. [Dreams] sits in with Nest because Nest is a strong business in software. We make software development tools. Nest has a strong business in software services, so there's a bit of synergy there. Nest is also a big manufacturing company. It's the biggest contract manufacturer in India at the moment. There're somewhere between three- and four-thousand employees in the company. Since the takeover, obviously things have changed a lot for me and for my colleagues here. We have, we downsized the company in Ireland and we have opened a development centre in India. So previously we would have had a big team, large team of engineers here, anything from some, varying ten to twenty engineers developing our products. Now we just have three here and we have a team in India who work in development. So that's been a big change for us.

Under the label [Dreams] ...

It's, yeah, it's an [Dreams], we call it, it's the [Dreams] ODC, the [Dreams] Offshore Development Centre, in, and it's in Nest. And Nest, while we're a subsidiary of Nest, it's done as an arms-length basis. They invoice us every month and we have to pay for it. Also, since the takeover of Nest, I now work for two other Nest, I'm the directors of two other Nest companies, one in the UK and one in Sweden. And they're in the fibre optics business. So about 50 percent of my time now is spent on, not on [Dreams] anymore, on these businesses. That's largely because my background is financial. So it's really a chief financial officer role for those companies in Europe. So those, I mean
those companies are, well the one in the UK is turning over about between 3 and 4 million dollars at the moment. The one in Sweden is about a million. So it's about a 5 million dollar operation in fibre optics. [Dreams] here is turning over, in Euros, about 1.2, 1.3 million. I'm hopeful that we can get it up to 2 million this year.

Yeah, it's interesting that your background is finance. It's not technology. How were you able to develop your career within the IT sector?

It's not, well, in my experience, it's not unusual. If, even the companies here on the park, a lot of the CEOs will actually have a financial background even while most of the companies are technology-oriented. Sorry what was your question again?

Well the initial question was to describe your current responsibilities here in the company and then the next question is if you can tell something about your family life out of work.

Well my responsibilities in the company, I mean, yes it's a high-tech company. We make a very complex high-tech product. And I wouldn't be, I would not be the most familiar with the product in the company. I have an engineering director who's really the technology, he's like the CTO of this company. Obviously I understand the product and know how it works and I'm able to talk to customers about it. I spend a lot of my time in a marketing role, face-to-face with customers. So, you know, well my experience would be that typically engineers are not good salespeople or marketing people. The best teams that I've seen always, two or three, a mixture of somebody who's a good relationship person, a good presenter, a good talker, and a technical person as well to deal with the technical questions. So when we're dealing with customers, in face-to-face, it tends to be a team of two or three. And if it's a major customer, I'd obviously lead, I'd head up that team. But I'd have my engineering director with me.

The financial, having a financial guy at the top, I guess will probably result more of the bad times and the good times in – business gets a bit tricky. You need very careful and good financial management really to negotiate your way through it. I was appointed CEO originally because I would have been the driver of fund raising that we did in 19, what was it, '99 and 2000. I suppose I'm still CEO because Nest perceives me as strong financially, able to keep an eye on things, and also to give an input in the other companies there. I see my role in [Dreams] as sort of 40 to 50 percent financial management, and the other is really managing the relationships we have with key customers.

So you do everything from here, from this office? How often do you travel?

There's a fair bit of travel. I would travel like, I counted last year, I travelled thirteen or fourteen, thirteen times I think, thirteen or fourteen times. So I, typically, one trip a month would be my – also my colleagues travel. This month for example, I'm going to Germany next week. I'm going to India then two weeks after that in March. I've been to the UK a couple of times in the last couple of months. Our travel tends to be mainly European or trips to India or far East.

And you stay a few days or you stay long periods of time.

I stay as short as I can. European trip, you usually will be gone maybe two nights. India is more like, you know, they may be gone six nights, six, seven nights.

And your trips mainly started after ...

It started after the takeover by Nest, yeah.

Yeah I saw that the Irish Software Association does some trips to India with business people and IT engineers. I was wondering if you were involved with the Irish Software Association's connection with India.
Yeah, I'm not familiar with that. No, we're not, no.

**So you travel for a few days or a week, so you come back. So you're mostly based here in Limerick.**

Mostly here, yeah.

**Do you work from say 9 to 5 ...**

No, we have a flexi-time arrangement here. So people are expected to be here from 10 o'clock to 4 o'clock. Outside of that they can manage their own hours. But really we, we're down to size, we have eight people here now. We tend to be even more flexible than that with – everybody has wi-fi at home. If it suits someone to work from home, it’s fine. We tolerate that.

**How much of your work is remote, from home?**

I would probably do a half a day or a day a week when I'm here from home. Very often in the evening time I'd do a couple of hours maybe if I'm home. Obviously when I'm travelling, that's remote. So maybe 25 percent of my work is remote.

**OK, your laptop is your main tool?**

Yeah, yeah.

**And your family. You live with your family?**

Yeah, yeah, a wife and two kids, yeah.

**Two kids. What are their ages?**

They're teenagers, thirteen and fifteen.

**OK, do they want to go to college?**

Yeah, I hope so. That's the plan, yeah.

**And how about yourself, your trajectory. What's your family background, and your college studies?**

I'm from this area. I grew up in Castletroy. I went to school in Limerick. College studies were in Trinity College in Dublin. That's followed then by accountancy training which takes about another three and a half years after your college degree, which I did in Pricewaterhouse in Limerick. So really most of my career has been around here, bar a couple of years I spent in the U.S. After leaving college, I took a bit of a break and went over there and worked for a while.

**In the U.S.?**

In the U.S., yeah, in Buffalo [NY state]. Yeah, but a part from that, most of my career has been based here.

**How did you enter the IT sector?**
Well I entered it as a financial guy coming into this company that need a financial controller. The company at that stage was maybe forty, forty, fifty people, so it was pretty big. It was growing and looked like a good opportunity to get into something. Previously I had worked in a U.S. multinational, which was great, very profitable company, part of the Pfiser Group, but I very much, you know, you're just a cog in a big wheel in an organisation like that. Whereas this was more attractive to me, involved in a small company at that age and I became a shareholder here. I had part ownership of it. It's more interesting.

Exactly, that’s interesting. So working in a high-tech company is not like being a cog in a machine?

Well in a small high-tech company like this, which was up to two years ago Irish-owned. You know, we, you know, we were in control of our own destiny. We make all our own decisions. We had hopes, I guess, of doing very well from our shares, but that didn't work out. We got very small money when we sold it to Nest. But even now, within the Nest organisation, we're very much still in charge or our own destiny, if you like. I have a very good relationship with the owner of Nest. There's still strong incentive for us here to see this company succeed. So there's a high level of commitment amongst the staff here to the company.

And how much travel is there for the ten people who work here and the engineers?

For, we have four people who I'd describe as sort of the senior people, each of those would probably travel in a similar pattern to my own. For the engineers, very little, I mean maybe one or two trips a year. For, we have a financial accountant, for him, maybe three, three or four trips a year, but they would be related to the other Nest companies, to go to Sweden or go to the UK.

And the IT team of [Dreams] that works in India, are they Indians or are they Irish?

They're Indians, yeah.

And they are not mobile at all?

No, they wouldn't travel.

So you wouldn't define your company's IT workers as being hyper mobile, or as remote workers?

No, our IT workers wouldn't be remote workers because, well we might have one or two software guys. We use software consultants every, on and off as we need them. But mainly we need, the IT guys need to be part of the team. And because what we make involves both hardware and software, you know, you need a lot of communication between those people. So some remote working certainly is possible, usually for software guys. For hardware guys, it's probably not practical, I mean, they need, they need desks, test stations, you know, access to the hardware that they're trying to develop. So it's just really not practical. So I would say no, the majority are people, we'd like them to be on site. And so in India, that is the case there, to look for work everyday, they work very long hours in India, here as well. The guys here generally turn up here everyday.

So the Irish team doesn't work together with the Indian team?

It does.

In developing products and developing software?

Yeah we have two sides of our business. We make, we have a very good business in smart card technology, you know, the chip cards, like the Visa cards and sim cards that we make. We make tools for Philips semi-conductors, they're now called MXP. And that business is largely done here. We've transferred most of our other business, which is our ranges of tools for different types of microprocessors. We transferred most of that business to India.
So we, you know, we can split our development work neatly that way. And we see in the future that the smart card development will continue to be done here and other products will be developed in India. So there would, there doesn't need to be that much interaction between the two teams, because they're working on different products.

So, the technologies that you use, you use them to connect, to collect information, or to connect with other people, like what are the networks of people you connect with on a daily basis or a weekly basis?

A lot of interaction with India on the financial side, probably fifteen, twenty e-mails a day and maybe one or two phone calls. On the technical side, likewise. From the engineering manager there'd be a huge amount of interaction with them. Not the engineers here, but the engineering manager. He manages the team in India as well. So there'll be a daily, you know, 10 o'clock every morning there's a teleconference with the team in India. There'll be lots of e-mail traffic. There's a report issued almost every day from the Indian team to show progress with what they're doing.

So you have a kind of virtual team?

Well they're a real team, but they're in India. That's it, any other real team on the ground here, so he manages both of those.

And do you also connect with networks outside of your company?

What do you mean by networks?

I mean, do you participate in events with other IT professionals and do you attend some sort of associations?

We go to the trade shows, you know, we go to all the embedded software trade shows. We are partners with many of the semiconductor companies. We would be part of their partner programmes. But everything we do is try to generate more sales for the company. That's what we're focused on. We don't participate like in discussion forms and that kind of thing really because we don't have, really don't have the time.

Yeah, so why is your company located within the technology park?

Because it was founded here. It was one of the first companies that came out of the Shannon Development incubation programme for encouraging people to start their own business. So it started here and it's remained here ever since. There's no real, no great reason to locate it anywhere else. It may, over time, you know, because we're owned by an Indian company now, there's always a possibility that over time everything gets transferred to India. Although I don't think, I don't think that'll be the case, certainly not in my time here. But the technology park has proven to be a pretty, you know, nice location. From a lifestyle point of view, for me, it's very good. I live five minutes away. That's a very strong reason to stay here. Links with the university are a positive. So it's, it's fine. It's a nice place to bring people.

Do you have developed regular contacts within the university?

Well it's on and off, it's been quiet now, quiet recently. We did have a good bit of contact with Lero, do you know Lero in the university? When they were getting started. It's been quiet enough recently. We also had a good deal of interaction with the software quality research group. There was a guy, David Parnasis, heading that up. But again that's, that died down recently. I suppose we found, we have a different focus than people in the university. I mean, we, we're trying to pay our way, and, you know, we start every month with zero sales in our order book and we have to make a certain figure, and that tends to take up your time. And our R&D team has got a target to meet for producing products. Some of them, we're not, we're generally not developing products just in a vacuum on our own. We're developing products for a specific customer, and we have an agreement with the customer. So
we have deadlines to meet, so these guys are focused on, on delivering that. It's very hard, it's hard to find time for, for more general type of interaction with the college.

So were your connections with the university to develop products together or were they to provide data?

No, we did, we did an application for European funding with the software quality research group, which was unsuccessful. If that had been successful, then there would have been more cooperation. With Lero, the cooperation is really, things like what you're doing, you know, they've come here a couple times and done studies, but from our, there isn't much benefit to us.

There is not?

Not really, no. No, I mean, as I say they, how would you describe it, the levels of abstraction here, I think the guys in the university are up here talking about macro stuff, which is great and all very fine. But we're down here, and we're a small company trying to make a go of things and trying to produce products that customers want. There's a long, there's a big gap between what we're trying to do and what people like Lero are doing. Or even yours, yours is, that's a very broad subject that you're studying, and that this discussion is about. But whereas ours is, we're in a small market, lots of niches in it, we're focused in that. So they're poles apart.

Back to the issue of being located in Limerick. There is a theory of concentration, that in cities like London or San Francisco there would be more opportunities, due to business intensity and professional contacts. How do you see that?

Yeah, there certainly would be better locations to be in. San Francisco would be a fantastic location for a company like this because our customers, our way to the market is through the semiconductor companies. So that would be ideal, yeah. But the fact that the company was founded by Irish people who lived in this location and this set up here. Likewise, London would be better. Munich would be certainly better place to be, because you can just get to your customers that much quicker. It has got less over the last few years with e-mail and, you know, the way of contacting people has become less of an issue. But it is still, it is still, Limerick would not be the ideal location for a company like this.

Yeah, yeah I see that you're concerned with the topic of sales. How do you promote sales, through the Web site, through contacts, through cold calling?

It's mainly through contact. It's mainly through personal relationships or business relationships that we have with semiconductor companies. And our product is used to test and debug software. If you think you have, where's software developed? It's developed in the labs in companies like Philips, Nokia, whatever, where you might have hundreds of engineers there. They need tools to develop this software. If we can get the semiconductor companies who are supplying the chips for these products for whom the software's being written, if we can get the recommendation from the semiconductor company for our tools, then we make sales. That's the way it works. So we partner with semiconductor companies, they bring out chips, we bring out tools to support their chips, and anyone who's designing software to run on those chips will have the option of choosing a tool from us, or from maybe several of our competitors.

OK, and being located in Ireland facilitates your business with Europe, somehow comparing with America, because you are Europe director, right, as I saw on the Web site?

For Nest, yes, yeah. I'm like the CFO of Nest in Europe. That's chief financial officer. In terms of the fibre optics business, I wouldn't get involved at all in the sales side of that. We have salespeople and really the chairman of Nest if you like acts as the CEO of that. For [Dreams], I'm the CEO and CFO, so like I said earlier my time is kind of split 50-50.
OK, so in terms of gender, like what's the ratio of male, female workers in the IT sector that you've experienced.

Very few, I mean we've had, gosh, over the years, very, very few female engineers. Of the eight people we have, two are female. One is an account assistant, and one actually is formally an engineer but she's a marketing person now and has been for many years. She's based in France. So, but I would think over the last ten years, I don't think we've had, I wouldn't think we've had a female engineer. There's no reason for that except we don't get applications. When we go looking, we don't get applications. There's never been a policy, or never even been discussed.

Based on the few female workers that you've interacted with, do you see any differences in terms of work style and technology use? Some differential that adds something to the work?

No, but I'm speaking from very little experience. I mean as I said we haven't had any female engineers. I have a female sales and marketing person based in France who is originally, who trained as an engineer and is technically competent. But no, I wouldn't notice any difference in the way she operates to any other salespeople I've worked with.

And the Indian-based team is also mostly male?

No, the Indian-based team has, let's see, there are more female, there are quite a lot of female engineers in India. The India-based team, right now it doesn't have any female engineers, but up till recently I think we had two. And one of whom was as good as any of the male engineers. But within that, there's a group of about 250 engineers in this particular business unit in India. Within that we have about seven working for us, but within that 250, there would be a high, pretty high proportion of female engineers. I'd say maybe 25, 30 percent.

The Indian engineers don't come here for exchange, for orienting?

They do, they do, yeah. We had three of them here for a six-month period for training before we set up this development centre. So they went back and they sort of headed up the development centre for us and that makes it easier to train other people over there.

But no Irish engineer there to help set up?

We have, well our engineering manager has gone there, he's been there, he'll be there probably once per quarter. We did send one engineer on one of the trips from India a week as well to help at the beginning.

But again, as you said before, this will not be any type of regular travelling to India and back, to India and Ireland, it, that was just for the set up of the centre.

It'll be, no it'll be on going. I mean, for example, we want to get some smart card design done in India soon. So to do that we're looking at probably – plus we're quoting for a contract with a semiconductor company and we think we're going to win. When we get that, we will probably bring one or two engineers from India here for a period, maybe for five to six months again to work on that project with the guys here. And then they can go back to India and they can, you know, they'll have sufficient knowledge to train other people. So it gives us more options as to where to do the work.

Is there lots of job hopping in your niche market? Because you were talking about Indian engineers that are no longer in the company.

Yeah. There, I'd say over the years, it's, when we've been forced to downsize, it's been more instigated by the company than by the engineering team. I have, or did notice in the last few years, primarily I think because the engineers we were hiring were generally not Irish, they were Polish or Czech or Bulgarian, and those guys have a
short lifespan here, you know. To them it’s a temporary thing to move to Ireland. And we found, we got some excellent engineers but then I don’t think any of them lasted more than two years. So that’s a lot of time and training them and then they leave, and that was kind of disappointing. With the Irish engineers over time, not a lot because, from an engineering point of view it’s actually very interesting technology. It’s pretty leading edge and you get to work with lots of different customers who are developing lots of different products and it’s quite challenging. So a lot of the engineers that we had over the years, they had quite a long time because they actually enjoyed the work. Plus we tend to pay, we try to pay, you know, a competitive rate to engineers.

Yeah, you also mentioned that you have a few contractors.

Yeah. They’re not employees, they’re, they tend to be, in our case at the moment, they are ex-employees who have a lot of product knowledge in their heads and are working for other companies, primarily Analogue Devices who poach, who have a lot of ex-[Dreams] people. But the, we find these guys would have worked in designing our product, and when we get a short contract it’s far more efficient for us to get somebody like that who has the product knowledge already to do, do a project. I mean it takes a fraction of the time it would take to hire someone, someone new to do it.

The contracting issue - it can be because the company downsizing, structural issues, or it can be because of the employee lifestyle they prefer.

Yeah, it’s both.

So how much do you see of each?

It’s both. I mean, my preference these days is to use, my first preference, from a cost point of view, my first preference is to use India because it’s the cheapest, second is to use the resources we have in house, and third is contractor. The contractors aren’t cheap, but a contractor is preferable to hiring a new person. Because if I get a contract, I’m getting a development contract from a customer, so it may be a five or six month deal. If I hire someone, I have them for a year from there. And so when the contract is over, I’ve got to get more work for them. Whereas if it’s, if I use an independent contractor, I’m matching up, you know, I’m matching my costs and my revenues in a much better, more efficient way. Plus I’m getting the benefit of, now the guys we use spent a long time here, that would have been sort of seven to ten years working here. So we’re continuing to use their knowledge.

So the contractors are experienced, seasoned professionals, right?

Yeah.

And they left the company, were they laid off, or did they leave by their own choice?

They, the contractors we use are the guys who left who really, I mean, the ones we’re using now, I mean, three or four years ago, it was very competitive, maybe even a little bit more, we were trying, very difficult to get engineers. And Analogue Devices, as an example, like coding, they had a scheme where by if an employee of Analogue Devices introduced an engineer, he got a 5,000 Euro bonus, they were so short of engineers, you know. So we tried to pay the going rate, but we couldn’t keep up with companies like Analogue Devices that were offering big, big money. So we lost, we lost some of the people. But we still kept in touch, we still use them, as I said, for contractors, yeah.

So they went to work for another company, but then, do they still work for other companies, or did they also leave?
No, well, they, we’re only using one guy at the moment and he’s still works for that other company. He does it at night time or on the weekends, he works for us.

I see. Because that’s one possible trajectory, that these people work at a few companies, and then they leave all the companies start working from home.

Yeah, yeah, it’ll be precarious, you know. You don’t have much job security doing that, but yeah. I know people who do that.

When they job hop, they move to, do they stay within Ireland or do you see lots of international movement.

No, most stay within Ireland. Anybody who’s doing what you’re describing, yeah I would say typically – I know one guy and the reason he’s doing it that way is because he wants to live where he’s living which is a nice country area. He doesn’t want to live in the city, commute to work, and, you know, they can do that because of the Internet and all that to a certain extent. But if they’re involved in a hardware project, it’s different. A hardware project requires hands-on and requires pieces of equipment.

So the contractors have to come here often to the office?

Yeah, yeah they would, yeah they’d come here maybe once or twice a month.

Do they work mostly from their homes then?

Yeah, yeah.

And do they live in the region?

Yeah, it’s a good lifestyle choice for them.

In terms of your family, your wife, does she stay at home or does she also ...

She works in the university, in the library.

OK. So moving more widely about society issues, we’re leading towards the end of the range of topics. As see it, what would be the main transformations in the so-called knowledge economy, in transforming Ireland, and more specifically in the IT sector?

Wow, that’s a very big question. The main transformations in the IT sector?

Yes, if compared to ten or twenty years ago.

I would feel it hasn't really developed in the last ten years, you know. I think it, I think there was a good momentum in Ireland in the 1990s for companies, you know, there was a lot of encouragement and stuff for high-tech companies to start up. There was a lot of funding available from the government, you know, a lot of assistance in R&D funding. That all seems to me to have dried up in the last seven, eight years, since sort of the early 2000s. That, the state agencies are not, their hands are tied in a lot of ways. They can't provide financial assistance except in very limited, a very limited way.

Also I think a lot of the, a lot of good companies like our company, the company next door, in fact there's several of them here in the park, got to a level in the 1990s where, you know, there were maybe forty, fifty people, they were turning over 2 to 3 million Euro in revenues and they needed to get to the next stage, you know. Companies
reach plateaus and then they need, they need a boost, and there was nothing, there was no assistance available to get, to bring companies to the next stage.

So to me, the high-tech business in Ireland, and I suppose this is coloured by my own experience in this company, but I think it's stagnated in the last number of years. So it's a, I suppose it's a negative answer. It was very exciting in the 1990s. It's rather stagnant right now. I think there's not enough assistance or incentives to people to set up high-tech businesses.

And I think the foreign multinationals who you might class as high-tech, a lot of that is smoke screen. A lot of that is actually very low-tech. I mean Dell is low-tech. Dell is assembling, they're assembling boxes. Microsoft in Dublin, now maybe I'm wrong, I know it's grown in the last few years, originally this was low-tech stuff. This is copying CDs, you know. And I think the government used, you know, we published, there was figures published about that software exports from Ireland being amongst the highest in the world. I mean that was just because we were copying CDs somewhere. So, you know I don't see, I don't see a vibrant high-tech industry here like there used to be.

You mentioned the next plateau right. What would have been the second plateau.

In financial terms, I think the second plateau would have been to break sort of 10 million in sales. What was needed to get there would was really a marketing investment. Developing the product is all very fine, that's one thing and you can have the best product in the world, but if you can't, if people don't see it, there's no point. And it's, in my experience, it's even more expensive to market the product than it is to develop it.

Yeah. If you want to see money disappear quickly, go on a strong marketing campaign. What companies like us need, we need people on the ground in two or three locations in the U.S., a couple locations in Europe, Japan, the far East, you need people, strong people there who are able to develop your business, develop relationships with local companies in those areas, and thereby grow your business. We tried it in the U.S., I mean we stuck one and a half million in a year setting up an office in the U.S., which eventually, which didn't work out. So you know that's, coming up, it's a good idea, someone needs to take that idea to the market. And I think, you know I've never seen any product yet where there's not lots and lots of competition, which means if you're to win the business you need strong relationships with your customers. And that means being able to support your customers and provide, you know, and tick every box for them at all times, and it's hard to do that, you know, it's hard to do that from Ireland. You need, if you want to sell this strong sales in Silicon Valley, well you need someone, you need people there in Silicon Valley who, customers rings and there's a problem, you know, someone from [Dreams] is there in the afternoon and sorts it out. You know, that's what, that's the type of response.

So remote work is not the answer for that?

No, but we have to start, everybody starts somewhere. So we're located here. Remote work is not the, is not ideal. But your question was what was needed to get to the next level. What's needed is, I don't need teams of engineers in Silicon Valley, I need two or three people, maybe one person if he's good enough, who the customer who has a strong relationship with the customers. The work will still be done remotely, the work can be done here, it can be done in India, it can be done anywhere. But I need someone at the front who, dealing with the customer, who has, where the customer has complete confidence in this person, and says "all right, we have a problem," "OK, we'll give it to Anthony, and Anthony will go to sort it," and Anthony goes and makes sure that the organisation sorts it out. That's what I think, because it, no matter how good your product is, you won't win the business without the relationship. No matter what, if your product has ten features that the other guys don't have, but the other guy has somebody who calls in every month and says "how are things going and can I give a package of a few free ones," or do this or that. It's a relationship thing, certainly our business is. It's not a commodity business, it's built on semiconductor company relationships. They only keep a relationship with you if they have full confidence in your ability to deliver what they want.
You said two very interesting things that I'd like to follow up on. So the product development, like capital investment is not critical in product development?

Oh it is, yes. Well capital, the capital investment will be low. I mean capital being equipment, I mean for any project, it's really labour, that's the cost of a product, of developing a product.

You said most of the money will go into marketing, not product development.

Yes, well marketing is more expensive. I can put together a team of engineers here. A typical team would be, to develop a new product from scratch would be say four, five engineers over, if you allow a twelve-month period. OK, so your talking maybe 250 K, 300 K to do that. But what I need to market that product is, the first thing I need strong technical marketing people, who tend to be the highest paid people. Because they're the guys who are originally engineers but also have good relationship management and get on well with customers and they're good at standing in front of a crowd of people and presenting themselves, and these guys are very hard to come by and very, very expensive. So if I want, say I wanted two of those in the U.S., two of those in the U.S. would cost me the same as my entire product development team. That's just two guys, that's before I put them, pay for an office for them and they start travelling all over the place. I mean, they'll spend 30, 40 K on travel. That's without doing any advertising. That's without taking space at a trade show. If I want to do a trade show and do it properly, it's going to be 15 to 20,000 to do a good nice stand at it and so on. Advertising is, we don't do any, but it's about 4 or 5,000 for, you know, for that much in a magazine.

So the IT marketing people would be very mobile in terms of travelling and also in terms of job hopping?

Unfortunately yes, in terms of job hopping as well, yeah. Because they're in constant, you know anyone who's good, I think, is in constant, there's a demand there for them.

So if they job hop, they'll still have to stay working in the same type of product right? Because your companies are specialised.

Yeah, they tend to be in the same industry. I mean it's funny when you go to a trade show usually you'll meet the same people, but they're at a different stand. You know, they're working for a different company within the same industry. Yeah, because that's their speciality.

There is some conversion skills there, that you can start selling a product that is slightly different and then you learn about that, and then you move and you learn more.

Yeah, yeah. I mean we're all, but still within the embedded software business.

Oh, embedded software.

That's where we'll be, yeah.

So the second plateau, which I think is extremely interesting, so I understand you're saying the second plateau, the second level would be like internationalisation of sales and marketing?

Yes. Now you wouldn't be able, of course you can't do them all together, you know, I mean, that's just maybe too much. You do them one at a time maybe. If you focus on the U.S., the U.S. is the biggest market for embedded software, you need the type of people I was describing to do that. But the original point was there was never any assistance for companies. And you could, and even from the venture capital companies here, you know they give money to develop a new product, but they weren't as eager to give money to do the marketing side. And certainly what happened in our case, we got a certain amount of money, the product development took twice as long as it should have, as we expected, so we spent too much of the money and left ourselves with too little for the
marketing. And there wasn't, we didn't then have access to anymore to do the next bit. Whereas, and we missed a big window, you know, our product should have been in General Motors, Ford, Verizon, companies like that should have been in there for evaluation in sort of 2000, 2001. But we missed, we missed that window. And that, you know, it's that kind of thing that makes your company grow.

They've, with the fibre optics business I'm involved in now for example, there's a proven process going on with Verizon in the U.S. and TelCel, Mexico, the mobile phone company. And assuming the product passes, their product passes that, they, the sales for each of those is going to be many, many millions. So, likewise in [Dreams]'s business, if we had won the business in key accounts like the General Motors and that, you'd have been looking at sales, not in, maybe up to a million per customer over a one or two year period. And that would give you great momentum, because you have money to throw back into your product to keep improving your product. It gives you a great reference sight, and when you go to a new customer, if you're going to Ford and you say "look, General Motors is using all of, they decided our product is the best." You know, it's an easier, easier thing for customers to do, you know. No customer, we always had a saying that no customer ever got fired for choosing, you know, the market leader, because even if it doesn't work out, the answer's always "well these guys, they're the leaders in the market, I mean, that was a logical decision I made," instead of if the customer says "oh no, I don't want the leader in the market, I want this small little company here in Ireland," you know that's a much harder thing to justify.

**But your company is a market leader in embedded software?**

That's what we describe ourselves as, yeah, so do all of our competitors, would say the same thing. In terms of market share, we would be, we would be quite small in our market, maybe one percent.

**Yeah, so you talked about the excitement of the 1990s and this sense of stagnation now. Would this process that you described be generalized to all companies here in the technology park? They didn't achieve the second level that you're talking about...**

Yeah some of them got acquired, like we did. I'm sure many of them just disappeared. I can't think of, can I think of any? I can't think of any on the park here that actually achieved, you know, achieved success on their own. I would think they all got stuck around the plateau that I was talking about, you know? Reach a certain level. For this company it was about 2 million in sales. Now it's not that they died, they were in many cases acquired. But then acquired by foreign companies, so. I mean who owns – we have a new product now for example that we're bringing in that's supporting Texas Instruments that's being launched in the next few weeks. It's potentially, you know, potentially it looks very good, but the benefit of this is going to go to, some benefit will be here, but the benefit of it is going to go to an Indian company. You know, the Irish economy's not going to benefit off it in the same way as if we still owned the shares here. OK, there'll be some employment here, and there'll be taxes paid and maybe corporation tax paid and that, but it's still not, it's still not, say we've lost the intellectual property.

**It also seemed that many of the companies here in the park, they've restrained themselves in the Irish market and a little bit UK, so they didn't go or want to go global.**

Yeah, we'd be different, I mean we, we do about 40 percent in U.S. I'd say another 30, 35 percent in Europe and the rest in far East. We've been doing also practically nothing, nothing in Ireland.

**This was before, this was before the acquisition by Nest?**

Well yeah, and still today. There isn't much of a market. And there's a sign for you of, that there isn't a high-tech business in Ireland because there's no market here for our tools. Our tools are used by people developing high-tech software-based products. And the market for our tools here is really usually universities or the Institute of Technology or a very short number of companies, namely in Dublin. But even the companies we sell to right now, they're not long-established companies, they tend to be start-ups.
I'm a bit confused then. You actually did reach the second level, then.

No, we never did, we never reached the 10 million level, no.

**But you got sales in the U.S. and sales in Europe.**

Yeah, but we don't have enough sales to say that we reached the second level. The market for our product is out there, is in those places. What we never achieved is the, well we achieved a certain level of sales and we have certain customers who are loyal and actually like our products and we do a good job for those customers. But we never achieved the scale that some of our competitors have done. And that is I think largely because we didn't crack the two main drivers of high-tech development tools, which would be automotive and the mobile telecoms. We didn't manage to crack those markets. And that's where competitors of our achieved scale. They got large sales, large sales quantities into those, because that's where all the, that's where most of the development was happening.

**So the reduction in the workforce - it can be stagnation but it can also be technology development process. But does it seem that the shrinkage refer to economic stagnation of the firms here in the technology park?**

That would be our experience here, yeah. The shrinkage is down to that. Plus it's, there's a logical change in our model now. It's logical for us to use the engineering team in India. We can increase it very quickly if we wanted to. So what our plan, we'll never have a large team here again. We'll have a few engineers here as a front line backed up by teams in India. That's our model going forward.

**So in a sense, the added value of work stays here in Ireland?**

Some of it.

**And the back office type of ...**

No, no, the thing that, it's not that straight forward. No, we want to build a team in India that can be as good as any team we have here. So, the work will be split on a project, on a case-by-case basis depending on where the expertise is. It's more cost effective to do it in India. The engineers are cheaper. I mean, an engineers salary in India is probably a third of the salary here.

**My final topic is improvement. Given the current context that you described here of the technology park, the IT sector in Ireland, what improvement or improvements you would like to see in place? And who would be in charge of that? And what improvements would that be?**

Well one thing I guess I'd like to see would be more, to go back to the type of focus we had in the '90s in Ireland on building up expertise and building up companies like ours when there was a lot of support, a lot of encouragement. You know, a willingness to help, that's one thing I'd like to see.

I would like to see more productivity coming from all the money that's going into the universities, you know, have, you know, take Lero that we spoke of earlier. The link up with Lero partnering, we see nothing, you know. And we've had some very generic, you know, we've helped out, there's been some projects done, it's very, it's all very generic. What the universities do, somebody should be looking at taking what's going on, the research that's going on and actually commercialising this and creating some wealth for the country, rather than - my impression is that a lot of people in the universities, they see the end is "well, I've published something, I published a report" and that's the end. That's useless, that's no good to the economy. The work, I'm sure there's a lot of money going in, a lot of very talented people doing research in software and that in the universities. There needs to be a way of commercialising that and turning it into real applications. Real applications. And that I think is missing right now. I
know, I was speaking to the former director of this company and he's just got a, he works with an independent consultant, he just got a brief with Enterprise Ireland to actually do this. To go to universities, see what they're doing and see if some of it can be actually turned into something productive.

A third thing I would like to see would be assistance in marketing, like I described earlier, in getting your product into markets. And really what I'm talking about is financial assistance to do that because you won't get really much non-financial assistance from a government agency. They know nothing about your product and they know nothing about your customers, and they know nothing about your markets. They have generic, big generic databases that are really useless if you want to do a target, something targeted. So it's up to people like me to know my product, to know my customers, to know my market. But we would certainly use some financial assistance to actually put people in place to introduce the products to new markets. And is there anything else I'd like to see? Well I'd be happy if I got those three. The, I guess, one other thing is that the number of Irish engineers coming out of the university seems to have collapsed.

**The number or the quality?**

No, the quantity. Yeah, it seems it completely collapsed. I mean I mentioned, we didn't purposely go to hire Polish people or Czech people, but that's, when we advertised, that's what we got.

**Did you advertise internationally?**

No, we'd go ... We'd go through the Web site. We avoid recruitment agencies because they're too expensive. We did the Web site, I think there's something in UL, some notice board mechanism there, where else did we? There are a few places on the Web you can place advertisements for free, you know, we would have used them. But yeah, so a period, you know I've heard anecdotally what the number's doing, computer engineering, electronic engineering are way, way down. So you know there should be, if you want to create a high-tech business you should be producing engineers. Now this is a Europe-wide problem. All of our customers tell us, they say they have the same problem.

**What about the technology institutes in the region here, Limerick, here, Kerry. They all have these technological institutes.**

Yeah, they wouldn't be, a graduate from there would not be perceived as being as strong as someone from the university. Now that's not to say that they're not, and we have had some very good people over the years that came from the LIT or that, but they would not, maybe that's an unfair perception, that is, that's certainly the perception.

Yeah, when I talk to kids at UL and that about the engineering software courses at UL, they say that it's very difficult and it's very theoretical. That's their perception. And that scares many people. And it seems that many of them prefer to go to these technological institutes that they perceive as being more market-oriented or job-related.

Yeah, I wouldn't, I'd have had the opposite now, the opposite view that – our preference here would be to hire a university graduate, yeah.

**Because they're thinking about their first job, right. They're not thinking about their career or long term. So when they say “oh theory, that's not applicable.” But then, maybe that's theory that will secure a scientific career.**

Yeah, yeah. Well anyway that's, and you know, we need people with technical qualifications who are willing to start up businesses, who are willing to be entrepreneurs, you know, so. There was quite a lot of that in the '80s and '90s in Ireland. I just feel that there's a lot less of it now.
But that's because of the individual, or that's because of the context?

It's because of the, it's because of the, well not so much the context, it's because they're, people are not going into these professions. They're not going into software engineering, hardware engineering, electronics engineering or computer engineering, so they're not coming out the other end. So that's always, a certain percentage of those who come out the other end would be the types of people who say "oh, I could start my own business with this." You need a lot more of that.

So, you said different things that, so are you talking about prioritising new small start-ups or prioritising the current companies to reach the second level?

If I had to prioritise, I'd prioritise helping the companies reach the second level, but I, you know, I'd put that ahead of the new start-up thing. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't do both, I mean, you should do both. You know, you need to do both. It's going to take years to get the level of, the number of start-ups back up to the level they used to be because they've got to firstly address the numbers that are doing engineering courses. You know, and a lot of people, the dot-com collapse scared the pants off an awful lot of guys, and then they saw suddenly hundreds of thousands of jobs just disappearing in engineering. And then you had, here you had a construction boom came soon after that, so now people say "oh, I want to be a solicitor, I want to be an accountant, or a quantity surveyor or an architect." So, you know, it's, I see these thing go in cycles.

And what role do you see for FDI, foreign investments as multinationals or venture capital.

I think if we get this stream of graduates, of engineering graduates going again, that Ireland will still be a very attractive place for companies. You know, the Americans broadly speaking have had a great experience here, you know. The language is the same, culturally we get on, we work very well together. So I don't, I think Ireland will still be very attractive. I think our salaries are going to become more and more competitive. I mean, they're not going up, but you can still make, you know, a good engineer can make a good living, even in his 20s he can get a job maybe 40, 50 K, which is pretty decent for somebody two or three years out of college.

Corporate taxes don't play a role there for the Americans?

Oh, they do, they do, yeah. But I mean, the corporate tax here, I think it's only one or two percent below most of the rest of Europe. So it's not a huge, it's still, it's an incentive, it's not massive. It's better than the UK, it's more attractive than the UK. I think the rest of Europe, they're heading to something similar to what we have.

So you think the HR, the talent is the critical factor in attracting capital.

Oh yeah, absolutely, yeah. Now also state aid is important as well, but I know that their government's hands our kind of tied because they can't make their own decisions, it's driven by Europe. I think that's one almost negative of being in the EU, is that the government's ability to help, to provide financial assistance is restricted by the Euros.

And what's the role of regional development agencies, like Shannon Development?

Well I think the, I think right now it appears to me that the existence of Shannon Development is almost a negative here. I think there's, why do I have IDA, Enterprise Ireland and Shannon Development, it doesn't make, to me Shannon Development doesn't make sense anymore because IDA and Enterprise Ireland have, you know, they have this area as part of their, that's part of their operations now. If you're foreign investment, you deal with IDA, to come to Limerick you locally deal with Enterprise Ireland. So what are Shannon Development doing? I had a person from Shannon Development in to me in the last year who told me he could do nothing, it was pointless talking to him.
So in a sense there is a concentration, concentration of decisions and policies in Dublin? Not regionalising ...

Well it would be more regionalised if Shannon Development would move, would just go away. I think the fact that Shannon Development is here, then if I was in the IDA or Enterprise Ireland, I'd place less focus on the midwest because Shannon Development is here. They're almost competing with each other.

This has been historical, right? This is not something new. There is a redundancy, sometimes more de-concentrated and regionalised and other moments more concentrated in Dublin's governmental decisions.

Well yes, except Shannon Development had it's own, you know, it was sort of independent of, you know, it was ridiculous. I mean it had an office in Silicon Valley nearby where IDA had an office, and same with New York, you know, it's stupid, stupid stuff. But, you know, Shannon Development was fairly successful in the early days, but there hasn't been, I mean there hasn't been a decent new industry in this area for ten years now. Vistakon is the last of any scale to come in here, which is a sign really of what Shannon Development is trying to do. They're not succeeding. Yet the IDA seem to be, you know, quite proud of their record, you know, continuously publishing about numbers and numbers of jobs coming in. We don't see it in this region.

Shannon's strategy now is to open a number of smaller technology parks around, you know, Kerry, and do you think that can work? Or would you prefer to see everything concentrated again in this area, for example?

No, I think, I think what you said, if it can work, yeah. I would think that's, that's a reasonable thing to do, have technology parks around, in different, spread around the place, yeah. Concentration is ridiculous, you know. Look at the state that Dublin's in. I mean that's from a policy of concentration.

Well wouldn't that fall, like what you said about Silicon Valley? Because now the big thing about being Silicon Valley is because you have lots of companies concentrated there, right? So if we had the concentration here, it would have the critical mass, business opportunities, business changes.

Yeah, why can't we just concentrate in Ireland? You don't have to concentrate in a very small place in Dublin. Silicon Valley is fairly big. I mean to drive from, you'll be talking I guess a two-hour drive from one end, from San Francisco to where you say Silicon Valley might stop, you know. The important things to me would be access to an international airport, I think is important. So if you're within an hour, hour and a half, of Shannon, Cork or Dublin, that's OK. Apart from that, you really, you need the infrastructure, you need the buildings, the broadband and all of that, but you know.

So you also have to convince young people that Limerick is an attractive, or the countryside is a beautiful place to live.

Yeah, yeah.

Whereas most youth now, they only think about Dublin and big centres and things like New York and Paris.

Well, I doubt, I think yeah they might think that when they're leaving college, but I think when they get a little bit older, they realise that it's not, you know commuting everyday is not what they want to do for the rest of their lives, you know. We've never had, we've never had a problem attracting engineers to [Dreams], right. Any time we were looking for engineers, we found them, even though recently we found them in foreign engineers. But the actual area, the whole lifestyle here, you know, people have liked it.

Are they in their 20s, or are they in their 30s, 40s?

Most of our guys in recent years would have been sort of late 20s and up, yeah.
Are any of them families or single guys?

Mixture, yeah.

Is there any issue that I didn't ask about that you think would be important, about all these range of topics that we talked about, like work, technology, travel, improvements? Anything I missed that you would like to talk about?

No, no I don't think so. No, we've covered quite a lot in general terms about the, this type of business. I'd like to do less travel of course. That would always be welcome.

So you still feel that you travel a lot.

I do, I find that the trips to India are hard.

Yeah, I lived in India for a year.

Did you? Whereabouts?

Puna and Goa. That was when I was doing my doctoral field work. I was interviewing Westerners who live in India. I know that India can be a tough place, the first time you've been there.

The first time is a big shock, yeah. I mean, I work well with my colleagues there and, you know, they're fine to work with.

It's Bangalore, right? It's Bangalore?

No, we're in Trivandrum, that's in Kerala. Bangalore is about an hours flight, yeah. So we have customers in Bangalore, so every time I go I spend a few days in Bangalore and a few days in Trivandrum. But what's difficult really is just the schedule. You fly, you get in at, you land in Bangalore after midnight, you get your hotel at maybe 2 in the morning, you start meetings at 9 or 10 that morning. You do, we're doing two days there, we fly to Trivandrum for more meetings, and then you fly back at, all the flights leave at like 2 in the morning.

Really, is that Bangalore-Shannon?

No, Bangalore-Paris, and Paris-Shannon, yeah. And you know, that's one respect where if we were next door to Heathrow it would be a lot easier. Our location is a bit of a negative here. Also the, losing the Shannon-Heathrow thing made, that's made our travel ...

But then you gained Shannon-Paris, right?

Yeah, but that's not, that's not as good. We have a long, we have to do a long, for an Indian trip you have to do a long layover in Paris, stay over night in Paris, yeah. So those trips aren't, I don't really look forward, I don't mind them, when you're in the middle of it, you just get on with it. But I don't look forward to them. And the European travel, it's generally RyanAir and that's pretty basic.

Yeah. But, yeah, as I said, the travelling has got less lately and the customers understand. But we're in a funny time now where everybody's just trying to survive with next month's sales and all that. If things turn and you start to see growth again, then I'd expect it to increase.

So your travel is not just to do administration of the internal business. You also travel to see clients?
Yeah, yeah. Next week is Germany to see a major customer. Two weeks after that is India, and that's a mixture of seeing customers in Bangalore and internal Nest people in Trivandrum. Then other times it'll be Sweden for internal Nest financial stuff, and the UK maybe for that. So it’s about half and half.

And what's the balance between potential clients and current clients? Like in new sales and …

Unfortunately not enough potential clients, I guess. It's a, our sales in the last few years tended to be to the same, with the same customers. It's been very difficult to land new customers.

Well they, I think the average for any, at least consultant firms, is like 80 percent of sales are recurrent sales.

Yeah, yeah, we'd be the same, yeah.

And there is a trend, there is this tendency, “oh we really want new clients,” but the current clients should never be overlooked.

Exactly, yeah, and it's much easier to sell something else to your existing client than to find a new client, yeah.

Well anyway, John, thank you very much for your time.

OK Anthony, all right, you're welcome. I hope you find some of this useful.

It was very rich and helpful.
INTERVIEW 5
Nomadic Work/Life in the Knowledge Economy - UL

Anthony interviews David (Managing Director of [software development and consulting start-up]) – 18 February 2009

Do you have any questions or concerns about the study?

No. I'm if I have questions or concerns as I go along, I'll ask them anyway. But I'm quite comfortable to proceed, it's fine. I hope that we are a suitable candidate for your study anyway.

So I guess high-tech in my mind is people who will be directly involved in maybe HPSU, High Potential Start Up, developing a particular technology for the mass market maybe in terms of software, or in engineering. Whereas basically for ourselves our business is based on two primary aspects of the company. One is that the IT services, which is pretty much everyday work where you go out and you do work for customers. So every one of your customers ends up being your boss, because you have to keep them all happy, you know, or you don't get paid.

And the other side of the business is the actual, the software development which is done, we have developed our own products, but we also, we've done contract development for other businesses that have their demand for it. So, I guess our focus isn't really on one particular technology, but it's a case of we would use particular technology such as the Microsoft platform, Microsoft development technologies, CSharp.Net, this kind of, the software side of things. But that's just our company background and I'm sure you'll probably get something from that.

What types of software specifically?

Well it's very much, well it's not any particular sector or any particular market, it's a case of the skill sets is what we focus on. So if somebody has a requirement for a particular application, and if we have the skills match for that we develop it. So for us, dot-net is our main focus – sequel for their databasing. We do a lot of Web-based work as well, so people might want a Web front end with a sequel back end for database.

Like one of the projects we've just completed is the work-flow system which was developed for debt collection for a solicitor's company down in Listowel in County Kerry, but they perform the debt collection on the E-flow system in Dublin on the M50. Have you heard of the M50? It's the ring road around Dublin. And they have that barrier-free tolling in operation now. So in order to follow up on that they need an assistant to actually perform this. But it's been our biggest project. It was a sixth-month project to be done in six weeks, so a lot of long days, a lot of long hours. But the technologies were vast. We used Java, CSharp, those desktop applications, there was Web applications, ASP.net, the CSharp side of things. We had interfacing with Twain Scanners, network scanners, barcode recognition, what else was there? There's mail merging, integrating with third-party systems as well through different NPIs, XML, XML packing and parsing and, it's pretty much any technology that was required, that was kind of modern and useful for this was what we used. Then there's technology like AJAX for Web development, that played a big part in the user interface.

So technology-wise it's a case of it comes down to the project specifically. But our skills sets would generally dictate what technology we would use to develop the actual product. One product that we developed for ourselves, and in collaboration with another Limerick-based company, was a document management solution. So the document management is all about scanning and indexing paper documents to free up the space, take them from filing cabinets. So that again, it's a desktop application with a sequel back end. But pretty much every application these days, it's all about information – information gathering, information mining, data mining and getting the information quickly from what you have, you know? So I think most modern applications heavily depend on databases. So I don't know if that answers your question in terms of technologies.
Yeah. I saw on the Web site that you have all the parts of a software development and a whole division on consulting services, right?

That's right, yeah. Well we originally started off as a software company, and it was a case of we just wanted to develop software. That's my qualification, that's John's qualification, that's what we had worked on, just the two of us. And then we decided, "You know what, it's fine for us to win a contract to go into our little cave, write software for six months, and then come back out again, rubbing our eyes, looking around us going 'OK what's next?'" You have no lead, source of leads. So we decided to actually proactively go into the IT services market because by going into IT services and offering a good service there. If you're in the business, if you're working in a business and you have a technical problem, you will always ask that question to the person who you know to be technology savvy, you know, tech-savvy. So for us, if we're providing the IT support services for a particular business, and they have a question in relation to a new technology or a question in terms of an opportunity for a software product, they will ask the IT guy, the IT guy being us. We can then refer them across to the software department and we now take (inaudible). So the IT services to us was really a way of getting our name out there and being good at it. And at the time, it suited because the market was full of what we called cowboys, or officially untrained professionals. So it worked well for ourselves because we had the competency and the qualifications.

So the software side of things has always been kind of really where the goal was, to develop our own product ultimately, because I think in most businesses out there, people recognise that a very, very good software product, I mean in a short period of time, can make an awful lot of money provided you hit the mass market. So for us, we're playing the game whereby we're working in a kind of slow and steady pace developing, developing relationships with customers providing support services, which also generates bread and butter money. While also then getting the name out there which brings in more contracts for software development, where there will be probably, you'll probably make more money from software development contract basis because you have no overheads really. You have no engineers, no cars, all you have is the guys operating on the computers, you know? So that aspect of things, it tends to be more cash-rich, but also ... In relation to?

In comparison to the IT services. So the consultancy side of the business is really more towards kind of getting the name out there then later on, we hope to get more leads out there in terms of actually developing software product. But the idea is if we keep doing contract software development, keep doing IT services, sooner or later an opportunity will arise, someone will knock on our door and say "we've got a great idea for a technology, a new product. Would you be interested in working with us?" And that's where we will get on board with a bigger opportunity. So we're building our name, building our credibility as a viable partner for somebody who might have a great idea in the future. And in the meantime, it buys us time to come up with our own ideas as well, and do our own market research if we come across something that we think could be useful.

So technology, in terms of ourself, I think we, we're spread across two industries as well, so that's stability because if we're short in software contracts, well then we still have some IT support money coming in to balance it out, and vice-versa. So we're spreading our risk across different sectors, which has worked well considering that one of our competitors here in Limerick recently had to let go three staff because they only focused on the IT, and when the downturn came in terms of new service being sold to new installations, and they've suffered. Whereas we've been OK to ride that out because we have the software development to compensate. So it's worked nicely for us and I've seen it work already.

Yeah, how many employees are in your company? Was the number always the same?

There are nine now. We started with two, and then we, since October of 2007, we have – we had three, so we had two up, from May 2005 up until September 2006, there was just two of us. September 2006 up until October
2007, there was three of us, and then between October 2007 and today, we expanded by six more staff and we’ve moved premises, relaunched Web sites.

So we've gone through a very, very rapid growth phase because new business just keeps coming our way and we seem to have good contacts in terms of people who are happy customers and who are referring us, so it really started our growth in a big way once we moved into the IT side of things. So, yeah nine of us.

And are they all based in Limerick?

We're all based in the same office there in, up in Plassey. And just to go the people that's there, there’s myself, I'd be operating as managing director, I've one business development person, one administration, admin staff for accounting and general administration work. Then we have three software guys and three IT guys. The head of the software department is John Savage who we mentioned earlier, and the head of the IT department is Jonathan Dean, who also came through the university here. So we’ve all, you know, John, Jonathan and myself are the three partners in the company.

And are you the CEO?

I would be, yeah, or managing director is what we use really, it's the same thing, really.

So how is your typical daily work, if you could describe?

In terms of how I operate things and how I get work done, how I manage my time? Or the length of the day?

Yeah, so from morning to evening, like, where are you located? What types of tasks you do? Types of tools you use?

Well, if we start simple, generally I aim to be in the office for 9 o'clock in the morning, because you're supposed to be in before your customers, really. But often that slides to maybe quarter past, twenty past 9, depending on how late the evening was before. So I go to work. Just in terms of the work time, I'll just go through the day time first, so the start of the morning around 9, quarter past 9, work through till whatever time suits, maybe a tea break or coffee break, might have a coffee at my desk, may have coffee with the others down in the Canteen, maybe fifteen minutes. We then work through to lunch time, but lunch time can be anywhere between 1 and 2. Some days it'll be pushed out to 3 o'clock. Some days, it'll go on for an hour, an hour and ten. So I mean it really varies day-to-day depending on the business. But generally we aim to have lunch between 1 and 2. We very often, I only take a ten-minute lunch like today for example, didn't have time and more work to do, so it was a short lunch. In the afternoons then again, work through generally until I feel tired, which often, like for example, I have a few things outside of work I try to prioritise like sports. I have one night a week, like Tuesday night for example is sports at 7 o’clock. I go play soccer for an hour.

You play here at the Arena?

It's actually up in Castletroy College, it's a school up the road. But they've astroturf there, a bit of five-a-side soccer. But work on those evenings, I'll probably stop at about half 6, twenty to 7, go home as quick as I can, throw some, a change of clothes on, quick pint of water, a few stretches, into the car and gone for soccer. Back from soccer, usually about quarter past 8 on a Tuesday night that would be, and organise food, do the usual washing, get the laptop out then, more work, you know? So my fiancee, she lives in Dublin, so I always put a few minutes aside every evening, maybe 20 minutes, we have a conversation, just catch up every day, so you put that in there as well. Get to bed maybe half 11, 12 o'clock, and it starts again. What I do at work then, is that what you were going to ask me?
Yeah, the next part of the interview was, do you do internal management of your business, or do you develop business with potential clients, or your service clients?

Yeah, the answer to that is everything. Like my job basically is to be constantly looking ahead to see potential opportunities, to be helping with the business development, to represent the company when it needs to be represented, to go to meetings. If there’s problems on the software side of things, if there’s a project delay, if a customer is asking some questions or if, basically to be informed so that if a decision needs to be made, then I’m informed. So, like John Savage on the software side will often pull me aside and say “Dave, we’ve got a customer here. They want this, this and this, but we only agree that. What should we do?” I might say “well, you know, we’ll find a solution by doing X, Y, and Z.” So it is problem solving on those side of things. But I also have to do the same on the IT side of things.

Because my background is originally software, and then I kind of moved to focus on the IT to get that up and running, I still have people who will ring me occasionally with IT problems. So if it’s a small problem, I’ll solve it quickly. Otherwise I will delegate that to one of my IT staff, who will then take it from there. So the next time the customer rings up, they won’t ask for me, they’ll ask for that person. So but that still happens.

Then I’ve got things like to liaise with the business development manager, like if we have a new opportunity to sell new technologies to somebody like a high-end enterprise technology is an area we’re looking at moving into with storage arrays, blade servers, it’s all enterprise data centre stuff. So we need to discuss those things. That’d be one part of the job. And then of course making sure that any payments that go through the system, I authorise all the payments for the company, keep on top of the accounts with Ailish, our administrator and accountant. She will ask me questions to do with customer queries as well. And then there will be general meetings, just progress report meetings where I’ll sit down with both my business development manager, Roman, and Ailish, our administrator. The three of us sit down and we discuss the marketing agenda. You know, what, between this week and last week, “how have things gone. OK, any problems? What can we do better this coming week.” So we try to keep communication going. And then on a Monday morning as well, I’d have another meeting with the IT guys, all of them, to make sure that the IT side is going along in the direction we want to go, and if anyone has any problems that they’re brought up and we deal with them to make sure the customer’s happy. Because otherwise you can all get on different paths.

So literally, any aspect of the business, I’ll be involved in, even right down into writing code and actually going out and doing deliveries, going out to customers to meet them for new requirements, or going out to a customer to maybe install a new computer. It really depends on how busy we are, but I have become really the Jack of all trades within the business. So my specialisation is really in multitasking.

And in the evenings then, I tend to catch up on e-mails at home, and my brain goes into default mode where I’m always thinking of “how can I improve things?” So for example, service management, I might be saying “well, if we had all our support queries going by one person, that one person could then delegate to the other staff, and keep on top of them.” Simple IT management things. But then OK, so to do that we need certain systems in to manage that, and then it’s a case of so if a customer rings up and asks “what callouts did you do for me in the last twelve months?” We need a system that can answer that. But also, yeah, you’re thinking in terms of, you’re always thinking to how you can improve the business. So literally, I eat, I sleep and I wake up and drink [software development and consulting start-up]. It’s a case of it’s just always there, and that has its other effects in terms of sleep and stress and, you know, working late. It’s, this is where I think you’re on a social side of things, sociality side of things, in terms of the work-life balance.

I think when you work for yourself, well put it like this, I once went to a presentation by Shannon Development, and there was a guy there talking about, the topic of the presentation was “So, you want to start your own business, do you?” Question mark, question mark, question mark. And they went through things of running your own business, and they said “OK you find yourself now, you’re working for a crazy man, aren’t you?” And everyone’s there nodding their head “yeah, working for a crazy man,” you know? And they said, “well, when
you’re working for yourself, you will find you’re working for a lunatic.” It goes beyond because there’s no satisfying – you know, this is your own business, this is your own baby, it’s your own love, it’s everything. And you want it to work so you will always put everything into it as much as you can. And the day that stops is the day that your company is going to be in decline. You have to keep putting something in because you only get out what you put in. But you need to always find a way to work smarter, not harder. And that’s kind of what I try to do. I always try to think ahead and try to find better ways to do things, better ways to use time, and at the same time reduce the stress on the people doing the jobs, to give them assistance and the tools they need to do the work easier. So, I think that maybe answers your question.

Yes. It seems that you have a very busy, intense work schedule.

Yeah, and sometimes I'd like to see the back of it. Like sometimes I think like with my fiancee living in Dublin, I'm thinking, well she's a neuropharmacologist, she's done three post-doctorates, so she's heavily into research and ...

Is she working in academia or in corporate?

No, academia in Trinity College in Dublin. But it's all research and she's funded by Science Foundation Ireland, and she would be in the business of publishing papers really. But because of the complexity around her research, there’s only a few people in Europe who do this particular type of research. So the number of papers, it could be eighteen months between papers, if not more. So with that in mind, sometimes you think “well do you know what? Why are we running around trying to chase all this money and build this castle when in the end it's doomed to fail anyway?” Because as soon as you step out of it, unless you've developed something you can sell, you know, you kind of wonder “well what am I doing it for?”

So the question is do you keep focusing on the business or do you decide "well, do you know what? Maybe we should look to, maybe we should look to I guess, step back a little bit from the business, accept a lower level of service for our customers, and go onto the next step, excuse me, go onto the next step in life, which is creating a family, buying a, you know, a family home and this sort of thing, you know, settling down really.” But because I am so involved in my work here in Limerick, and my customers are mostly in Limerick, and her work is only in Dublin. Like she's based mostly in the college all the time. She can do a bit of analysis work remotely on her laptop, but at the end of the day her experiments must be done in a lab in Dublin and she needs certain facilities that they have. Other alternatives are she moves to Galway or Cork or Belfast, but none of them are that close to Limerick really. So we just kind of keep on tipping along. So in terms of work-life balance and the busy schedule, you kind of sometimes ask yourself “is it all worth it?”

Yes, the academic lifestyle is very much different than business.

I envy it. I mean I see that completely, because again, my fiancee, she’s, I mean she works hard. She goes in early in the morning, she’ll be in between half 8 and 9, and she'll work through to maybe 6 in the evening, and sometimes later if her experiments are going well because they’re very complicated so once she does, if it’s working, you’ll work with it and work later. You know, she will work through lunch if the experiment is going well. And then she'll catch up later, you know what I mean? She has those days as well, but overall, she works for herself really, she has a supervisor, she's funded by Science Foundation Ireland. She can finish at 3 o’clock on a Friday if she wants to. She can arrive in at 11 o’clock on a Monday if she wants to, and she'll make up for that in the evenings. But it’s very, it's very flexible and it comes down to the quality of work, not how many hours you're putting in. Whereas in I think a situation where you're providing somebody with a service, you always need to be available to deal with that customer, because they could ring you at 6 o'clock in the evening. They might ring you at ten to 9 in the morning, but you really need to be there to answer that. And if it’s not you, one of your trusted associates should be there to deal with that call. So there’s no stopping.

I think the core of the problem here is that when you work for somebody else, you’ve got one boss. When you work for yourself, every single customer you serve is potentially your boss, you know what I mean? So you have
more people to deal with, more bosses to report to, and I think that’s what kind of grows on me, the stress. But I think, I think everybody goes through a stage in their life where they actually thrive on this pressure and thrive on actually the getting the satisfaction back from customers. Customer satisfaction, they come back to you and say “Dave, that was a brilliant job, great job, thanks very much,” and they’re happy when they’re writing their cheque and paying you. And that’s when you know you’ve done a good job. If you have to chase somebody for months to get paid, you have to ask yourself, “well did I do a good job there?”

Would you like some water?

I would love some. Can we pause that?

It seems that as a business owner you move now toward strategic management business tasks. You don’t do more, do you still do like the technical work of software development, IT systems?

Yes and no. Yes, to answer your question in the fact that my focus is more on the strategy of the business, the longer-term focus. Like we look at the current environment at the moment, everyone is going “you know, we’ve got to cut back, we have to cut back here, we have to reduce our prices.” Business isn’t as strong out there at the moment. And my job is to find a way, find a way through this. If times are going to be tough and we’re in a recession, it’s a case of you have to find a way through. And that’s my job. And I don’t ever want to be in a position where I’m turning to somebody and saying “I’m sorry, we don’t have the work for you anymore, bye-bye.” It’s not a position I want to be in, and providing somebody is doing a good job for us and they’re putting their heart and soul into the job they do, I will never tell them goodbye. You know, so it’s a case of I want to make all the decisions I can as best I can all of the time to try and find a way that everybody in our business continues to get paid. You know, it involves talking to the banks, making sure that if we foresee quiet times, make sure you’ve got a better overdraft, you know. Talk to suppliers, negotiate better rates on your costs. But that’s all part of it. Strategy-wise in terms of how do you bring in some stability in your supply chain for new business, so by developing partnerships with people.

So it is all about, I guess my job is more about strategy, so I’m doing more thinking which I think can be more tiring as well in some cases, than like if I was just working, just going from job to job repairing things, fixing things, installing things. It’d be, it’s more satisfying because you’re meeting the customer on a nightmare to solve their problem side of things so they like you. Whereas if you’re there to sell them something, they don’t like you as much until afterwards and they’re happy. So there’s a different kind of way to, but yeah strategies are going. Technical roles, yes. Occasionally I do have to pull my sleeves up and get into the nitty gritty. But it comes down to, if somebody else is on holidays, some cover might be required generally on the IT side of things, which is less technical than software development. The most recent time I did software development was in October, I believe it was, September maybe. And that was to do with us getting awarded this contract for the E-flow project. So in that case, I had to spend some time writing code because we just did not have the capacity. So I spent about, just three weeks, developing one particular application, but I hadn’t done any software development in probably about eighteen months before that. But it, I still found it interesting, you know. But what it does mean is when you’re actually focusing on doing the work, there’s nobody focusing on bringing in extra work down the line. So you need a balance between bringing new business and getting the work done, and that’s something that we’re kind of getting to the point now where we’re trying to stabilise a good supply of new business, your PR, your marketing, your sales engine, and a good balance in between that and getting the work done and the guys that do the work.

So do you prefer business management and development, or your technical background, IT, software development, IT?

I’ve never been able to answer that question to myself even. It’s a case of, what I do like is variety, and I like the freedom. Like I mentioned earlier about the ability, when you’re working for yourself having, that you have an awful lot of different bosses out there. Every customer is your boss. And I just wanted to kind of go back to that
and say well the difference really between working for someone else and working for everybody is, is that
you can turn around and say to a particular customer "I don't want to do business with you anymore." That's one less boss. You know, you have the choice.

In terms of your question, do I prefer the business side of things, the business development side of things, or the technical role? They both have different positives and negatives. For example, when you're working just doing technical stuff, if I was working technical stuff and just said to John, "look, you just give me a module, tell me what to do and I'll go and write the code, and you can validate everything I've done just to make sure that it's up to the standard for this project," you know? So that's great because it just means you sit down, you put your headphones on, you listen to some music and you write some code. Anyone rings, I'm in "do not disturb" mode, that's great, I can focus on this one job, fantastic, love that.

But the flip side to that is you're very much just stuck here, where I'd be more of the person, I like to meet people. So when you're out meeting people, developing business, putting some thoughts into what's going on, it's a case of you need to find time to plan, but the thing is finding time is where the problem is. And during the day I can be subjected to anybody in the office walking up to me and saying "Dave, can I talk to you for a minute?" "Dave, how are we going to do this? Can we have a meeting on that? So on and so on. Dave, can you give me an answer on this?" The phone could ring, a customer could be ringing in and saying for this "can you help, can you come meet me?" So you don't get to do any planning. I'm reacting to other people's demands, so your pulled in different directions. Whereas if you want to really plan, be strategic and think things through, you need to do that outside of the work, so you might go for a walk. But you don't do that during the day because a customer could ring you. So that's where in the evenings, when I sit down, I've had my dinner, I'll have the laptop out, the television will be on in the corner, and I'll probably do a bit of work, you know?

But it's, another side of things is you could be in bed at night not able to sleep because you've got something ticking around in your head but it's usually to do with work and strategy, and you know, you foresee potential difficulties and you want to find a way to guard against that. So all of a sudden you kind of sit up in bed and say "oh I have an idea." So you're out to the kitchen and you're writing down your bullet-pointed list of ideas so you can go to sleep then. And the next day you get back to work on that. But again, it's outside of the office hours is when you get your strategy and your planning and your thoughts done.

And because it's my business and because I started it, and because I guess I'm so committed to it, I find that I - like, you know, you have a brain process ticking around all the time, an inner voice in your head, that's always going. And if nothing else is happening, mine goes back to work. And it goes back to potential work problems, these sort of things. I find it very difficult to relax, which as what I was saying earlier, like good contest between academia and I see it with Sarah working in Dublin, and myself working in industry, it's a case of - she is a very, very calming influence on me. She's much more relaxed. She's happy with her work. She can go home in the evening and she can just switch off and watch some tele, do some cooking, you know, phone some friends, go shopping. Where I'm thinking, you know, right I'm not going to leave work until I have X, Y and Z done, then I got to go home and hopefully I've got time to get my washing done, otherwise I'm going to have to go buy new socks, do you know what I mean? I'm just trying to squeeze things in as much as I can. So it's different - so weekends, like she's like one person who has this calming influence that doesn't talk about her work, doesn't think about work outside of work. Whereas I'm the opposite, it's a case of, goes back to my inner voice, and my inner voice is always well on the next problem.

This is very similar to me and my wife. I am the academic and she's the business woman.

And you're now the calming influence on her because you're not thinking about these things and the environment that you're in is less stress-free because research is the case, you can't force it. It's a natural development.

Yeah, the flow of time is different in business.
Well that's it exactly. And I think the way the world is getting, people are demanding, there's more people out there so there's more competition so competitive advantage is what it's all about. So unless you have a competitive advantage, you're in a situation whereby you're just one of a number of potential suppliers to that client. So they're going to go with whoever gives them the best price and the best service. And to guarantee the business you have to do both, which means, to give them the best service, it probably you've got to work harder, and to give them the best price, it means you've probably got to work longer hours because you've got to do it for more customers.

Whereas when you're working academia, it's a case of well, you know what, if your paper is delayed by a month, and the funding money is there, well it doesn't matter. You're still going to get paid at the end of the month. So it's a different level of urgency. Like you said there, it comes to the time frames. But I mean that's life and it's a case of we all have a choice to go into academia if we want to, and it's something I don't rule out in the future. I'd love to get back and I'd love to do an MBA or something, because I am actually interested in business. So I guess going back to your earlier question, do I prefer business development side of things versus the technology side of technical roles, I think I'm more geared toward the actual business side of things now and I do favour that. I think that I could pay somebody twenty Euros an hour to do that, so why am I doing it when I can be doing this and bringing in more business, which would earn a lot more, you know what I mean? So it's a case of ...

**So but you started as a software engineer, right?**

That's right, yes.

**Why did you get into that? I mean what attracted you to become a software engineer?**

It's quite funny, it goes back to my childhood. My father used to work in Agfa in Dublin. They used to have a big photocopier department, photocopier, X-ray machines, and my dad, originally based in London, in the UK, was sent across to Ireland when I was about two I think it was.

**So is he English?**

Originally English, yeah, he would be English, yeah. But he's been living here now for twenty-something years, you know, in fact more, nearly thirty years now.

**Your mother is English, too?**

Irish as well. Well they're both kind of Irish really because we spent so much time in Ireland, you know? But I think my mother technically was born in England, but her parents are from, are all Irish.

So it's technicalities like, I myself was born in England, but I've been here since I was three. So it goes back to when my dad moved over from England. He's always been involved in fixing machines, fixing photocopiers. He was a service engineer in the service industry, so a certain amount of that must have brushed off on me. And as time went by, the machines that he worked on, and as I got older, the machines he worked on were more geared towards, you connect them to computer, network printing, Windows '95, there was DOS systems out there. My dad then was given a laptop one day because he needed it to do (inaudible), it's on photocopiers and certain machines. So he'd give it to me and go "here, play with that" and on the computer there'd be some computer games. So all these little DOS programmes, you just type in like one of them was called Gorilla and Nibbles, so I'd play those. I mean the computers were, I mean, the first laptops in the country type thing. I mean this was back in 1989 type thing, 1990, so a long time ago.

**Yeah I learned BASIC language, the first “user friendly” language.**
I just loved it. I just couldn’t – I thought it was unbelievable. It was amazing, you know. And then a little bit younger than that, I was about four or five, my dad came home with an Atari, plug in cassettes into it, you know? And you can play Astroids on the TV like, and this was amazing. So I was like “Oh my god, computers are just amazing,” you know. I love games. Games, games, games, you know? So he got his laptop, I played games on that. And I went from there.

My friend then, his dad has his own business and my friend when he was about 14 was given a PC for Christmas, and it was a very nice machine. I think it was an Amstrad, so you had to load the tapes and everything into it, you know. But then the following year he got an actual PC, not an Amstrad, and it had a colour screen. And it was “oh my god” and he was only 15, you know? So around the same time then, his dad had an old computer he was throwing out or some friend of my dad’s did, but it just had two floppy drives in it, no internal hard drive, but I used to boot it off floppy disks and just play computer games. It was all my motivation, like computer to me meant computer games as a kid. So I kind of then got an interest in actually writing a bit of software when I was about 15 or 16. And on this computer I had, I went over to the library near by and I took out a book on basic programming, so I wrote my first little word programme when I was 15, I think I was, 15 or 16 anyway.

That to me, it was great, using if and while, you know? All these, the syntax from software. So then, I didn’t know enough about computers, enough about software and it’s a case of, a bit lazy, I liked to just go and have fun really, cycling on my bike, you know? And I used to play rugby and things. But what happened then was I went away to boarding school after my first two years of secondary school, after doing a bit of this work.

I was always good with my hands in terms of woodwork and mechanical drawing, technical type things, logical stuff, and well able to follow instructions, this is how my brain is wired. But it goes back to, part of going away to boarding school, we all had to do a project on what our future career would be. And I think if they had asked me maybe a year earlier, I probably would have said “I’d like to be an artistic woodworker.” You know, but it just so happened I think it was the computers I had been exposed to and the basic programming I did, I still had this kind of curiosity about them. And I said, “you know what? I’m going to be a software developer.” It was a time when computers were becoming more, more and more into the early ‘90s, 1994 type era. So in 1994, I wrote my project for career development, was the course I was doing, and I chose I wanted to be a software developer. Computer programmer was what it was. So I applied to college later on, three years later, and got accepted here in the university for computer systems.

At UL?

Yeah. So the funny thing was I always entered in electronics, then number one choice on my degree was electronic engineering I think it was. Was it? No, it was computer engineering. Then it was, second it was computer systems. Third it was electronic engineering. But I actually got my second choice which was computer systems. So I didn’t know how to take it, you know, “oh it’s only my second choice, computer engineering.” But looking back in hindsight after doing my first year, I realised I am in the right course, computer engineering. I wasn’t really interested in the actual, the nuts and bolts of making circuit boards. I’m more interested in the software side of things and playing computer games. And I always, college to me, my first computer, my grandmother bought for me in college here, again I just wanted to play computer games on it. So I’d spend sixteen hours a day playing games.

Have you ever talked about joining a game development company?

Well developing games and playing games are two different things, you know what I mean? I have, like I actually represented Ireland playing computer games when I was in college here for a couple of years in a row, and after college as well.

Action games, Quake was one of them, Quake 3, would be the games really. It’s all 3D shoot-em up games. But I grew out of that really, and it’s a case of I’ve got to focus on life, my career and work. But when I finished college, I
was lucky enough to be given a job in a software development company, a start-up company. And it was funded by a lot of investments and over a period of four years, I guess the money supply ran out, the product wasn't yet developed because they, like many companies, you know, there's – when they bring out one product, it's more like a prototype that they sell and it works, and people go “it's brilliant. It's making us money. Fantastic, right. Let’s get some investment in now, here's our proof of concept. Now we're going to develop this.” And they wave their hand, then they're developing the brand known world, so they've got all the investment money and we aim for the stars and the development cycle was way too long, the product was way too many features than what the actual market needed. What the market needed was a better version of what we already had and not this huge other monstrosity.

So we learned a lot from that as individuals, working in that company, myself and John, we both worked there together. And after the money ran out and we were given pay cut after pay cut, one Christmas we got what we called an anti-bonus, where rather than giving us a bonus at Christmas, they actually took money away. So we decided, “you know what? This is not worth it. I want to work for myself. What do you think, John? Are you in?” And he goes, “maybe.” So John at the time was working in Los Angeles, so he flew back at Christmas, spent a few weeks at home, and myself and John spent a few days deciding, “look are we going to do this? How are we going to start up? What contracts do we need to get the business off the ground? And how will we go?” And we just said “look, let's just give it a shot, take it as it comes.” So himself and his girlfriend moved back from Los Angeles, I set the company up in April, they moved back I think it was August or September. And I had been working under my own name in [software development and consulting start-up] for the first few months. John came back and joined us and we kept going and Jonathan joined a year later. But yeah, I'm not sure if I'm just waffling on here.

No, that's fascinating.

It's the background to where we came from, really. But I first got into computers when I was a kid, and it's like I've always known I wanted to be somewhat involved in computers. Now that I'm in computers and when I was writing software, I always found that I was maybe a little, you know, I found it difficult to make decisions, which is not a strong point of writing software because very often you're faced with a situation where there's ten different ways to do something. And I'm always looking for the best way. So I spent so much time looking for the best way, when I could have just actually gone and done it one of the ways, and if I made the mistake, do it a different way, you know what I mean? So I almost was looking for kind of the best, you know, I'm always looking for the broader picture. It's probably part of, as a kid I played a good bit of chess, and chess as a game teaches you to not just look at the actual moment, but to look at the consequences and the causes, and look at the wider picture. So that's kind of one way I believe I think like that. But I hope I'm, so far I think I'm kind of proven right in the way I make my decisions. I try to make things fairly balanced and you're always, like that's the best part of decision making when you're running your own company. It's a case of you want to be decisive, but at the same time you need to take in as much information as you can to make the right decision, not just the easy decision, you know? And that's, that's pretty much that side of things.

So would you say – what is distinctive about being a high-tech professional?

In comparison to somebody working as a woodworker? That makes me stand out from the crowd, is it?

Not to you specifically, but is there any lifestyle involved in being an IT professional?

I think there is a certain lifestyle there, and you know the stereotype of the big guy with the beard and the sandals in “The Simpsons.” You know what I mean? With his computer everywhere he goes, with his computer, he has to be connected to the Internet. And a certain amount of being in a technology company means you need to be connected as much as possible, you know? You're very dependent on your laptop to do that. So you're never far from the Internet ever. And I think a lot of other jobs out there, you use the computer more as just as a tool to get your job done in terms of “well I've got to write a document, or I've got to document this.” Whereas for us, it's –
maybe it's probably true for a lot of companies – communications, I don't know. I'm kind of thinking out loud here really.

Something distinctive? Nothing really comes to mind, to be honest. I think that when you're working for yourself in computers, you do find yourself probably connected to the Internet a lot more than other people do because you're always interested in learning about the next new technology, or something interesting that's going along with it. Whereas other people that say if you're working construction, you don't need to see a computer from one end of the day to the next. So there's, they're different lifestyles.

Like working in construction, you get to do your work and go home at the end of the day, watch tele, you know. OK, maybe you get up early, you work hard, but at the end of the day, you go home and you switch off. I think with computers, you're never really turned off, you know, you're never really disconnected, which I probably think increases stress levels. You know, because a computer is in front of me, my urge is to turn on to check my e-mail, to check news Web sites, to check this, to check that, to check this, to check that. And that's part of being a technical person. Whereas I could leave that same computer in front of my girlfriend Sarah, who uses a computer all day at work, and she'll see the computer and go "meh." She doesn't have to go and turn it on, where I have to turn it on, you know. It's a different side of things. I doubt if that would make us distinctive. It would make us misfortunate, you know, I think, so. I don't think that answers your question really.

Yeah, yeah. I mean I have specific questions about working as an IT professional. I may be wrong. Is there lots of job hopping among IT professionals? You were working for this company that was cutting your salaries. You and colleagues could have moved into a different company and work as contractors, right? So, is there a sense of more flexibility and autonomy in being a software engineer, or am I wrong?

Well, you do have a lot of scope as a software developer and a good software developer. You always have the option to go contracting. And contracting in software, you can bring in anything, depending on the technology you're focusing on and your skill set, so you can bring anything from probably 350 Euros up to maybe 700 Euros per day, depending on the technology. Whereas like, I think the average would be 350 to 450 really per day. So that's an attractive salary to bring in. I mean if you take 400 Euros over the year, fifty weeks in a year, that's 104,000 Euros, you know? Two grand a week, happy days, you know? Loaded. But the thing is there's, it is hard work. It's not straight forward.

And the problem is when you're contracting to people, it's an attractive proposition for a short period of time, because most contracts would be from three months, six months, some a year, and very rare would you get a contract that goes on beyond a year, so you're in a different situation whereby if you want to get a mortgage for a house, you know what I mean? You might be seen as being somebody who knows their stuff, but if the economy turns dry and people stop investing in research and development, well you're going to be out high and dry.

Whereas there's a certain amount of comfort that goes with actually working for another business, and accepting a reduced salary for that to get the stability and lifestyle. Because you're right, I mean, people who go contracting, there's an awful lot of job hopping. Like I've got friends that have worked for ten different companies since they left college in 2001. You know, that's a different company, more than a different company in a year, which is huge. Whereas for myself and John, we stuck it out with the one company and when that company ran out of funds and decided to downsize, we just said "look, OK, look, we together will go because you only need one of us, really." So John took over the development, I then went looking for IT contracts and software contracts when we started up the company. We didn't really job hop, we actually made more of a decision to go out on our own.

And why was that?

Well I just wanted to, I didn't want to work for an idiot again, you know what I mean? The decisions were being made that I didn't agree with. Maybe I thought I was, you know, too big for my boots or something, I don't know, but it's a case of somethings, working for somebody else frustrated me. Somethings they did didn't make sense to
me. And I always felt that I could do it better. So myself and John decided well, you know, we both believed that we had good skill sets, good qualifications and we’re both determined and hard-working. So taking that together we had the core of a future business that hopefully we’d bring in new people working for us, so we’ve inspired them because of the way we work, will inspire them as well. Because if you act lazy, your employees are going to rub off on you, and they’ll be lazy, you know what I mean? So, yeah.

Would most of your friends prefer to be contractors?

I wouldn’t say most. Well you see, I’m just trying to think through. To be honest, most of my friends, they work doing jobs. They actually work in employment. And I think that’s because times have changed. Like back in 2000, between 2000 and 2005 maybe, maybe even as late as 2007, contracting was quite a big thing. But when the economy turns to downturn, people are saying “well I’d like to have stability here because I don’t want to work for three months, get paid loads, and then have nothing for three months” because that defeats the purpose. You want to have a constant stream.

People when they get to a certain age in their life, like I’m 30 now, and when you get between 28 and 38, I think it’s probably the area where you’re looking to maybe change in that period, settle down, buy a house, have children. You don’t want to be in a position whereby you’re living in Cork one year, Dublin the next year, Galway the next, London. You don’t want to be doing too much travelling because you’re dragging your family around with you in those situations. So I think as you get older, you look for more stability. But I would believe that the younger generation out of college, the only way that they can actually go up the ladder is to hop jobs.

One of my close friends in Dublin was working as an employee for one company, let’s say he started on 30,000. And he was trying to negotiate a salary to maybe up to 35. And they said “no, we’ll give you 34” and he goes “OK, that’s fine, that’s grand.” So he worked for them for another six months. Started looking around and he basically got offered a job then for 45, an extra 11,000 because somebody recognised his skill sets. Whereas when you go into a company on one level, and I’ve seen it even in our own company, when you go into a company at one level, if you accept a job Day One for I don’t know, say 30,000 Euros, you can’t expect that in Year Two, you’re going to jump to 40,000 Euros. You know, you’re going to get a certain amount, you might get 10 percent. You know what I mean? You’ll get your inflation, and you’ll get a bit more on top of that, you know? It has to be a slow increase because you’re hired by that company to fit a certain box. And you fit that box. And when you go looking for a pay raise, you have to accept that it’s only going to move a certain way. Where you can find that if you actually decide to look around for jobs, rather than going from 30 to 33, or 30 to 35, you go from 30 to 40, in which case it’s worthwhile hopping jobs. But that’s the, that’s how it works.

Is salary the only driver for job hopping?

I think it’s most, it’s mostly the way, mostly the case. And I think at the end of the day, money makes the world go round, that’s what they say. But I think that we have some people working for us who, they I believe they could be paid better, but they’re working on a lower salary. However, when we do big projects and they put the extra hours in and the project is a success, we give them a substantial bonus. Like one guy for us, he’s working and he’s on like a, he’s working on a salary, I think it’s 35 he’s on. And we had that bit E-flow project and that went amazingly well. The guy was working six, maybe seven-day weeks, working long hours, sacrificing his relationship with his girlfriend up to a point to get this job done. So after this two-month period was up, we turned around and gave the guy an extra 5,000 Euros, you know what I mean? So it’s a case of they would work for the bonus as well, and recognition.

So they don’t mind having the lower job, the lower pay ongoing, but when they are recognised for doing a great job, they get remunerated, they get money. And I think, but again, I think it does come down to money because at the end of the day, like money and location. You will need to kind of make a decision at some point in your life as to which is more important. Like for me, is money working here in Limerick and the company more important than me moving to Dublin and getting a job and working for somebody else. Which is more important to me? You
know, right now it’s a case of the money is a priority to kind of build some stability going forward. But also I have a
tremendous amount of job satisfaction in what I do. So like for the last couple of years I believe I’m definitely
underpaid for what I’m doing, but it’s a case of I’m working for myself, so I’m doing something.

**When you were an employee, was it in Dublin or was it here?**

It was here in Limerick.

**You never thought about going to Dublin or London?**

Los Angeles, maybe. Yeah I thought about it. But that was, I almost moved to Cork at one point. Before I started
[software development and consulting start-up], I was offered a job down in Cork writing software. And another
position came up here in Limerick for less money. And it was less money and based in Limerick, close to home and
close to my friends. So I was, I almost much prefer to be close to my friends and people that mattered to me than
to be in a foreign city earning more money. To me the certain amount of social side of things is important to me. I
like to go and have a quiet pint maybe on a Thursday night or something. I like to have a close-knit group of
friends that if we throw a party, we know we’re going to have good fun and really get to unwind.

Whereas I believe if I was working, if I was in your position, a different country and a different city, you know, it’s,
I think I definitely would thrive on the opportunity to meet new people and do new things and get on with people.
But there’s a certain amount of being happy in my comfort zone. And I think you get to a point in life where you
decide, “right, I’m quite comfortable doing what I’m doing, where I am, with the people I like.” And then after that,
money comes second, and that’s the environment we’re trying to grow in our company in terms of the employees
that work for us. It’s a case of yes, they need to be paid well, but they need to be given the opportunities as well,
and they need to be given the opportunity to earn more money when it’s there, and the opportunity to take on
more responsibilities to challenge themselves. Because you don’t want to be just a monkey doing monkey work all
your life. It’s a case of, they want to get different opportunities. So I think, you asked which is more important,
money or location. I think it really depends on the individual. For me it’s a case of location.

**Or excitement? Isn’t there a bit of excitement in change, because, at some point you said that you’d like to go
out and meet people beyond the technical work. So as a software developer, you could have different projects,
different contracts, and meet other software developers, make new friends at work.**

Yeah, I think you still need to have that group of friends outside of work, though. It’s good to have like friends at
work and get on with them, but it’s even better I find to have friends that you don’t know through work and
they’re friends and you just get on and there’s similarities there. Because, people say you know, you shouldn’t mix
work with social. But in reality, people do, and I think that outside of work – I have my own group of friends
separate to anybody else inside the business even though some of my best friends work in the company with us,
as in myself and John and Jonathan. But the thing is when you work with your friends, any conversations over a
pint deteriorate to work talk, you know? Where you need to get away from that, so that’s why it’s important to
have a social side of things out of it, and I think that most people also have that same kind of, they’d be the same
in that.

Kind of coming back to your question on location versus money, and I think it’s location and lifestyle and
excitement that are important. And I think as people get older, money becomes less important. While when
you’re younger, money is more important so you job hop. As you get older, you get settled, you get comfortable.
You don't feel the need to prove yourself anymore. And you see opportunity in meeting people and challenges in
meeting people and getting to know people. Like as a software developer, you’re very much like stuck in a corner
with your computer, your headphones on and you’re working, you’re very focused. And it takes a certain type of
person to do that. People that would believe that either it's black or it's white, it's a one or a zero, that's what it
comes back to. They think binary. Whereas people who are more social, more creative, more out there, I think
they don't think of things as yes or no or black or white. It's a case of so many different shades of grey and it's all about people's perspective and opinions and good topics for discussion.

So there are different types of people. And I think my move has been more towards the, I've always been more social which is probably why I found it frustrating making decisions and stuff when it comes to actually writing software. I was good at it, but at the same time I enjoy being out there more and I don't really do it necessarily for the money. I do it for the fun.

You don't, you do it for the money or?...

I would say, yes I work for money, but I think for the last four years working for [software development and consulting start-up], I would say I've been underpaid, but I believe I'm growing something that may or may not be worth something in the end, but right now on a day-to-day basis, I do it because I'm challenged by it. I do it because I get to meet a few people out there, and it's interesting. Like I'm meeting yourself because I am where I am, do you know what I mean? And I find this sort of thing interesting, and going out talking to people, networking groups, call it meeting potential customers, developing relationships, befriending people, you know, that's all part of it. And it's interesting and a certain amount of fun in that, you know?

Yes. But in terms of mobility? Travelling, mobility, job hopping, there is this image of high-tech professionals being hyper-mobile. Who are the IT workers who are always travelling, like one week in a different city, and they move around to meet different clients?

There are people like that, and I think they are high-end consultants, like people who are very, very, very specialised like in the IT sector. I don't think it's really software developers. Software developers are more, they would work from anywhere they need to work and generally they can tele work, they don't need to be present because it comes down to job specification, design documents, it comes down to communications, phone calls, you know. That's all fine, but the guys that would travel to, the guys that would travel a lot are the guys that are I guess consultants in terms of technical salespeople or project managers. You're getting very kind of focused on a certain area. Like let's say an IT project manager who might want to deploy a brand new solution for, I don't know, pick some big financial institute, HBC or something or the Royal Bank of Scotland, or somebody with a presence over in a different country. And they will always use this one consultant because they know there is one project manager because he's good at what he does or she's good at what she does. And they'll bring them over and they will, they'll run that project from start to finish, opening a new office, opening a new branch, so big solutions. These people are very, very specialised.

A friend of mine, he would work in Cork, a company is EDS, but he is, he went down the VMWare route, is what we call it, you know? So it's all virtualisation technologies for IT and it's become a big, big thing. But you've got to be VMWare certified first, then you go up through different levels of accreditations.

What's that? Is that a name of a company?

That's the name of a company, yeah. And they're one of the fastest growing, biggest companies in the world.

I thought it was a type of processor.

Well the thing is, it's both. The company is called VMWare, and their product is called VMWare, so it's both. And the product is, it's a technology that allows you to run multiple servers on one physical server. So rather than buying a second server, you use virtualisation is what it's called. So you can actually have the hardware near it can be abstracted from the software. So you can have multiple servers operating on one physical server.

It sounds like parcelling a hard disk.
In a way, yeah, partitioning. It’s kind of like that, but it’s higher level again because it means that your operating system, your server exists as one big file on the server, and you can have multiple on it. So backing up things, business continuance, disaster recovery, it opened up so many doors. It means now rather than buying ten servers, I’ve only got to buy two, you know what I mean? You’ll see – so there’s no-brainer savings – power usage, energy company, heat, cooling, all these things play into it. But he has gone down this route of being very, very qualified in this, so far so he’s now a VMWare consultant.

So in that role there, very often he has to fly over as part of his business to, I think it’s Canada and over to, is it Massachusetts I think. They have offices in these places, and he would go to make sure things are done correctly. So it’s a case of you put yourself in a position and these multinational organisations whereby you’re heavily depended on, and you have built a name up for yourself. So global information services directors, these guys would be very involved in the project itself as well, managing the project, and they’d want to oversee projects in different countries, so they’d travel quite a lot.

So these are employees of these big corporations?

They would, but they’d be well-paid employees and they have a lot of responsibility. They’re up at management level almost, whereby they would be very, very senior in the departments they’re in anyway.

Yeah, and thinking about this stereotype of the high-tech worker that’s a contractor, flexible contracts, hyper-mobile, always with a laptop, different countries every weekend. Is there a segment of workers that are like that? Autonomous, flexible, hyper-mobile, or is this just a stereotype that doesn’t really exist?

I think it’s an interesting stereotype. I actually haven’t heard of it before, to be honest. I’m trying to think, can I actually see any circumstances or any people I know that would do that? And I keep in touch with a lot of my friends from university. But I think it comes down to the, it comes down to the environment. I think it might be the case in terms of ...

Because you’re talking about your friends who worked for ten companies, whereas you were working for one.

Yeah, well this guy worked for ten, I mean he moved over to Los Angeles, Silicon Valley, and it’s a case of a start-up company after a start-up company after a start-up company. And he might have a contract that only would last six months. So then he’s gone and he’s onto another company because the project’s finished. So he’s brought in as an extra hand on a project, he works on that project, the projects finished, he moves on, moves on, moves on. But in terms of travelling around the world, I think they would certainly be in the minority.

OK, yeah, when I mean travelling around the world, I mean travelling through these special circuits, like, you know, Silicon Valley, and then Munich, London, maybe India.

But you’re still talking about hopping around the globe, you know? And I think in my own experience of my own friends and the people who have graduated from our course in the university, both a year in front of me and a year behind me, most of these people are in employment as employees, the majority are. But they will move jobs to get better money, and some of them will say “you know what? I’d like to go and work in Zurich, I’d like to go work in New Zealand, I’d like to go work in London.” But they generally will go to a country, they’ll spend a certain amount of time, they’re working as an employee in that job. More for the exposure to a different civilisation, a different culture, and then they’ll go on.

But to be honest, I know one guy now who would actually be back and forth between Ireland and I think it’s Singapore, but he runs his own business and it’s a case of he would also be moving, he’d be travelling up to Norway, around Europe really, and even over to the states. But very much, his job again, he’s the guy who started up the company, great product, great idea, got some investment money, R&D is done here in Europe, then they’ve moved now R&D over to Romania where they have the team of highly qualified engineers out in Romania.
working on a certain aspect of the software. He then has his facilities over in Singapore whereby he would get prototypes done up. He then takes his prototypes, he brings them over to the likes of Nokia over in Norway, demos them there, then they might have a conference showcasing the stuff in Barcelona, but then they could be over in the states meeting potential investors. But the guy is always travelling, always on his laptop. But again, he's doing that for himself because it's his own business. He's not doing it because he's an employee for somebody else. But he's hyper-technology or into this product and what he does.

But if you, if you decide to extend your clientele base, say into UK, into Europe, then you would see yourself travelling.

I can see it happening in a situation, yeah. Like my friend's situation or when you have a lot of companies, like you said clients in different countries, you will generally travel back and forth, absolutely. So I think that will definitely work in a multinational corporate side of things. But where we are, we're in SME, so that would be the difference. But yeah, I'm sure there are people out there that would be travelling a lot more than you or me, you know?

Because your company is SME, but it could be international, to a certain extent.

Yeah, but in that environment, because what we do, the jobs in most in terms of the actual IT side of things anyway, in the IT services. The work is very much run-of-the-mill stuff. There's nothing fancy that we're doing. There's some things that we are certified in ahead of other people in the country, so that would be where our core confidences are. But equally, there's another one of us in London. There's another one of us in France. I mean, we're just one company in Ireland, but there's somebody like us in all the other countries as well.

So but say that one of your clients is an Irish international that has subsidiaries in other countries. Then they may like your work, and say, "hey, would you please do this work in my other subsidiaries?"

That's right, yeah. And there is one company that has approached us in the past and the agreement would be that we take care of their operation here in Ireland and Holland and Belgium and the United States, and in that situation, we would have had to have gone to Holland, but the company subsequently basically have held out on this because they're struggling with investment money at the moment. But if that was to come through, we would certainly find ourselves going over to different countries to do that work, absolutely. And it would be more IT work. But I think if you're actively looking for business in a certain country or a certain city, generally you will probably establish a presence on the ground there as well, you know?

Yeah, this person you mentioned that has a team in Romania, like you said he's high-ends technology, that he's hyper-specialised in some ...

Yeah, this guy went to the university here, he was very involved in the university's computer society. He's full of ideas, very, very bright guy, very intelligent. And to him, there's a technical solution to every problem, and it's always technology. So he likes that side of things. But he's working really as a business developer for himself, you know? So he's making sure things are done right. Of course, he's got the technical background.

But you're right, yeah. There are companies like that that would service banking and financial institutions, and they would travel up, you know, back and forth between the different branches around the world to make sure that everything is being done. There are people that would do technical audits in different countries to an organisation, like say aviation for example. Like they're subjected to the FAA, the Federal Aviation Authority I think it is in the states, whereby the FAA will audit every single company that does any work on aviation or aircraft parts, be it manufacture them or remanufacture them. And it's a case of there are technical roles in those cases where you would audit the different sites around the world to make sure that their security, for example, is up-to-date. So security audits is actually, and security is something whereby I think people might travel a bit more because it's a very close skill set. But again, you're focusing on ...
You have this on your website I think, don't you?

We do some security work, yeah. But we wouldn't be, it's more a case of we have done security audits for the crowd for the E-flow, but it's a case of it's something where an organisation might see it as something that they're looking for. We've gone and worked with them as to the solution they're looking for in terms of security side of things, firewalls.

That's security in terms of anti-hacking?

Yes, exactly. But you see, banks and financial institutions, they would always be looking for somebody who has done an awful lot of that work. So there is a tradition and I think it's been a small amount of people who have that skill set and the knowledge to deploy solutions that are anti-hacking and to adhere to industry best standards and best practises. So those individuals I could see would travel quite more and they would be consultants and they would generally possibly be contracting as well. But in order for you to go out and do a job, you still need somebody promoting you, you know what I mean? So ultimately these people are, they're working for a business, they're working for an organisation. Somebody's promoted them somewhere.

But I think, yeah, you have that situation whereby you get a job, you're working for a company who has clients in different countries, yeah, you'll be sent to those different countries. But I think there's only a certain amount that a person can take of that. I don't think it lasts for long periods of time. You know what I mean? Because at the end of the day it goes back to the fact that you know, when you're younger you'll do it for the money. When you get older, you get more comfortable, you're looking for stability, you want to settle. So I think that's my perspective on it.

Yeah, I've travelled a lot, I've lived in different countries, but, you know, I'm a bit tired of that.

And as you get older, your mind set and your strategy changes, you know? It's like when you're a kid, yeah drinking is great, you know. "I want to go to every party every night of the week, you know, seven nights a week. I want to do this, I want to do everything." And now when someone asks you to go to the nightclub, you go "nightclub? I don't want to go to the nightclub. I want to hang out here and talk to my friends." You know what I mean? Because you grow out of it and I think it's the same with jet-setting and a job that involves that. So yeah, you'll do it for a certain period of time, but at the end of the day, like any healthy guy, any healthy girl, they want to have a relationship. They will have friends and family in certain locations that they will always come back to. Like even if you try to adopt that lifestyle of jet-setting and being highly-technical and focusing on a certain area and going from city to city to city to city, you only do it for a certain amount of time before you meet somebody that you want to spend more time with. So I think that will create some sort of a tie for you, you know?

So tell me if I'm right, so there is no real nomadism between IT professionals?

Well there are guys who I would call slightly socially retarded, and those guys have the ability to be nomadic because they don't have the same social desires as other people do. You know, they're bachelors. I know guys in there early 40s who are, you know, low self-esteem, technology's their realm, they work in computers, technology, you know from 8 in the morning until midnight, and they do it everyday. They love it. They go on weekends and they set up test environments on the next new technology. But those guys aren't the commonplace guys like I think you need a balance, and I think anyone who has a balance kind of, some sort sort of a balance life. You will do a certain amount of hard work and a certain amount of focused work no matter what you do, only for a certain period of your life, and eventually you'd be looking more for the balance, then you're looking more for the actual lifestyle, less work, as you get older I think.

So they don't do this for some sort of glamour or party lifestyle, jet-setting?
Well I can't say they're mixing because you'll be too tired. You know, I mean if you think about the social aspect, you're travelling, you're in different time zones, you have no real circle of friends, relationships would be shallow, you know? And I think that again it's a young man's job. You'll only do that for a certain period of time. You know, you grow out of it. So I think maybe some people, like me for example, when I finished college I was thinking "Oh I'd love to go work in Hong Kong, I'd love to work in London, I'd love to work in New York and Los Angeles, I want to be working in all these cities and just see the world." And I realised that afterwards, you know, I can get in a plane and go to Hong Kong and I can have a walk around, spend a few weeks there and have a holiday. But do I really want to get to know the guys there? Do I really want that lifestyle, you know?

Yeah because one of your friends went to LA, right?

Yeah, and what kept him there? He met a girl. He's married and has kids. She's an American girl, yeah. So basically, it's like he went over there and he intended to work there for a few years to get some good experience and then come back to Ireland and set up his own company. But he went over that way and ended up getting into a relationship, as did three other of my friends as well.

But he came back, he came back to Ireland?

No, no, he's over there now. He's working in ...

Oh I thought he was your business partner.

No, that's sorry, yeah that's John. Yeah he went over there, but he brought his girlfriend with him from here. The two of them moved over for four years and then came back. So that was a different friend. Yeah that was John who I work with. And whereas the other guy I'm thinking of, is a guy Declan and another friend, Derek, Rory, this other guy Brian, they all went over to San Francisco. And they went over there with the intention of working there for a few years, making loads of money, come back to Ireland and settle down and start their own company. But they've all met girlfriends, married, kids within the space of a few years, and it's those kind of real life needs and urges and social side of things where I think people end up gravitating more to, you know?

Couldn't they expand your business into LA, for example? Or are you just not interested in that?

I think for ourselves it's a case of we need to think bigger than we're thinking, you know. It's a case of where are our desires at the moment. Like in order to do that you're, yeah, you're right we could. I mean I've got relatives and things in the UK, I've got friends down in New Zealand, but at the end of the day if the business was bringing an awful lot of money over in the states, well that'd be great. It'd be a cash cow, you know? Whereas what we're doing here, it's bringing in enough to get by and make a living and we're quite happy with that.

However we do want to expand bigger, but we kind of want to find our feet first, build up more stability, get the system and the processes correct within the organisation, before we take that and we drop it somewhere else. You know, you want to make sure that you have your processes down because you have to learn from the first one as much as you can, get everything set up. And you only have a business when it doesn't need you. Like because if your business needs you to be there, it's just a job, right? At the end of the day it's just a job. You got to get up, you got to go to work. Whereas if it's really a proper business, if I decide to take a week off work, my business should still function. There should be people in there who have the different responsibilities.

Yeah, because I'm trying to think, you and your friend were ambitious enough to open your own business, right?

Yeah.

But you don't seem as ambitious to go international.
Well, we can go national first, you see. So like for us it's a case of we're trying to get the Limerick market cracked, get it figured out, get our processes right and in terms of the, if you think about it, like I said earlier, from October of 2007 until January, oh wait no February of 2009, we went from three people to nine people. So we've tripled in size in, what is that, fifteen months?

Oh yeah, that's very fast.

So that is quite rapid growth.

So you're just starting in a sense.

Exactly. The first year was myself and John, learning what we're doing, deciding where we're going. We then brought in our third guy Jonathan to decide, "look let's go into the IT work." So after two years of business, we started into IT. We're now less than four years in business, so we've only really been doing IT in a big way for the last, what, twenty, twenty-two months really. You know, maybe a bit longer, since September, October of 2006 it would be, so just over two years, really.

I still have some topics to cover. How are you on time?

Oh I have plenty of time. I'm very, yeah.

OK, awesome, because this has been so rich.

I just waffle.

But that's excellent, honestly. So thinking about all these things you've told me about lifestyle, and your lifestyle when you're younger and when you're older, the IT part and the software part of it... How about gender, right? How would you differentiate female professionals from male professionals in the high-tech sector?

It's, I don't know, this is a funny question because sexism, it's a big white elephant in the room, you know what I mean, and feminism, and all this, male chauvinism, and it's like I really, I try to treat people on the basis of what they do, you know? On their skills, how dedicated they are to the workforce, you know? But having said that, like at the end of the day, it's really tough for women out there. I really appreciate it. Because when you're in a position whereby you're given, let's say I'm given an option of hiring this guy here who's exactly equal to this girl here in every way, in skill sets, shape, ability, everything, even if the pay check is the same, right, if everything is identical. Who am I going to give the job to? Probably the guy. And the reason for that is, like I think it comes down to the fact there's always a risk of a girl being pregnant. There can be mood swings, there can be different relationships affected within the office, and it seems like it's a, I feel like I'm being so sexist even though it's not intended.

But it's a case of when you own your own business and you pay somebody, it's a real concern that you know, that the environment is right, that the people that work in the office are treated well, and you want to do everything you can for them. And we do have a situation whereby like Ailish our administrator is now, she's pregnant herself, so she starts maternity leave in May. And I'm really happy for her, but for us as a business, it now means we now have to find somebody else to fill that role, so it's more of a headache for us. So it's very selfish of me to say that I would choose the guy over the girl, because at the end of the day, I know that there's a lot of girls out there that will do their job a lot better than the guy, but it only comes back to if they're both identical. You know, I believe I would probably choose the guy first.

Because imagine, like as it is, IT is generally I think, traditionally a guy, a male, I guess vocation really, you know. Like in terms of our degree in college, there was 240 started that degree course, and the majority of them were
guys. However, in the top ten there was a couple of girls who graduated in the top ten of the class. So I know that women are fantastic, women think in different ways, they have different ways of reasoning. They, you know, they can multiprocess and everything. But at the same time, because the majority in the IT place is guys, if you bring in one girl into a three-man IT guy team, you've got one girl now and three guys, there's potential there for, you know, relationships to suffer, competition around chasing the girl or whatever. Those would be concerns of mine, you know?

But at the same time it's like if I'm in a situation where our recruitment guy gives me five CVs, and the best one on that list is a girl, I will hire them. I have no problem with that, and that's how I think. It's the right person for the job for me, first and foremost. But in a situation where I have two identical CVs right down to it, I would probably go with the guy. Does that, I don't know if that answers the question.

Yeah, yeah, that’s one important ...

I think women get the rough end of the deal here, a very, very raw end, because like I know girls working for different companies out there that we would work with who have their qualifications and they get treated bad by guys, and they get treated, like you know – one of our clients for example, I'm sure that she feels that she's in a man's world and she gets kind of treated and patronised in certain ways because she's a girl, and that's not right at all. So we try to treat her as anybody else. To us she's another potential customer, that's another relationship to be had, at the end of the day her money is as green as anybody else's. But I definitely do feel that people can look down at them. And I think that other out there, they're not paid an equivalent salary to the guy and I don't understand why that is, because at the end of the day is somebody's doing the job as good as the next person ...

That's within the IT sector?

That's within the IT sector, very specifically, yeah.

So a female software developers would earn less than male ones?

I suspect so.

But if they are contractors, if they're there for two, three months, if they get pregnant ...

Doesn't matter, yeah I'm sure there are people that would do that. But I think at the same time, I'm only – I suspect, and I don't know if I'm right in this at all, that contracting is more of a guy thing. They want to prove themselves, the want to go out there, they want to be macho, they want to earn loads of money, drive a nice car. Where girls are much more a case of, a lot of them would gravitate toward family and friends first, money second. They're about relationships, caring, this sort of, and that's a stereotype that I have, but I don't know any female contractors.

What about remote working gender-wise? You could say that, you know, if you're a mom, you could work from home, right?

Sure.

So do you see any patterns there about remote working and women? Or as I just asked about contractors and ...

Well in the technology sector, yeah there's actually great scope to work from home for anybody in terms of remote working. I guess if somebody's trying to raise a family and they've got other work on their mind, it's like – if you're in a position, situation where you're a mom, for example, you're going to have kids running around in the house if you're at home looking after them. Because the reason you're at home is because you're looking after
them, right? Like the only reason, otherwise you'd have them in a creche and you wouldn't be at home, you know? So it's a case of you'd stay at home to look after the children. So now, which is your priority? You've got divided loyalties here. Because if your child is crying and the phone is ringing, you have to look after your child. You know what I mean?

So it's a case of – however if it's a flexi-time thing and you're given a job to do, or to write a module for a programme, it's a case of if you can find the time and commit the time to getting that done and done well and up to the same standard as if you weren't looking after a child, well then that's fair enough, you know? It's about the merit, it's about proving yourself and about – like I'm not saying it can't be done, but I suspect that you've got divided loyalties, you know? Like you have to look after your children.

I forgot to ask you this, do you have remote workers now working for your company?

Not really, no.

Everybody comes to the office.

Everybody comes to the office, yes. And I think it's a good way of developing relationships. I think that there's definitely scope for that, but in a young company, we want to foster communication and get the culture right. In the future there may be a situation whereby people can go out and work on the road. You know, in a larger organisation you can certainly do hot-desking, or have like a couple of guys working remotely, and in the office you might have a couple of stations where they can plug in if they need to come into the office for meetings or whatever else. But in a smaller business, you really want to foster communication, collaboration and go from there, I think.

Because I think that – yeah, remote working, I've heard great things about it, tele-working, people working at home, they're able to deal with things like getting their washing done, then they can sit down to work and write their code and, you know, get the job done and keep the boss happy. Whether, like, again it goes back to saying if you're home or working at home looking after children, or if you're a guy working at home looking after a relative, or whatever, it doesn't really matter, provided you can get the work done. And that's my motivation as a business owner to make sure that whoever does the job is up to that task. So remote working, I think that's a very good idea in some organisations.

For ourselves, because we're in a period of growth, we want everybody to be focused and all of us moving in the same direction. Like you don't want somebody to be sitting at home feeling that they're only tele-working because they're not wanted in the office or that they're only tele-working because they're taken for granted, they're just given a job, go into the job, give them the results, thanks very much, good luck, next, you know? You want to have a certain amount of communication with that person to get across, you know, the gratitude and make sure that they're satisfied in their work. Because if you're working on your own at home all the time, then you're in your home watching tele in the evening and your girlfriend or wife arrive in or whatever, or vice-versa. It's a case of you need to be able to draw a line between work and your social, home life. And that's something that's very, very important.

So if tele-working is something you're promoting, people will work different hours, varying hours, possibly longer hours, maybe the time they do work will be more focused. Because they are able to deal with nagging tasks like going to the post office renewing a TV license. They can get these things out of the way, not having to squeeze them in at lunch time, running around with something on their mind. They can just knock those things on the head and get on with their work. So it can work, definitely. Again, because we're small, we're focused, we want to collaborate more in the office, and as we grow I think it's something that we will take advantage of.

So you think that work outcomes, like the programming, done in the office is better than done at home?
I don't necessarily – yes, well there's one side of things. One is to do with purely looking at results, and we don't purely look at results. We look at the actual individual as well and them fitting into the actual organisation and creating a culture in the organisation. So that's very important, the culture of things. But in terms of if you're a developer working at home on your own, and you come across some sort of a problem and you can't figure out the best way to do it, it's very, very easy in a team environment to turn around and tap somebody on the shoulder, and say “hey, John, just wondering about this. Could you have a quick look at this? Could you throw an eye in there please?” John will turn around, come over, you know, a five minute conversation and the problem will probably be resolved.

Whereas if you're at home, you might feel that well you have to prove yourself at home and you might be on Google, you might be searching different technical forums on the Internet trying to find the answer to your solution doing more reading. Whereas in your office, you can just say to one of the other guys in the office, “can I bounce something off you? Can I use you as a sounding board?” And those sort of things, it's about team building.

And you're building a certain amount of competitiveness amongst the guys working there as well because people, when you work as part of a team, everybody feels somewhat compared to the next guy. So a small bit of competition is healthy. Too much competition is unhealthy. And I think if you're at home on your own, it has the potential to be the other way, less productive. But culture is important, like you want to be able to get to know the person that's working for you or with you. I hate to use the words “working for me” because really, they are working with you. And the people that work with you are the people that end up deciding whether your business is a success or not. So, yeah.

**OK. Back to gender, work outcomes and gender. You gave the example of having a team with three guys and one girl. Is the work outcome in terms of software development different than if you have a mix of gender, or only one gender? How does the work process change?**

To be honest, like we haven't, we're at the size whereby it just so happens the people we've employed and the CVs that have been put to us have all been for guys. And like, we do work with a recruitment guy, and he doesn't ask us do we have any preference in terms of software developers or IT people. We've never indicated a preference either way. When we hired our administrative staff, we said “look, we prefer a girl who has experience in this because she's able to multitask, very suitable to this, somebody who's looking to be settled.” So in a team environment in software development or in IT services, I actually haven't had exposure to having somebody working with one of those teams. However, I have some female friends who do that work, and they do work as part of a software team, and they get on great, you know? And I can't see there being a problem. I guess it's really maybe a stereotype I have in my head.

But I think to date, you see, as a small business, and going back to, sorry, just taking a step back again. Going back to, for example, the university, I’d say 75 percent of our class were male, you know? And the minority is the female aspect of it, the majority are male. And so it's purely by chance that I think everyone's working for us are guys. Like two of the people were, two of them friends, or introduced to us by a mutual friend. Our business development manager, I know he's not software, but he was again a referral from somebody I knew. And then we’ve hired two people, one on the IT and one on the software through a recruitment agency, and it just so happens that the CVs that came in, we were looking for certain qualifications and the CVs that came in were for guys. So I don't have exposure to that, but I would believe that it could definitely work very well, as well.

**Do your female software friends, do they work at the park as well?**

No, she's working in New Zealand. So she, yeah. Now would you be interested in talking to her, maybe?

**Yes, I would, but initially my focus is on people from the technology park, or in the region.**
Sure, yeah. I'm trying to think, do I know, I have other female friends who qualified for computer systems but then moved out and started doing other things away from computers, you know?

I actually, I do know somebody. And she works in the office upstairs from us and she works as a QA testing, quality assurance. And there's a team of three guys working with her. There used to be eight of them, but the team was downsized. [Helen] is her name, and she is in the same building as yourself in the tech park, and she might be of use.

That would be great. I'll remind you later, because it's important for our research to have gender perspective. It's one of the basic topics that we are covering.

I also, sorry, I also know an IT administrator who works in Milford Care Centre, Caroline McCarthy. She might be worth talking to, because she has come from a background where she was IT service, out on the road, solving customer problems like our team of guys is. And then she moved into looking for a more settled position, a more stable environment, which is Milford Care Centre, where she's now working as kind of one of the IT help desk people. So she would be good as well.

I would be very interested in interviewing them.

Yeah, OK.

OK, I don't want to make you tired, but this is so rich.

No, keep going, I'm quite comfortable here. I left my afternoon open.

We are leaning towards the end anyway. In terms of location, why did you guys move to the technology park?

Well that's interesting actually. We were based out in Mungret. I guess it's a funny case of - sometimes situations just arise, like with the business for example. When we started up our company, we were actually, one of our contracts was providing some IT work with a company called Copy Type on the other side of Limerick. So we were based there and we were working out of an attic space, really. It was very small. We fit four people into that, and then we had to take a second room over there, then there was six of us. So we said, "no, this is too much." The guy was looking at increasing our rent, so we said "you know what? Let's go out on our own here, more space, more kind of a feeling of stand up and fight as opposed to living in the nest," you know what I mean? "It's time for us to step out of the nest and go out in the big world and do it for ourself."

So we went looking around for some office space, and as it happened, I got into a conversation with somebody saying "well, the office space down in the tech park, they're quite reasonable." And it was aimed towards businesses that were post start-up and trying to get to the next level of being fully established, you know? So companies that were between two and five years in business, and there was plenty of space over there. So we got talking to them and the rates were very reasonable in terms of the cost per square foot, the service charges. And also, they were very satisfied or happy for us to make changes to the architecture to the building, to put a server room in there, to put a small canteen in there.

So that was kind of where that came from, really. So it came down to pricing, but also the tech park here is, in my mind, it's a good place to be for technology firms because it has, like within Limerick, you've got Raheen Industrial Estate, you've got like different parks around the place. There's one out in Ballysimon across the gala in those - Eastway Business Park. They're all generic business parks or industry parks, whereas this one here is a technology park. And because we're in technology, it kind of goes quite well. So for us, it also was an added bonus. The fact that the majority of us working in the company actually operate and work this side of town as well. It ticked that box, because none of us wanted to be commuting for too long. So I live up by Superquin, which is only five minutes from the office.
Near to the movie theatre?

Yeah, that's right. Exactly. I mean the office is just over there near, well it's of the tech park here, but I live near the theatre there, exactly. So it just suited. It ticked the box location wise, it ticked the box in terms of technology and price.

And when you opened your business, it was physically located inside your first client, is this what you're saying?

Yes. It's kind of funny. We rented a room from them, you know? But it was like incubation for us really. And as well, they were good to bounce ideas off and they were good to introduce us to potential clients as well.

OK. So you decided to stay in the region because you guys are all from here?

We decided to stay in the region because our customers are here. Once we moved into the IT sector, all our customers are based in Limerick. So you need to be in a half an hour, forty minutes driving distance of them. So we stayed in Limerick once we moved into IT services. Doing software development, again, we probably could have done that from anywhere.

The first part is the IT services, dealing with IT clients, computer repairs, server installations, network support, you need to be close to your client. So within one hour really, distance, maybe. Maybe even half an hour, ideally, in case you do need to get in your car and drive in there and plug a cable in. You need to be close to them, so that's why we stayed in Limerick. You're right though, in terms of the software development aspect of our business, that could really be done from anywhere, Dublin, Cork, France, London.

But you can also repair some networks remotely, right? You just have to access …

Yeah, you can but if somebody's plugged something out – we do, 90 percent, nearly 95 percent of our work is done remotely over the Internet. But occasionally you have physical problems with machines or somebody plugs something out.

But if you think, Dublin is not that far, nor Cork. That's two and a half hours, you can say that's far enough. But if you had a handful of significant clients in a different city like Cork, or Dublin …

And we do have in Dublin.

But you didn't decide to move to Dublin, for example.

Because the majority of our clients are here in Limerick. So we, rather than move to Dublin, the intention is that we'll open an office in Dublin, so we'll have a sales person there. The systems that we use for reporting IT problems and managing our clients and billing invoicing, desktop support, that would all be done from Limerick. The longer term goal is that we'll have some sales guys in Dublin and some IT staff that are available to do repairs and callouts. On the software side of things, I think we'll probably always be focused here in the park. But on the IT services side of things, we would definitely branch out into different cities if the economy allows us to of course and if our sales are working. So there's opportunity there in Cork, opportunity in Dublin, and our service is as good if not better than the next person. So why not? And it gives us extra coverage and exposure to potential software contract customers.

OK. In terms of networking, I mean, in terms of social network, people. Does the park assist you somehow or provide you more opportunities or more exposure to contact other professionals, other businesses?
I would say no, because there's no real initiative there. There is a list of people in the park. There is once a year, I think, some sort of a meeting where they try to get, like a Christmas party for the park. They try to get everyone together to go out for a Christmas party. People don't really go. You get some people to turn up.

But the real networking for me on the social networking side of things to do with business networking is through the Limerick Chamber of Commerce. Like every two weeks, there's a networking, networking morning and you, it's done in such a way that different mornings, different people give different presentations. You're encouraged to mingle, to get to know the other people there. It's limited to one representative from a particular business sector. So you only ever have one architect there, one solicitor there, one IT company there. So we're in there as the IT company. It gives us exposure to other people who are out there and it's a new network of potential sales for us. So we give them recommendations and they give us recommendations. But in terms of the park here, I mean there's nobody proactively helping us to get in contact with other businesses. And I think it's something that, it's a shame, really because there's a lot of businesses here that they could benefit from collaboration and from more communications and networking.

Can I get some more water, please?

Sure, yeah.

We were talking about networking here in the park and the facilities and the proactive kind of generation of, or lack of proactive kind of organisations or somebody willing to take the bull by the horns and actually set up the networking.

**So your friends in New Zealand and America, you guys don't talk about work or novelties?**

We would have a quick talk on G-Talk, you know, instant messaging programmes and keep in touch really. But it wouldn't be more work related, it would be more social related.

**What technologies do you use to talk? Telephone or Skype?**

You know the Google Talk? G-Talk. It's just a chat programme, instant messaging. It's like Skype without the, you know Skype, you can type in it. It's the same, yeah. So we use those. I have on occasion chatted to friends down in New Zealand and Australia on Skype or on Google Talk again does have the voiceover IP thing, you know? So yeah, I mean a bit of both.

**There's a society, like you're very young, but what types of transformations have you seen taken place in the IT sector in the last years in terms of work, you know, work, industry, opportunities, anything?**

Yeah, I was thinking about that the other day actually. It's interesting that you say that. I think there's been a big migration towards, away from things like desktop applications in terms of – this is again, specific to the work we do really, and everything has become about databases and Web. It's all database and it's all Web, whereas when I came out of college, everything was sort of inclined to architecture, where you’d have all communications would be done using propriety protocols between the server and client, running over IP, you know. But as time has gone by now, things like Web service has taken off, Web sites or Intranet sites in organisations, which have all our CRM and their ERP. All access databases are through now a Web browser for example. They don't have desktop applications because it means their, it means the systems are now open to multiple platforms. So that's one transgression I’ve seen anyway, one change.

I think that technology has become simpler and more easier to access in terms of development, software development. Like it's very, very easy to pick up and learn the likes of CSharp or EB for example. But in the dot-net side of things, it's easier again and I think Microsoft are kind of going that direction to make things easier to get it, and they try to take away the complexity of programming. Like my qualification was all about C Plus Plus
programming, that was everything I did. So there's an awful lot of technical aspects to that in how you write your code that no longer apply or have been hidden from the programmer in the newer technologies because they try to simplify it.

But then this has a negative side that you have anyone becoming a software developer and charging any penny for that. So how do you move away from that type of competition?

Well we still focus on quality is one thing. And people look at reputation, so the longer we're in business, we're finding that we get more referrals and we get more clients. Like people who work, who want to spend a lot of money on something or want to develop something that is going, their company is going to be dependent on for the next ten years, they want to make sure they get that right. So they don't necessarily want to go to the lowest bidder, you know? So we basically, we don't get into that environment. Once we prove ourselves to somebody that what we provide is extremely good, well tested and almost bug-free, and on budget, people are happy to come back to us, you know?

So often people who are repeat customers who come to us with a budget, and they will say, "look guys, I've only been authorised to spend this much money. This is what I want to achieve. You know, can we achieve this? Can we find a middle ground," you know? So I think it's about relationships. People do business with people at the end of the day. And that is very, very important in networking and in any company, technology or any other company, you know? So I think the social side of business is as important as the technology side of things. You need to be out there, you need to be seen. So I think again, it goes back to our strategy going from software over to IT. It's about people doing business with people. And I've forgotten your question.

The main transformations in the high-tech sector... or in society overall.

Yeah transformations, OK. Yeah in society. I think things have become more competitive. Money has become more accessible in recent times. In society in general, I mean – technology has become so cheap that we just throw it away. You know, there was a day, there was a time that existed whereby your TV breaks, you get some guy to fix it for you. Now you put it in the bin. So I mean there's generic things in globalisation and technology that have become unnecessary and there's guys out there now with no job because of it.

But is there a change between the Celtic Tiger years and the post Celtic Tiger years, or do you think this is just ...

Yeah, I mean for ourselves in the last two years, people will ring us up, “we need a server, we need this,” you could put down any price you wanted and they'd just say “yeah that's fine, just do it." You know? Whereas now people are getting in three, four, five quotes. They have to get a sign-off from the managing director, it takes longer now. So it's much more, the sales process is longer and your margins will be tighter. So yeah, things have become a bit tougher on the IT side of things. Software side of things, we still haven't really, we haven't suffered so much because for example our daily rate would be 400 Euros a day. We increased that to 450 there last September and it's worked through until around now where one or two customers are now asking, “look, this is the best price we can do," in which case we'll try to bring in a bit of a discount. But we're still back to our 400 Euros a day rate, which we're happy with, you know? And it comes down to how busy we are. Like sometimes if we're very, very busy and we cannot do the work, and it's a new client and it's a small job, we might try and deliberately price it a bit higher so that they probably won't give us the work, do you know what I mean?

Would you hire a contractor?

We have subcontracted people and, exactly yeah, to do certain things. Like with the E-flow project, we had to break the project down into about twenty different modules, and we brought in past colleagues and friends, again, that we would have known going back through the years to do a bit of work here, a bit of work there, you know, a week here, ten days there to get the project to completion. So, yeah.
Before I forget, when you moved to the park, was UL in your mind, about being “back to UL.”

It was. It was in terms of, I love this place. To me it's really relaxed. It's the perfect academic environment because everybody is in the same area, so there's a focus in terms of academia. And there's a lot of communication and collaboration. Where you go to other universities up in Dublin or down in Cork or Galway, the campuses are spread out, so people don't spend as much time together as they do here in Limerick. And that is something that is fantastic, and I love the university here for it. And I think the guys that have developed the university have done a great job.

From our own perspective, we have always intended to try and give something back to the University of Limerick because we believe that, you know, we love the university here. We believe that academia is very important for progress, which is why I’m sitting down with you now. Otherwise I might have gone “oh, whatever, go away,” you know? “Don't be annoying me.” But no, I think it's important for us to give something back, because the university has taught us to do things in a certain way, and we feel that we need to be back and a part of it.

So recent times, we've been in talking to the likes of Liam Brown. We're now working with a guy, Brendan Cleary, do you know Brendan Cleary? He's in a department here somewhere in the university. We were actually awarded a contract with him this morning in the university. So there's opportunity in here for ourselves, a lot of the departments here as well. And then you've got Lero which is the software development, Jack Downey and the lads over there. So we've been talking to them basically. It's about collaborating with people, and again it comes down to knowing people, networking and the social side of things to maintain your own business. You have to be out there, you have to be seen to be out there, and the university to us is one place where we do have relationships that we've developed over the years with lecturers. I've worked in the university myself, there used to be a company called AMT, which I think was Advanced Manufacturing Technologies, but I was their IT guy when I was in college here. So that people I've known, that's how I new Liam Brown, he used to work there. So again, it's...

Well it was eight years ago now that we graduated, so it's flown by. But in that eight years I think there's still relationships between the university. And I think from our own perspective, we actually like to bring in some students to do some work with us as well. And I mean, just be available to meet with people like yourselves, and to be seen to be involved and to be kind of proactive in giving something to the university without getting anything back. And if we do get some business out of it, well fantastic.

Or develop partnerships in which both sides win, right? Win-win situations?

Well I think you need to be prepared in any good networking environment. Like you need to be prepared to look out for the other people's interests, and if I'm looking out for you and I'm looking for something for you, and I'm out and about and I see an opportunity, that's a case of I'll let you know then, and I don't expect anything in return. And it's a case of if something comes back in the future, well then fantastic. But that is the heart of networking. It's not about what's in it for me. It's about what problems can I solve for the other person? Yes maybe they'll pay me for them, but also it'll come back to me, you know?

It comes back one way or the other.

It does, it does. And that's kind of how I like to think of things, and the university plays a part in that, but also I think from our own perspective, because we're a technology company as well, academia is known to be very focused on research and development. It's very focused on doing things the right way, industry best practices. A lot of that kind of stems from university research. So for us to be seen to be involved with the university as well, we're seen to be on the cutting edge, we're seen to be tech savvy, we're seen to be in some way – it helps us reputation wise, I'm sure, you know, or I suspect anyway. It's not being something that's an issue today.
Yeah, exactly, one of the reasons why companies set up their facilities within science parks is the branding issue, to be associated with a science park brand. This is a common practice. But a final point then, on improvement, based on all these things that we talked about. What types of improvement would you like to see in your high-tech business or in the high-tech sector that would make your life better or easier, life and work?

If we look at generally, globally, I’m not quite sure, but I’m going to focus on the company’s point of view at the moment, like how we can improve our things ourselves is by investing in technology that helps us run our business in terms of client management and in terms of tracking customer queries and being more proactive with it. Like I see, like Ireland for example, everything in the IT side of things, it’s all about, it’s a break-fix environment. Something breaks, you get called, you go out there and you fix it. Whereas bigger markets are going more toward preventative maintenance. And Ireland now is starting to realise this, and Irish IT providers are starting to offer a proactive service whereby people have a problem, you proactively go out there and fix it before the problem happens. They don’t even know it’s happened. Or rather than waiting for something to go wrong, we go out there once a month and we actually give the server a health check, go through a forty-point checklist, make sure everything is operating within acceptable constraints. So if there’s a problem then, we can see it coming. If there’s a memory problem, a processor problem, a disk problem, we can raise that with the actual business owner and say, "look, you’ve got a problem here, you’re going to run out of this in this period of time, you need to take action now." Or we can say things like "your server now, it’s been acting up over the last six months, you’ve seen it, we’ve experienced it, I think now you ought to be moving towards this."

But you try to be proactive with things. So then the next step here now is where you have what’s called a managed service, whereby you install actually applications that are programmes that run on the background on servers, on desktop computers that report back into a central reporting database. From that then the client and the IT company can pull out reports from that and they can show the client, “well look it, of your ten computers here, one of them is having problems. You can see users having problems, you can see that the server, everything is running within predefined constraints.” So in, you then have a team of guys who will actually keep an eye on your client’s sites up on a big screen, where I don’t know, the colour would change on a certain site name to green, to amber, to red or something. You click in there, you can actually see the problem with the server and work on it. So you’re moving from reactive to a hundred percent proactive demand service, and that’s where the Irish market would be technology-wise in another probably three to five years. People are talking about it now. Some people are trying to do it. The smaller guys can’t keep up, though. So we see that where technology can help us, and help us help our clients, so that’s good.

In terms of software development, though? Like open source is something that’s becoming more and more used these days. People are buying phone systems out of the box. They run some Lynax environment with Asterisk running on it, and they install it on a machine, install phone system for free. All they need is somebody who’s willing to spend the time learning these things, so open source is something that’s coming more and more and more, because there’s actually a value in that, a savings in that. Technology’s becoming more accessible for individuals.

As regards any brand new technology breakthroughs? If I new of any, I’d be developing my own company to do it, you know what I mean? So it’s a case of, I just think the trends are, things are going open sourced. We ourselves don’t embrace that because we are Microsoft only traditionally, and that’s whereby, that’s because Microsoft help us to develop our business, but they also, they provide the tools to do our work. Whereas the open source way, you’re very often up against students or up against guys working in a bedroom in the back of nowhere trying to develop some new technology. And at the end of it, they give it away. So we can see open source as an enemy of us. But in some cases like Google, developing all these applications and then giving them away, it’s great for Google. But it’s hard to see where the money’s being made for everyday people like us, you know? So sorry, you had another question.
About this topic of improvement, like thinking about the government or Shannon Development or technology park management, I mean if you could say something about improvements, how your business could be empowered ...

How they could help us? That they could do better for us? Well I think your suggestion earlier of there being a networking opportunity for companies in the business park here, I think that is something they should do. And they could do that in collaboration with the Limerick Chamber of Commerce. But ultimately you need more communication between the different parks and management and existing social networks. Because there's opportunity for them to mix.

Like recently there was, between Limerick and Galway, they had a big joint networking evening, network evening inside Dromore Castle in Clare, so they brought Chambers of Commerce from Limerick, from Clare, and from Galway, had a big event there in Dromore Castle. And everybody got to meet different people from different cities, different towns. It was very proactively networking, which was very good. So opportunity to work and meet people that you could collaborate with or partnership with, or potential clients or get referrals from. There's so many different opportunities there.

So one thing I would say to the likes of Shannon Development is they don't promote that enough, they don't do that. They have a lot of companies and parks, and they don't do any networking, of any use anyway that I've come across. They could also have a portal Web site for every business they have in their park on the Internet whereby you could put some information up there and have it refereled back to your own Web site, you know? So again, you have more of a Web presence and you're seen to be more of the technology group in this park, you know? So a park Web site would be great, to be found easier, to be found on the Web site, like on the Internet. The more people out there, the more sites your name is on the better. So that would be one thing I would say to them.

And I think the park itself in terms of improving things, like Shannon Development own an awful lot of properties, and we have to pay rates, you know, for every square foot we have. I think we have to pay 3 Euros or 4 Euros, I think it's 4 Euros per square foot per year in terms of overheads to pay for electricity, security, water, these things, heat. Well I think that they could actually proactively go around and they could put up things like energy saving light bulbs, you know? They could recycle things.

They could also provide small businesses with, like Shannon Development could partner with particular IT companies themselves. Like what I'm getting at is there's high potential start-ups out there who have a fantastic idea and they don't know how to start, so what do they do? They go talk to their friends, they talk to other people in business. Then they go talk to Shannon Development, Enterprise Ireland, they get some funding released, they do feasibility studies, they still don't fully understand maybe the technology side of things or what's available to help them, consultancy wise. Because we have, we have been down the route ourselves whereby when we worked for the previous company, we developed one product, it sold very well. We then spent too long developing this monstrosity. It wasn't really what the market needed, so the company failed on the back of that. So it's a case of, in terms of architecting a complex software solution, you need the right person to do that. And a lot of people who are in a HPSU situation, they aren't given the supports they need in terms of technology.

HPSU?

High Potential Start-Up. They're not given, they're not given the technical backing that they require. Like they're given business consultants, they're given marketing consultants, they're given sales consultants. There's no technology consultant, yet technology is going to be the heart of that business because they're trying to develop a new product. So yeah they might know a bit about the stuff themselves, but they need to talk to somebody who has done an awful lot of this in the past or has experience, and who knows where the mistakes are and the pitfalls. Because some people who go "yeah, I'll just hire some guys at the University of Limerick here." That's fantastic. Sit them down in a room, "oh, fly my pretties, fly. Develop a new solution for us." And the thing is, guys that are fresh
out of the university haven't got the industry experience in terms of software development that is required to
develop some of these longer-term technologies.

You need to be in the workplace for a few years to learn the ways and to learn the reality associated with industry
and how it works. You know, it's important to focus on the technologies and have not necessarily the right
solution, but the actual best solution for the job. Like it may not be a hundred percent the best academic way to
do it, but it'll be all that the market requires. So I'm not cutting corners, it's about being realistic as well because
there's so many different ways to skin a cat at the end of the day. You're burning somebody's money the more
time you spend on it. So I think that the likes of Shannon Development, Enterprise Ireland, they don't offer
technology consultants to these – *(phone ringing)* excuse me, I'll turn this off. So they don't ...

If it's important, just go ahead.

No, no, he's gone now. They don't offer the technology supports that are required for small businesses who are
aimed at being technology oriented, developing an enterprise solution. They're not given that support, and that's
very, very important to me. Business consultants, sales consultants, marketing consultants, your accountants, you
have bank managers, everything is about the money.

So are you developing software applications that you're not marketing yet?

Us, we have developed one application in collaboration with this other company in the document management
area. Sequel back end, Windows desktop, it's suitable for enterprise, it's totally in use in about ten companies
around Limerick. And we've had good feedback from it, but in terms of marketing and selling, we have nobody
marketing and selling it because we're now focusing on our core competencies. And the other company that was
involved, they were supposed to be doing sales and marketing of it, but they've now gone back to focusing on
their core competencies because of the environment here. So what we do need is somebody to come along and
take this product.

Are these ten companies all located in the park?

No the other company is based, that was the company from where we started our business, renting from them on
the other side of Limerick. It's that company. We've maintained that relationship. But they were supposed to be
selling that product, but they're not.

So you don't have any networking with firms in the park because you are all in the park?

No, there's no facility for that, because at the end of the day, in industry people are all about time is money, and if
I ring somebody up at the park and say "hi, I'm Dave, I've just moved into the park," and they go "very good with
you Dave. I do this, this and this," "OK that's grand, yeah," I showed no interest, "thanks very much, goodbye." Whereas you really need to get into that person, develop a relationship with them at networking evenings. So you
may not necessarily do any business, do any work with that individual, but that individual who works in that
company may know somebody else who may need our services, and vice-versa. So there's no environment
created there to bring these people into the same room, to even get talking or even get exchanging business cards.
And that's something that's not done.

So the physical proximity is not working for you, yet at least?

I think the physical proximity is, because we're in the technology park, it definitely, it's good for us, right. It
definitely gives us a certain amount of recognition because it's a technology park and that's what we do. So I think
from that aspect it is working. It is working in terms of our rent is a bit lower, you know? Or it's affordable versus
going to somewhere else in Limerick, more affordable. Thirdly, because we're close to the university and we're
now developing relationships with different departments in the university. It's working because we're
collaborating more with the university. So that is all good. So the next step then is to sponsor some final year projects in the university that will be technology oriented. To get those people working that direction, who may eventually come work with ourselves. So it's giving something back, but also we're getting something from it.

I wouldn't say it isn't working. I think that in terms of what we're doing company wise, where we are, how it's working, it's definitely working to an extent because we're still in business, you know? But, I think that in terms of how the park could be managed and how communication could be fostered between the companies in the park, that's not working and there's nothing there to do that and I think it would be beneficial for everybody in the park to do that, you know? But that's just my two cents. But it's, I do, I do like the park. It does have good and it's close to home.

Yeah, less than a mile.

Yeah. And I still drive.

You could bike to work if you want.

I could walk. But it's, I think it's a case of, you know, to do the job, because I don't know where I'm going to be at any time during the day, a phone call could ring, I might have to go away somewhere, I don't know. I always prefer to have the car there. Whereas realistically, if the company was to go a little bit bigger, I could in theory afford to walk to work because I would be able to plan my days better in advance. But for me, my job, I really need to be out and about. I need to be out meeting people, making appointments, talking to people, to pursue this business development and to keep the name out there so that's that side of things. But yeah, anymore? Anything else?

No...

Did we cover, like what's your real, what's your real kind of – you're just trying to understand the lifestyle is it? Or just our opinion?

Well, I think when I called you I said that we are developing a series of studies about the high-tech sector. So there are multiple interests, multiple topics that our team is interested in. One is technology parks and how it relates with the high-tech industry and regional development, in what has been called a triple-helix model of business, government and science. One additional dimension is this issue of lifestyle, like the social, cultural aspects of lifestyles in the high-tech sector, like, new forms of labour, new forms of leisure. This is why I asked questions about gender, mobility, remote work. So this interview is very comprehensive, as I cover from the most personal to the most social, right?

Yeah, you have to do a good few of these, don't you?

Yeah, it's not a survey or questionnaire where in you just check boxes. At the end of this first study, I will provide a confidential summary report to everyone who participated, a summary with the key findings.

Is there any question that, anything that I didn't ask that you'd like to say?

No, I mean look at, I'm happy just to follow the conversation any way you want to go. I just hope my comments or my feedback has been of use.
Do you have any questions or concerns about the research?

No, nothing, no. Just see how it goes, I suppose.

So if you could please tell me a little bit about yourself, like who you are, your professional role here first, so I can kind of have an idea.

I am in accounts payable, I'm the only accounts person in the Limerick office, so I, but we only deal with accounts payable here, so that's basically my job among other things. I'm a Jack of all trades here really, but the accounts payable is my core job and I deal with a lot of other things as well. We don't have, we don't actually have any directors or managers on site here, so we have what we call a leadership team, and that's represented by someone, one person from each department. So I'm obviously the representative from my department.

Which is finance?

Yeah.

So you're the only person in finance?

In this office, yeah. I mean it's a global company, the Limerick office, we're kind of our own little group here, you know?

The main office is in, what's the name? It's in California, I can't think of the name. I can't think of the name of the actual area now. I don't know America at all. So that's basically it. I mean, I'm involved in all aspects of what goes on here really, I mean, as part of the leadership team. But my core thing is the finance.

OK, and you don't do HR?

I do a lot of, we have a HR person here, but I do, like she doesn't work full time, she does part time. I do pick up a lot of HR-type stuff as well, but it wouldn't be – the biggest part is the finance side of it.

How many people are in [American manufacture software developer multinational]?

We have thirty-five people here in this office at the moment. Now we also have an office in Dublin called Precision that they've bought. I don't know how many are in there. They're still kind of a very separate entity. [American manufacture software developer multinational] have bought out other companies in the past and they've become [American manufacture software developer multinational], but Precision has stayed as Precision. So we would have some, from a financial perspective, there's some of a crossover at times, but more or less, they're a completely separate company.

Yeah I saw on the Web site that [American manufacture software developer multinational] produces software applications for manufacturing.

Yeah.
[American manufacture software developer multinational] Ireland, what does [American manufacture software developer multinational] Ireland specifically do?

The biggest section in [American manufacture software developer multinational] Ireland is actually the R&D, you know? So a lot of the programmes, a lot of them are developed here. Out of the thirty-five staff, I'd say over twenty of them are R&D.

They are software development?

Developers, Research and Development, yeah. They have different, I mean, the package they're working on at the moment is a finance package. So they're, the majority of them are actually working on that at the moment. They have developed other packages as well, you know? They've had jets packages and those kind of things. I don't know a whole lot about the software side of things. I'm not very technical, but yeah, the R&D is the mainstay of this office. The majority of the people here are in that.

And they work in the office here? Or they work remotely?

No, no everybody, the thirty-five people are based in the Limerick office.

So they'll come here from 9 to 5?

Yeah, yeah.

Do you have any staff on the road?

No, we don't. No, we don't have salespeople. Well we do, we have staff here who would travel, but it wouldn't be a regular thing. I mean, they're regular thing would be 9 to half 5 in the office, and if they need to go and meet up with other team members, I mean, they're in global teams, they're not just teams in the Limerick, they have, you know, team members in China and America and Holland and, you know, so they'd be working with people from all over the world. So at times, obviously, they have to travel to meet up with them, or you know, the IT guys, excuse me, just sitting out here, they were in Dublin all week working in the Precision office, you know. But the mainstay is actually just to work from here 9 to 5:30 Monday through Friday.

Do they work remotely, like from home with a laptop?

They can do, I mean, they have the option to do that like. I mean, some of them do, if they need to be at home for some reason. But the majority of people work from the office in the meantime. I mean, we do have other people, we have one of the HR, one of the, she'll be nearly one of the top HR managers, she works in the UK, but she has a home office, she works from home all the time. They do have people who work from home, but our office in particular, it's all office staff.

Doesn't the company require IT people to be travelling regionally to install software, meet with a client?

They do and they - like they do updates and there's new offices or if anyone's moving an office then obviously they have to travel to do that. But I mean they have IT people all over the world as well like. So I mean, it's very regionalised I mean, really, in that sense. That every office in the world will have someone from one of the departments working it it. So, I mean, you're kind of covered in that sense. Obviously there was a lot more travel, but they're cutting, you know, the way things are going now, they're cutting back on any unnecessary travel where they can.
I mean I know salespeople that work for [American manufacture software developer multinational] are on the road constantly. I know they have an office in Schiphol [Nederland] that there's hardly anyone there. They're mainly sales, so if you ever went over there, half the office is out on the road or whatever. But it's, we don't have sales in the Ireland office, so it's not an issue.

**OK. So they are the ones that do sales for [American manufacture software developer multinational]?**

They do, yeah. They're the biggest salespeople that I'm aware of. Now, I don't deal with the sales side of it, it's nothing to do ...

**OK but if there's a company in Dublin that wants to buy your software, you would send someone from Holland to come here?**

As far as I know, yeah. We don't have any salespeople in the Limerick office. They may have some people in the Dublin office that deal with sales, I don't know really. They're fairly new and I don't really have much to do with Precision, but.

**So back to you, how many years have you been here and tell me about your life trajectory, say your professional and family background, if you went to college, etc.**

I don't know. Better ask me questions, I'm not very good at talking about myself.

Well, I'm born and raised in Limerick. I've lived here all my life. I'm actually living in Tipperary now for the last three years. I went to school in Limerick. And I didn't go to college straight out of school. I'm actually in college now for my sense. I go to college two nights a week.

**What college do you go?**

I go to LIT.

**What are you studying there?**

I'm doing business studies and accounting, so I'm in third year.

**And is that a four year degree?**

Four years, yeah.

**And you'll become a bachelor in business?**

I'll have a degree, yeah. And I'm hoping to continue on with management accounting then after that, do the CIMA course, but we'll see. Three years in, I've kind of had enough. Wondering why I left it so late.

**How's the course there? Do you like it?**

I do, yeah. Yeah, I do, I like the course. I mean I'm enjoying it. It can be very frustrating at times, you're dealing with two institutes. You have LIT and then the IP or the regional board that set the exams and that, and they tend not to communicate with each other very well and it can get very frustrating. But I am, I'm glad I went back, you know what I mean?

**Did you try UL?**
No, UL actually at the time I was looking weren't doing the course I was looking for. So I think somebody said to me they're doing something along those lines now, but at the time that I was looking into doing an evening course, they weren't carrying that kind of course so. So I went to LIT instead.

**And for how many years have you been here at [American manufacture software developer multinational]?**

I'm in [American manufacture software developer multinational] I think three and a half years now. When I started here first, I was actually brought in on a contract covering maternity leave. Someone in the UK was on maternity leave so somebody here was covering her job, so they needed someone to cover, you know? It was kind of working back. So I was only here for, I think it was initially I was brought in for eight months, and then it got extended and extended. And then I actually left, my contract was up and I left for seven weeks and then got a full-time job back here again. They came looking for me so.

**They called you?**

Yeah, they did. So I actually went to Analogue for the few weeks in between.

**And always in the same position?**

Yeah, yeah. In finance, yeah. It was accounts receivable actually in Analogue that I was working in. But I was only there for six weeks, then I came back here.

**So you had some training before coming to work ...**

No, I didn't actually, really. To be honest, it's kind of strange, I fell into it. I always loved working with figures, so I was working for an events organiser for a couple of years before I started working here. And I used to just do his accounts for him on spreadsheets. I mean, he had an accountant, but obviously he needed the information gathered and that's how I started. And just kind of taught myself really, you know? And just started doing it that way and started working through accounts, and then I just went and I did a basic course on one of the packages I had done, I think it was called the Red Book, and then there was another one, I can't remember. It was literally, it was a very quick course. You went in, you did your study and you did the exam within a couple of weeks. And I got that, so that was just something to say "I have the experience and here's the paperwork to back it up," really. You know, it was just kind of self-taught.

**What school was that?**

It's Pitman, it's, I can't think of what they call it now. I know it's the Pitman Certificate, but I'm not sure if they're called Pitmans. I did that, I'd say, maybe four years ago. But yeah, most of it was self-taught. And then I came here and they have their own package called [American manufacture software developer multinational]DB. And I mean it's the same with any company you go into. If they have a particular package, you're not going to go in with the knowledge. You might have an idea of what you're doing, but all the packages are different, so I mean, I think that's probably an advantage in the position I'm in, is that you have to have some standard of training when you go in there anyway so.

**So that, you mean, the training that the company provides?**

Yeah, basically it's the computer package that they'd be using for the accounts, you know? Most, I found, I've worked for maybe five or six different companies, you know, for maybe short periods of time, just trying to gather experience, and they've nearly all had a different computer package for the accounting. I mean, there's a lot of similarities, but they can be quite different as well.
So when you came to [American manufacture software developer multinational] then, did you have to learn your software system?

Yeah, because they obviously being a software development company, they had their own package. So, yeah, but it was very straightforward. I mean, like I said, they are, most of them are kind of based, there's one or two that were way out totally different, but it's just like anything. When you're doing it for long enough it just becomes second nature.

Yeah, it does. In the beginning it looks difficult, but then you learn the mechanics of it.

It does, yeah. Yeah. But that's it, and especially in the accounts payable, everything is just a routine, you know? Get your invoices in, date them, get them on the system, get them paid, it's very straightforward.

And your family background? Your parents ...

Yeah my parents are Limerick born and bred as well. They're still living here in Corbally. And I have two brothers, one older and one younger. My brother, my younger brother's actually in UL doing a computer games course.

Oh really? Computer games?

Yeah, he's in his final year developing computer games. He's a computer fanatic. So he's in his final year now. And my older brother works for Aer Lingus.

OK and what does he do there?

He's a trolley dolly. He's an air host. Yeah, he's been working for them for years. He loves it.

Locally or internationally?

Yeah he works from Shannon and he does the American flights, Boston, Chicago, New York, yeah.

[anonymizing cut]

Yeah I'm going to go to Chicago next month. My wife lives in Chicago. I came to Ireland about six months ago, so kind of still getting familiar with Limerick, although I've lived in Ireland before.

Yeah, well he does Boston, Chicago and New York. So I think he was on New York the last few flights so he's probably due – he tries to avoid Boston. He loves Chicago, so he tries to get on that.

And your parents, were they in the city or in the countryside?

They were both from the city. Like where they are living now, in Corbally, is I suppose, it's actually County Clare is what it is, it would be considered. Now it's considered a city, but when I was growing up, we were out in the country like, you know? But everything has extended for so long, you know? But yeah, they're from the city originally.

And currently, do you have your own family now?

I do, I have one daughter, she's 13.

Just the two of you?
And my partner, yeah. So we live out in Neenagh, which is in Tipperary.

And what does he do?

He works for Intel in Kildare.

What function? Technical, administration?

Oh he's in technical. He's, the exact, it's something along the lines of the engineering side of it. But he's not actually qualified as an engineer, but he's worked there for so long. He's there thirteen years now. I couldn't tell you his exact job title, it's very complicated.

Does he develop software?

No, it's not in the software. He deals with the locks in the fabs, you know, the development of the actual chips and all that kind of stuff. That's what he deals with. What exactly, I couldn't tell you now, but.

So yeah, about your own family, and this is interesting. How do you and your partner organise your time, like, taking care of your daughter, working, doing the house chores. How do you guys organise that?

Well he works kind of shift. The way he works is he does a three-day week and then a four-day week every second week. So he's at home more often than I am. Obviously now I'm in college two nights a week as well, so I mean, I'm on the road nearly constantly. So I drop my daughter, she's in school in Killaloe, so I drop her at school in the morning and she gets the bus back to my parents' house after school. And I pick her up then in the evening and go on home. She's in first year now in secondary school.

So how do you and your partner organise things house chores, such as cooking, laundry, all these things?

We just put a wash on if it needs to be put on. Basically like, he's off today, so he'll cook. When I go home this evening, he'll have the dinner ready. And I mean I work five days a week, so I cook on the weekend, and he cooks any of the midweek days that he's home. That's basically the way we do it. With wash then, we just put it on as it needs to be on. Cleaning the house? Normally he does it after I scream at him for ten minutes and "why didn't you just pick up the hoover?" Yeah, no we do, yeah we just kind of do it as it needs to be done, really. You know? He's fairly good now at home, I have to say.

If I may ask, for how many years have you been together?

We've been together five years now.

Is he from Limerick too?

No he's from Dublin. Yeah.

Did he come to Limerick because of the job?

Well no, Intel is actually in Kildare, it's next to Dublin.

Oh OK. Dell is here.

Yeah, Dell is here. Intel is actually up in Kildare, which is just outside of Dublin. No, he, we just, we met five years ago and started a relationship and kind of went from there. We've been living in Neenagh for three years now. That was kind of the half-way. It's Tipperary, yeah. It's about forty minutes from here, forty-five minutes.
So it's in between Kildare and between Limerick?

Yeah it's kind of our mid-way mark.

Yeah, so tell me about your commuting. Your experience of commuting back and forth.

I'm so used to it now. I mean I literally, I drive every morning and every evening, I drive to and from Neenagh.

It's forty minutes each way you said?

No it's actually more. In the mornings especially I have to, my daughter goes to school in Killaloe, so I have to drop her at Killaloe. It takes me about an hour in the morning. And it can, if the traffic is bad and the weather is bad, it could be an hour and a half in the morning. It can depend, between an hour and an hour and a half. And in the evening time, fifty to sixty minutes again, yeah, more or less.

It's a long drive, isn't it?

Yeah, I'm used to it, I've been doing it for so long. I found it very hard at first. A lot of getting used to, and the cost of it as well. But I'm so used to it now. I don't even think about it anymore. It's automatic.

And your partner, does he drive?

He does, but he does, he'll actually – his parents are from Dublin, well they're not from Dublin, but they live in Dublin. So he'll go up, we'll say this weekend, he's work now on Sunday, so he'll drive up on Sunday morning and come back down Wednesday evening. He'll stay with his parents. And then he'll be off for the following Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday at home. So that's the way he does it.

Yeah, you said that in the beginning it was hard, right? So if it was hard, why didn't you think about getting a job closer to where you live, or move to Limerick or move to Dublin?

I would not live in Dublin if you paid me.

Or Kildare, no?

No, well it was kind of, a lot of it was at the time that we were buying the house, prices were high as well. We couldn't afford, well I wouldn't have lived in Dublin and Kildare is just as expensive. And Noel didn't really want to come as far as Limerick. So Neenagh was kind of an in-between mark and there was more affordable houses there. So that was kind of why we ended up there. But I love living in Neenagh. I'm so used to the drive now, I don't feel it anymore. I actually really like it out there, so I don't think I would move to be honest.

There is no public transportation?

No, not for the way I have to go. They've now started running a train between Neenagh and Limerick, but it goes, it stops in Limerick City so I'd still have to find my way back out here. So it's just, and also I've got to drop my daughter at Killaloe in the morning, which is kind of out of the way. So there's just no alternative. I have to drive.

Our project is called Nomadic Work Life. So we are interested in understanding mobility issue involving travel, commuting, or relocation, regional or international relocation. So do you know many people doing all this travelling like you do?
Yeah, in Neenagh there are actually, I mean I don't know that many people out in Neenagh because I'm new there, you know? But yeah, there are a lot, I know there are a lot of people who travel from Neenagh to Limerick. And there's actually another girl who works here who actually is from Neenagh and drives in every morning as well. But it's just because having to get my daughter to school and pick her up out in the other side of Limerick every evening, I can't actually share the trip with other people. You know? Unfortunately that's just the way it is.

**And have you thought about school for your daughter here in Limerick?**

She actually went to primary school in Limerick, and when she started secondary this year, because the secondary school process is absolutely terrible, you number the skills you want from one to whatever, and you're not guaranteed to get your number one and you can get any other one off the list. And the skill that she actually got, there's no appeals, you just get, you're given a skill and that's it. And the one she got was not an option. It's a very rough skill. So we decided to go outside all together and brought her to Killaloe, which is actually handy for me because it's on my way in a sense anyway. It just means I'm not coming the main road from Neenagh, I'm going the back roads. But I'm still coming in the same direction. So it's not taking me out of my way. Whereas when she was in school in Limerick, I was actually passing where I worked everyday to go and drop her to school, and then coming all the way back across in heavy traffic in the morning, so it's actually more convenient now than it was before she went to secondary so.

**And what about your colleagues here? Do they all live here in the city?**

No, we have people from, yeah we have a good number of people that are actually from in or around the city, from all different sides of the city, from Raheen, from Corbally, from this side of town. There's a lot of people who live in Killaloe. We have some from Neenagh, others from Tipperary Town. Yeah there's kind of, there are, there's actually – one of the girls travels a good distance, now I'm trying to think of where she comes from. I can't think now off the top of my head. They're kind of fairly spread out all right. Yeah we have some people from Shannon as well.

**So, would you say that are a rare case in the sense of living further?**

Yeah, I suppose. The people who live that bit further are few and far between here, yeah. The majority of them are within a quick enough ...

**So why did you decide to work here, I mean, staying for so long and driving one hour each way?**

I like, I love working here actually. It's a lovely company to work for. I think it's the size as well, and the people that are here. Everybody gets on, it's like a little family. It's brilliant like. I absolutely love it. But also along the line of work that I wanted to do in the accounts side of things, the time – like before I started here and I was looking for that kind of work, all the jobs were out in Shannon, which coming from Neenagh certainly wasn't an alternative. It was way too far away. You know, especially because I have to get my daughter to school in the morning. And I have to have her there for 9 o'clock, so I can't drop her and be out in Shannon, you know? I mean I can drop her at school at half 8, it's open and supervised, but I still wouldn't have gotten from Killaloe to Shannon by 9 o'clock. And it just wasn't an option. So when the job came up here, you know, it was ideal. I don't think I was actually even working in, I hadn't actually moved to Neenagh when I started here, I don't think. We were just in the process of getting the house ready and that.

**And you never considered working in Dublin?**

In Dublin, no, no.

**No. You didn't even look for jobs there?**
No, Dublin is, well I was never going to live in Dublin. I don't like Dublin at all. I just don't like it.

Why?

It's too loud and too busy, you know? I like the quiet life. No, I can't, even driving in Dublin, my nerves come at me. I hate driving up there. And it's just too far away because, I mean, I'm only living in Neenagh three years. My daughter and myself had lived with my parents up till then all my life until three years ago. And I wouldn't have taken her that far away from my parents. She'd have been devastated. They're very close like. So I wouldn't have done that to her. Plus I need my parents to mind her, you know, for after school and all that as well.

But your parents, you said they live nearby.

Yeah, they live in Corbally, yeah.

Oh and then your daughter from school, she goes ...

There's a bus. There's a bus that actually passes by my parents' estate every evening. So she gets the bus from there and they meet her at the bus stop.

So she spends even more time commuting than you, right?

Yeah.

Does she like it?

She does. She absolutely loves it out there, yeah.

But does she complain about so much driving and commuting?

No, no it doesn't bother her. She normally gets into the car in the morning and lies down until we get to school, has a doze.

So she naps in the car?

Yeah.

She doesn't read or play games in the car?

She does in the evening time, going home. She'll be listening to music or whatever. But normally in the morning, she just wants to close her eyes and go back to sleep.

And how, can you describe your typical day here at work?

Yeah, what's my typical day? Busy. Yeah, it's just, there's always something going on. There's always something that has to be dealt with or meetings to be had. It is actually a fairly jam-packed workday, I have to say. But I like it that way because the day goes faster. Yeah, it just, I don't know. What's a typical workday? Come in in the morning, read my e-mails, check my phone messages, prioritise what needs to be done for that day, always start with anything to do with accounting and then move on from there. That's my main priority, yeah.

Do you also do administrative stuff here? If there's any problem or issues, do you have to sort it out?
Yeah, we do. I suppose it would depend on what kind of thing, I mean. There's so much, it's hard to think. I mean, I'd fill in a lot of, I do a lot of surveys, you know, the, my brain isn't working today. You know the surveys you'd get from the employers groups and all those kind of things like, I forever have a stack of those on my desk so if I find fifteen, twenty minutes, I'll do one of those, and, you know. I'm also the main phone. We don't have a receptionist or anything, so the main phone line comes into my office, so I tend to deal with that as well. I update holiday files and absence requests and all that stuff as well. That's kind of more the HR side but that's the bit that I would do.

Like recruiting and selecting?

No, I don't do, no I don't, no. We basically, we have an HR person here, but kind of the way they do it is she would deal with, you know, talking to the agencies and telling them what we're looking for, but it's the kind of company, they're very into having the people who are directly involved. So if we were hiring somebody for the IT department, then they'd have people from the IT department interviewing. Now Maureen, who's the HR person would also interview them to make sure from the HR perspective what they're looking for. But I don't tend to get involved in the interview process at all, just maybe setting up interviews, that kind of stuff, you know?

And again, on your typical day, it seems that you talk to many people throughout the day. Who are they?

Yeah.

Well, everyone, I'd say at least everyone in the office I'll talk to at one stage or another during the day. I handle payroll as well, so if they have any issues with that or holiday pays. Externally, it could be anyone. I mean, I've had at least six calls from recruitment agencies today. They're desperately looking for people to give them something to do. Just anyone and everyone. The amount of calls I get for the university is unbelievable, actually.

In what sense?

People ringing thinking that we're the university just because we're in the technology park or just getting the wrong numbers mixed up.

They call you to look for jobs, is that what you mean?

No, the recruitment agency is just basically ringing to see are we looking to hire people. They're very quite at the minute so, they're desperate. They're constantly on the phone. And then I'll be dealing with suppliers, or ...

What about the UL thing?

The UL thing is just, yeah, I actually, I rang someone, what's his name? Stephan De Burca, is it? One of the lecturers or something over there. I get an untold number of calls.

Really? Have you tried to contact him?

I actually did. I rang him, I rang him just last week or something. I had this really snooty lady on the phone who was most upset like. She thought I was lying to her. I was like “no, this isn't the university, you know, it's the wrong number.”

Do you know his department at UL?

I have no idea what he does. No idea at all. But I just, I contacted him and just said, “look, just to let you know, I don't know, you could be missing calls. The lady that I last spoke to last week had actually said that she rang and actually got redirected by the phone lines there to my number, so they wouldn't believe me when I said to her
that we weren't in the university." So anyway, I just said to him, "look, I'm just letting you know that this is happening and deal with it if you want."

So, recruitment agencies, UL people, who else? Suppliers?

Basically – yeah. That's, oh god, I'm trying to think who would I generally get calls from in the day.

Do you have contact with people in America?

Well not by phone now really, to be honest with you. I mean they have the Same Time or e-mail, but I don't have many dealings with the people in America. Like my manager is in the UK. I don't even really have much dealings with him. I do my job and he's happy and that's it like, you know? And you know, it's just if he has a query or if I have a query, then we'll just e-mail each other or whatever. No, I wouldn't really have dealings – the only time I'd have dealings with people, with [American manufacture software developer multinational] staff outside of the Limerick office, I also handle hotel bookings and organise travel for people as well. I do a bit of everything.

All right, can you tell me a little bit about this booking of hotels and travel for people. Who are these people?

Well basically if we have anyone that's coming over to the Limerick office for meetings or anything like that, they'll just let me know and I'll just book their hotels for them. It's straightforward really. We have obviously deals, corporate deals with a few of the hotels around like, you know? So it depends on where they want to stay. I just have that organised. Maybe organise a pickup for them at the airport. Just give them information if they want to know for travel by bus or train or anything like that. I just find out the information.

Is that something that happens frequently, like to host people here?

It used to be. Last year, kind of towards the end of last year it got very quiet.

Were they software developers, managers or sales?

Everyone, everyone. We don't really, never have salespeople here. We have the sales manager, JC is his name, he has come over a couple of times, but more in the capacity as a senior manager than for sales. But we don't really have salespeople here.

There is R&D in India, right? Because I saw on the map at the website...

In India.

Yeah, India, and there's lots of other countries. I suppose some R&D happens in India. Other companies in the technology park, they have connections with India. Do you see people here connecting with Indian offices?

I'm trying to think if we ever had, I know we had – I'm just trying to think. Because my way of knowing who's involved with who is when they come here. I'm trying to think if we ever had anyone from India. We had an Indian person working here, he's actually gone to work in Atlanta now, but.

What was his job?

He would have been in the R&D, I don't know what his exact title was. But because they're in different – within R&D, they're not all just one big group. They're all different groups working on different projects. And moved his project – he had been working with two people here, and one of them was moved to a different project, and the other guy left. So he was still working on this project whereas the rest of the team were in America, you know? And it was kind of, it made things difficult, but they didn't want to lose him. So they actually gave him the option
to go, so he packed up the family and went to Atlanta. He’s still working for [American manufacture software developer multinational], he’s just gone to [American manufacture software developer multinational] Atlanta.

OK. Do you guys work with contractors? Like software developers outside, which you’d contract for a project, and then when the project ends …

No, not that I’m aware of. I think the people in R&D are [American manufacture software developer multinational] employees, yeah. Well I mean, I know I’ve heard of situations where they were working on a big project, and at the end of it, they’d let people go. But they were actually [American manufacture software developer multinational] employees, like. I’ve never heard, but maybe from the Limerick perspective, no. All the people working here are [American manufacture software developer multinational] employees.

So in your contact with all these different people, what tools do you use to contact people?

Phone. Yeah, e-mail, Same Time. Same Time is very handy if you’re just wanting a quick question answered, or anything like that, you know? Everyone in [American manufacture software developer multinational] is connected with the Same Time, and it’s handy in that sense.

Do you use telephone more than e-mail?

It would depend on who I’m contacting and for what reason. Even with suppliers, there’s certain suppliers that I’ll only contact by e-mail because they’re the ones that you want to keep track of, you know? Difficulty with, like we had problems with security and so I only contact the security company by e-mail now, so I like to keep a record of everything, you know? But yeah, I mean, any of the suppliers, I would generally pick up the phone and I would ring them.

Do you use Skype or messenger?

No, no, no. I’ve never used Skype now. I’ve heard of it all right, but I haven’t used it. My mother uses it. She’s great.

I use it with my wife. And my laptop has a Web cam and my wife has a Web cam there, so we can see each other as well.

Yeah, my mother now got set up recently. We got her a little laptop for Christmas, and she’s set up with the Skype because her sisters, she has two sisters in England and one in New Zealand, so she doesn’t see them very often. So she’s gotten them all set up with the Skype now and they can chat away. So she says it’s great, especially with her sister in New Zealand because they can see each other like, you know? So she thinks it’s great. She’s great actually, my mother. She does all her shopping online and everything. My mother’s on Facebook and Bebo and everything.

Wow. Do you use Facebook?

I do, yeah.

Do you have Linked-In as well?

Do I have which?

Linked-In. Linked-In is like Facebook, but it’s only professional. It’s only for professional contacts.

No, I just use Facebook for personal.
It's almost like a CV. You put like your professional profile there and then you connect with people, but it's only businesses, only professional contacts. It's called Linked-In.

No, I've never heard of that.

OK, do you use it to connect with [American manufacture software developer multinational] people?

Yeah there are actually a couple of [American manufacture software developer multinational] employees who would be friends of mine on Facebook.

Does [American manufacture software developer multinational] have a internal network itself?

Not that I'm aware of.

Or a portal that you go and connect with other [American manufacture software developer multinational] employees?

From an out-of-work perspective?

Because I saw some papers there in the kitchen like some events like sports, yoga, I saw something about yoga, it was very nice.

Yeah, they do, that's kind of more a Limerick-based thing, you know? I mean, we have a PDL set up for PDL Limerick and you can send an e-mail out to just the Limerick office, you know? That kind of thing.

What's PDL?

PDL, it's Public, what do they call it now? God, you're getting technical again now. It's just basically a file. Everywhere in the company has a PDL, like you can do PDL Finance, and you can send an e-mail to everyone involved in finance.

Oh so it's a mailing list.

Yeah, it's kind of a mailing list. But we don't, we don't actually have like a social network.

But what about then, about yoga, yoga, soccer, rugby, I saw all those.

Yeah, that's just, we'd send an e-mail around saying "thinking of doing a five-a-side football if any of you are interested." And they'd respond. Like we're first starting a darts tournament next week. And we have a Wii. We have a sports and social, actually I'm a member of the sports and social committee as well. I'm a member of all the committees. We have a sports and social committee, and we organise different events. Like next Tuesday now, we're doing pancakes Tuesday morning for everyone, that's Pancake Tuesday. Trove Tuesday, have you ever heard?

Just this one off Tuesday.

Yeah, it's the last Tuesday before Lent.

Yeah, I saw pictures of I think it was employees, in the kitchen there's pictures of Christmas time.

Ice skating, yeah.
Everybody together, yeah. So tell me a bit about the social life here, these events?

They're very good, actually. We have a great sports and social club and it's, the great thing about it is that it's done through payroll. Everybody that wants to be – everyone is a member of it, but you make a contribution, 15 Euros a month out of your payroll is what we do. And the company isn't involved.

It's our sports and social, you know what I mean? So we can organise events and, you know, they're paid for. And we have a lovely Christmas party every year. We always do a summer event. We try to organise a barbecue or something, quizzes, maybe that kind of stuff. We bought a Wii. You know the Wii? We have one of those in the other rooms set up and we've done ...

And you get all sweaty.

Yeah, so we've done Wii tournaments as well where we've played tennis and bowling and boxing and that, you know? And the dart board is the newest addition, so we're ...

And who wins gets a prize?

Yeah, they give generally a 50 Euro voucher to whoever wins, that kind of stuff, you know? And the dart board is the latest addition, so we're starting a tournament in that next week.

That can be dangerous.

Well they have it all lined out there now and nobody's allowed to stand on this side. But they are actually, it's a great company from the social perspective. If ever anything comes up, you know, if there's any, we all went off to a show there last year. It was on out in Shannon, actually, you know? Somebody who used to work here was after getting a part in a show, and we all got tickets and went out. And, you know, the ice skating, we did that last year. We all went ice skating one day. It's great. It's actually, there's a great social ...

Does everyone join in?

Yeah, most do. It depends on the event, I think as well. I mean, the ice skating, there was a lot of people, a lot of people came along, but didn't want to go ice skating. They came for the social aspect of it, but they didn't actually want to get on the ice, you know?

Yeah, I worked in business companies before and some of them were very heavy environments. So even when they tried to organise something social, nobody would go because they were so sick and tired.

Sick of looking at you. No, they're great. I think that's probably why I love the company so much. It is literally, everyone gets on so well here. It's a nice small group. Everyone knows each other and you know, I mean, you know, somebody's birthday party. Someone had a fortieth here recently. Everybody was invited. You don't see that often. You might have one or two people you'd invite from the work place, but like here, because everyone gets on, everyone is invited, you know?

And why is that? Why are companies different?

I don't know. I think it's actually the people, to be honest. I think it's just the people here, we're just very, very lucky. Because I have, I've seen it, I mean I haven't been here that long, but in the few years that I have been here, the people that would be kind of the quieter people and didn't mix, you know, or were kind of withdrawn never seemed to last very long. So I don't know whether it's just they feel out of place or what it is, but I found the people that are, I mean, they're very, they have a great, what's the term I'm looking for? They kind of have it weighted out very well. They have very intense work. I mean, the R&D department have a very heavy workload
and they have lots of deadlines. But they balance it really well, like. You know what I mean? They're in there earlier on, and Niall was under pressure, then you know he kind of got where he wanted and said "all right, who's up for a game of darts?" You know what I mean? They do that and it's great because that's what you need, you know? You can't be rigid in every aspect ...

Do you work extra time and weekends?

Some of them do especially if they're on deadlines.

Is it always like this?

It can be at times, yeah. With the finance package they're working on at the moment, they have a lot of deadlines. They're kind of at that stage now where things have to be done and I find a lot of them are working longer hours. But they can also do that from home. A lot of it as well, it's to do with the fact that they might be dealing with people in the states who don't come online until 2 or 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Your day is almost over, you're just starting, and you still have a whole days work to go through with them. So, you know, I have seen, like I've seen people, you know, if they're on calls late in the night, they just come in later the next day, you know? They don't ...

It's pretty flexible then.

It's a very flexible company, it really is like. Do you know what I mean? There's no rigidity. It's not like you have to be here at 9 o'clock and you have to leave at half – there's none of that. It's very easy going. And it just makes the difference.

So you think this is because of the mix of employees, or is it the company's policies?

I don't know, it's hard to know. I mean the company's policies are kind of, they are the kind of company that I was saying, they're happy if you're getting the work done. That's what they want obviously. They want you to be doing the work. But yeah, I think a lot of it is down to the people. I really do. They're very easy to work with. So, I think, yeah, like the company is very flexible though.

How important is this for you, to be working here for a number of years and live far away?

Well put it this way. I went to Analogue for six weeks and I couldn't get out of there fast enough. I was delighted when they rang me and said "a full-time position has come up, will you come back?" I was like, "yes, please." I just total – maybe I'd been spoiled here for the time that I was here. But when I went over there, it was just totally different. It was like an absolute – before I worked here, I'd worked for an events organiser as I said. And it was, a lot of it was just me and him in the office, and we'd great banter. I'd known him for years, and we're still friends and we're still in touch with each other. And I think that's the difference. I then went to Analogue where you sat in your little cubicle, which I've never had, you know. OK, I'll have an office, but my door is open and you'll come and go. All the cubicles here are all lowered so you can see each other. But out here, they were high cubicles, I was in a corner on my own. Nobody spoke to each other. It was just, I felt tense going in there every day. It felt tense coming out of there every day. It was horrible. It was the worst job I've ever had.

Was it a high-tech company as well?

Analogue are, yeah, again I was in the finance. That's a massive company now. I couldn't tell you what they do from one end of the day to the next. But it's kind of the same. I think they make, we'll say whereas Analogue make the chips, I think they make the little diamondy things that you make the chips from or something, I don't know.

So you worked for different high-tech companies, right?
And two totally different experiences. It's amazing like. But it's size, I think.

**So tell me, as a woman, how are your experiences in working for a high-tech company?**

I don't think that I'm treated any differently, certainly in this company, than any of the men would be. But I'm in the kind of role that is generally, a majority, a female role I think. I've come across very few men who are in accounts payable. That might sound a little sexist, but I actually have never come across a man who does accounts payable. So I think the position I'm in is kind of a female kind of role anyway maybe.

**And why is that?**

I don't know. I just don't think I've ever come across a man who does it like, you know? Maybe the men become accountants, you know? I don't know really, but it's just anyone I've ever had any dealings with in a similar kind of role, it's always been a woman.

**And what about R&D? Are there many women working there?**

Oh there are, yeah. I'd say, what's the portion, now? I'm trying to think. I'd say there are more men than women, but it's not too much of a difference, to be honest.

**And they're, are they IT technicians, engineers?**

There's engineers, there's quality analysts, the IT technicians – I don't think there's any IT technicians in the R&D department.

**Software technicians?**

Yeah, there's software engineers and there's quality analysts and there's some kind of other, I'm trying to think what the other engineer is. It's some kind of applications engineer, I'm not sure.

**And project managers, I suppose?**

We've actually just gotten a project manager, which we never had in the Limerick office. And he's actually funnily enough another person who worked here years ago and came back. Yeah, Paul. He worked, now I didn't know him when he worked here before, but he worked her for years. And yeah, he's come on and he's actually project managing two projects here.

**OK, would you know why he left and why he came back?**

I don't. I actually don't know. He was here years ago. I mean, the company's here just over ten, nearly eleven years I think. I don't even know how long, I mean, he wasn't here any of the years that I was here. I think he just, I don't know, did he move, or just go elsewhere, I'm not sure. Did he maybe just follow the project management route and they weren't doing that here at the time.

**Oh, maybe he was in a different division of [American manufacture software developer multinational].**

No, he actually wasn't working for [American manufacture software developer multinational] at all. He had left and had gone elsewhere. He just came back there just towards the end of last year, it was December, November-December time I think. So he's, and he's actually a very nice guy as well.
So back to the female-male issue, can you tell me a little bit more? For example, comparing with other companies, or comparing with what your friends, colleagues in other companies tell you?

Yeah, to be honest, the only issues I hear are on the news. I've never actually come across it. I've never seen an instance where, I mean I know it happens. Everyone knows it happens. You hear about it on the news, you hear about the, you know, lack of equality in pay and all that. But I've never actually experienced it. Maybe it's just because the kind of roles I've been in. I don't know.

**OK, in terms of work style, do you see a difference between between men and women?**

I do, actually. Just from what I see with the people, we'll say we could have a man and a woman doing, you know, we have two Kess there, and I'm trying to think of what, they're Knowledge Engineers, but I know there's a more technical term. And they have two completely different approaches. Now the two of them are the best in their field and they get the job done and they're absolutely brilliant. But it's very funny to see the difference. Whereas Marie has a very logical approach, very, you know, “I need to do this, this, this, and this.” Whereas Darrel will just go “ah, sure, we'll start this and see what happens.” You know? She's a lot more organised, but they both get the same level of work done, you know? And they work really well together as well for that reason, I think. Because, you know, she's got her own way of doing things, and he has a completely different model to doing things, but it actually works really well. But other than that, I don't really see ...

**And are they working on the same project or different projects?**

They're, I think they're on the same project at the moment. I don't actually – I have little involvement in that side of things, so I kind of lose track of who's on what. They're not actually programming. I'm not sure what it is exactly that they do. I know it's ...

**This example that you gave between this female R&D worker and male R&D worker, do you think their differences are because of gender or because that's individuals, who they are?**

It's hard to know. I mean I, personally, even from my own home life between myself and Noel, I'm a lot more stepped and organised, whereas he has the kind of “ah sure, we'll just do what needs to be done” approach. So I don't know, is that just a male-female thing or is just the kind of people we are. I've always been a very organised person. I live in chaos, I'm not tidy, but I'm organised.

**You try to organise things.**

Yeah, especially in work. I'm very, I have a set way of doing things. Everything that needs to be done, I know before I start what way I want it to go, and it goes that way, you know?

**All right, but in, what about Internet? Do you like the Internet?**

Yeah, I do, yeah.

**For example, your partner, I suppose, do you guys have a desktop at home or computer at home?**

No, we've both got laptops actually.

**Laptops, OK. So do you guys use lots of, spend lots of time online at home?**

Sometimes. It would depend, not really. I suppose if Noel isn't there, then I would be on the Internet more often, but when he's there, no. We try to spend some together like. But no, not really, to be honest. It's more like if
we're, you know, want to look up something or there's something in particular, you know, booking a holiday and we have a look at destinations, that kind of stuff. But no, not really.

**Do you see a difference between you and him in terms of Internet use?**

I think I use it more than he does. Yeah. He's actually great, he's very active. He's very good to get up and go out and go to the gym, and he does boxing training and all these, and I'm lazy. I'm just like “OK, I've been on the road all week and I just want to relax,” you know? So I'll go on and play Connect-Four or something on the Internet.

**What do you like doing on the Internet? What types of Web sites?**

Well I like Facebook and Bebo, I'm on both, but I use Bebo more for playing games.

**I don't know Bebo.**

It's another thing like, it's just another social Web site. But I kind of use that more for playing games than actually connecting with people. Facebook I do because I have a lot of cousins that are around the world and it's great to keep in touch with them and I think it's the best thing ever invented. My cousin in New Zealand, we were always very close, but we're really bad for kind of keeping in touch, you know, writing letters or that or even e-mails. But I find we're often online at the same time, so we can chat away. In that sense, I think it's great. What else do I use on the Internet? Paris Hilton.

**News?**

Celebrity news, really, yeah.

**Shopping? Do you do lots of shopping?**

Yes, I do. I do all my banking. I do, I buy my CDs, my DVDs, my clothes, I do all that online, shoes, bags.

**Do you prefer doing this online rather than, for example, going to a shopping centre?**

I wouldn't say I prefer. I absolutely love going shopping, I just don't have time. I don't, I mean, the evenings that I don't have college, I don't get home until 7 o'clock. The evenings that I do have college, I don't get home until half 10, 11 o'clock. So, you know, and then on the weekend, the house has to be tidied, I want to do something with my daughter, and, you know, the bit of study that needs to be fitted in there somewhere. I just don't get a chance to go. And I mean, I'm in my element, leave me off - it's the one thing I do like about Dublin. Leave me off in Dublin for a day to walk around and go into the shops and I'll be happy out. But I just don't get a chance to so I do it online.

**And comparing to the Internet, do you spend time watching TV?**

Certain things, there's one or two programmes that I love that I hate to miss.

**Can you tell the names?**

“24”, I love “24” and I've seen every episode of it. And what's the, I'm just trying to think actually. There's a couple that I'd watch if I came across them. But I'm just trying to think other than “24”, is there any that I actually go out of my way to watch. Oh, “ER”. That's it. On a Sunday night, that's my ...

**What's the name of that cop in “24”?**
Jack Bauer.

Oh Yes, Bauer, Jack Bauer, OK. My wife and I watched that sometimes.

Yeah, I love it. I absolutely love it. And I'll have to say that's one, I've watched every episode of it since it started however many years ago.

My father-in-law has all the DVDs, all the series.

Yeah a lot of people kind of gave up after the first one or two, but no, I love it.

There is this game in America, whenever Bauer says “damn,” you drink a shot.

Oh god, you'd be rightly in the loop then. Now, they're short-run seasons. Well, obviously there's twenty-four episodes of “24” every year. “ER” is in its final season, I don't know what I'm going to do then. But other than that, I mean there's a lot that I would watch if I had the time, and I'll flick on the tele, you know?

So do you work at home? Do you feel compelled to check your email at night?

No, I don't. I mean, I keep a check on my personal and my work e-mail in here during the day. I don't actually get a whole, I don't get a great volume of personal e-mail.

No, but I mean work e-mail at night?

No, I don't, never. Never, never, never. I have a desktop in the office, I do not have a work laptop. I have my own personal laptop at home. I leave at work behind me when I work out the door.

So when 5, 6 p.m. comes, you just go home and turn off work issues?

Yeah, I have to. Most times it's because I'm rushing out the door to college or something, so I have to start thinking of management accounting or information systems or something, you know? But I'm in that kind of a job where I can switch off. I don't think it's high pressure. I mean I have the days of pressure, but I think, I just, I don't know, I mean I'm very organised in my job I think.

Comparing all the places that you've worked before, in terms of gender, in terms of lifestyle, do you think it's different to work for a high-tech company?

No, not really. See it's hard to know, because I mean other jobs I've had have been so completely different to what I'm doing here. When I worked for Fran and he was the events organiser, I was just as comfortable working for him as I am here. I enjoyed it just as much, probably more. But yeah, I don't - and that was a totally different kind of a thing. Maybe it's just my take. If I'm in somewhere and I feel comfortable, I'm happy out like. I'm very easily pleased.

If [American manufacture software developer multinational] came to you and said, “hey, we have this position in New Zealand, or in America.”

Not a hope.

Would you go?

No.
Why not?

I don't want to.

If they offered you a job in England, say “we're relocating our facilities to a different country.”

No, I'm Irish through and through. I don't think I'd ever live outside of Ireland.

There are many Irish people living overseas. Many Irish in America.

Oh yeah, I have family in England. Actually I have a cousin living very near the English office and, as I said, I have family living in New Zealand and everything. But no, I just, I would never leave Ireland. I love Ireland too much.

And if your husband, your partner, if Intel comes to him and they say “we opened a factory in Poland and we would like …

He'd be gone on his own.

... we would like you to stay there for a year.” Would you consider that?

I'd leave him go for a year. I'd go over and visit him a couple of times, but I wouldn't move there. No, definitely not, no. Because he actually, he was offered to go to Israel for six to eight months, which he was considering taking, and he was actually going to take it, but it was just, I was going to go over maybe once or twice while he was there for a visit, but kind of, the trouble kind of flared up again and they decided to ...

War issues over there?

Yeah. But he, so I'd be happy enough just to leave him off and I'd come over and meet him a couple of times just as a holiday, but I wouldn't move, no.

He would get some training in Israel?

He was actually going out there to train people, yeah. They wanted someone out there.

Was he excited about it?

Yeah, well it was kind of, he was excited about the prospect of the trip, but Intel, and actually I've seen it happen in [American manufacture software developer multinational] a lot of the times, they come up with this great idea, but it never comes off in the end. And [American manufacture software developer multinational] can be like that at times as well. They come up with an idea, and “oh we're going to do this,” and everyone gets all excited, and then they go “yeah, we're not doing that after all,” you know? But I think a lot of companies are like that. So it never happened in the end. Whether or not it will go ahead in the future ...

But, you know, in multinational companies like [American manufacture software developer multinational], Intel, with so many facilities around the world, it happens sometimes that people relocate. They want to put a manager in a different place, and they want to train, so it happens internationally.

Oh it does, yeah.

So everybody here is Irish then?

Is everyone here Irish at the moment? I'm trying to think now. Yeah, I think they are actually. Brian is English. Paul is English. I think everyone else, yeah.
They are English, but they are Irish-based? I mean have they always lived in Ireland?

Paul’s lived in Ireland for years. Brian has, I think he actually moved to Ireland when he got the job in [American manufacture software developer multinational]. He relocated with his family. And Muthu, he was the guy from India, he’s gone to Atlanta now. He was here for a couple of years as well, but he’s moved in the last few months. I think everybody else is Irish. It’s funny, you don’t think about it, do you? We’re colleagues.

So next topic.. I am aware we getting short on time... Society. In terms of the knowledge economy, what people call the Celtic Tiger years, of a knowledge economy in Ireland. So, comparing with ten years ago, what are the main transformations that you’ve seen in the workplace? Thinking about your own experiences, your friends', colleagues' experiences...

Well obviously there was a lot more of the multinationals came in. A lot of them now are starting to flee. I don’t know because I mean it’s, the kind of, me being in this kind of a job now is fairly recent. I didn’t, I worked in a supermarket for ten years like. You know what I mean? I was happy enough to do that, and then one day decided “I can do better,” and just kind of turned my life around. But I was happy enough plodding along, I was able to support my daughter and that. Yeah, I mean obviously, I think it’s great from the point of view in that it encouraged a lot more people to go to college that wouldn't have done it. I mean there’s more and more, nearly all the kids now think of college because, and now because it’s all supported by the government, well for the time being anyway. You know? I mean I couldn’t go to college when I finished school. My parents couldn’t afford to send me. And I certainly couldn’t afford it, so I just went out and I got a job and I plodded along for however many years, you know? And I think in that sense it’s great. And unfortunately now there’s a lot of them out there with great educations and they can’t get a job for it, you know?

Work wise, what changes have you seen in the workplace?

Well that’s what I’m saying. I mean they all went and they all got their degrees and whatever and they all got these fantastic jobs. Now it’s all starting to turn around again and it's kind of taking a step backwards. I mean, most definitely everything got a lot more technical. There were a lot more pharmaceutical companies and R&D companies and that came with it. How long they’re going to last now is another thing.

In your day-to-day work life, has it changed a lot?

I don’t know really. I guess, I’m trying to think. From when I first started working, however many years ago that was, yeah, I suppose to a certain degree it has become more favourable for the employee. I think for years the employer was God, and I think now, I don’t know if it’s such a good thing, though. From the point of view of an employee, it’s great that you have a right to your say and you have, you know, laws that are protecting you and equality and everything. But then you look at the other side of it and go if all that wasn’t there, there’d probably be a lot more jobs available in the country at the moment, you know? Yeah everything changes and evolves, I suppose.

Yeah, back to the gender issue, right? Some people tell me “oh, women have this question of pregnancy, so if they work, they get pregnant, they stop, so that puts women at a disadvantage when they are looking for better jobs.” So what do you think about this type of statement?

I think it’s probably true. I mean, I’m sure there’s many people who are sitting through an interview with someone thinking, “yeah, she’s great for the job, but he won’t get pregnant.” You know? It’s a fact of life. You’re never, no matter what laws there are, you’re not going to stop someone thinking like that. And it is a fact of life. And we’ve one particular department here, we had like five pregnancies in a row, so they had one after the other. A small little department and they all had babies one after the other, and it was just constantly looking for replacement
staff and the whole lot, you know? What can you do? So you can understand, you know? I'd say it was more than a coincidence that the last person that they hired was of a non-child bearing age.

**OK, and the women who work in the R&D sector, did they study here at UL or in the region?**

Some of them were UL, some were in Cork. I think, I don't know did one of them go to Trinity in Dublin? I'm not a hundred percent sure.

**So when your company opens a vacancy in the R&D technical issues, do you get many CVs from women?**

We do, yeah. We do, yeah.

That's curious now because when I talk to other companies, they tell me that they never get CVs from women.

Really? No, we do now. And actually the last, the last, I'm trying to think what the role was they were looking at recently and they had the two CVs that they narrowed it down to were actually both women. And then the role got pulled and they decided to do all the cut backs, but it was actually two women were the two finalists for that job basically. Yeah, they don't, I suppose, maybe it's the fact that our HR manager's a woman as well, I don't know. But I've never, like I'm aware of the fact that, and actually one of the girls that worked here was actually asked in the job when she was going for an interview, was she planning on having children, which I thought was like “yeah, that's that,” you know?

Yeah, your comment that you made about the HR manager is very interesting. So you think that if the HR manager is female, she will be more sensitive ...

No, I just think that maybe that is something to do with it.

**Or HR manager who's a male will not be as conscious about that?**

I don't know really. Maybe women would be even more conscious because they're aware of it. I don't know. That was just an off-the-cuff comment. I don't really know if there's any. I don't know really. I think everyone is doing – I don't think it matters whether you're male or female. Everyone has their own set of opinions like, you know? I just, it's never something that I've heard been brought up in consideration. I mean, I've often sat in on discussions when they've been narrowing down, you know, if they wanted me to do notes or anything for stuff, and if they're narrowing down between, I've never heard anyone mention the age, the sex, you know, the race, or anything like that. Because I'd probably, I probably would freak out if I did, you know?

I know a company in America where the CEO, the CFO, the C-level people are all women, and they say that when they are negotiating with suppliers, they must have a woman in the supplier side, otherwise they will not buy, will not do business with that company. What do you think about that?

I think that's ridiculous. I mean if the sole reason for doing business with a company is because they have a woman there, then you're obviously looking at the wrong reasons for doing business. To me it would be the best product at the best price. Each to their own, I guess. I mean, the founder of the company, of [American manufacture software developer multinational] is a woman, Pam Lopker.

Yeah, I saw on the Web site, it's a couple, right?

Yeah, well Pam actually founded it and Carl is the, what's his title now? They change their names so often I lose track of who's what. She's president and he's maybe CEO or something, I'm not sure.

Yeah, he's a CEO and she's a chairwoman.
I think she's president, President Pam, yeah. I'm trying to think, because she was in to the technical, the IT side of things. And I think he was a shoe salesman, and it came down to something years ago, he was looking for something to keep track of, and she came up with the idea. She basically developed this product for Carl in particular. And they thought, “that's a great idea, let's try and sell it,” and it went from there.

**So she was a software engineer?**

Yeah, of some description. I couldn't tell you the exact details.

**Have you ever met them in person?**

No, never, no. Now I know she was here, there would be some people who've been here since day one. We’ve three or four people who are here the ten, nearly eleven years that met her. She came over and turned a piece of sod and laid a tree like, you know, when the company was opening originally. But she's never been here since, so probably a good thing.

**So back to this issue of knowledge economy, like you're in a technology park. What do you think about the technology park, having UL here and other high-tech companies around?**

Yeah, I couldn't even tell you half the companies that are in the park, and that's being honest. I just come in every morning and I do my job and I go home, you know? I'm aware of all the restaurants and stores that are around, but. No, I don't really, I mean, Northern Trust, I know there's some other company gone in there, I couldn't tell you who they are. I know that's Roselawn House behind me, I don't know what company's in there. To be honest I just …

**Is Thompson down here?**

Thompson are, they've actually gone the other side of this hall as well and gone downstairs.

**Do you have contact with them? Do you connect?**

No, not really. Darren now would be the manager. I'd know him, see him. We meet once a year just to review the site fees, you know, for whatever needs doing. We always have a meeting for that and a discussion.

I've been trying to contact him, Darren, but the phone list I have has many mistakes. Nobody answers, or the phone number's wrong.

Yeah, I don't know. Pat now at the front desk might have a number for Darren.

**So R&D people here, do they connect with people from other companies?**

I don't know. I know there are some of them who would deal with customers if customers are having a problem, some of them will deal with it over the phone, others will go on site and, you know, if they're setting up with a new system, they'll go on site and that. But other companies? Other than customers, I don't know.

**Like for football games or social activities?**

It's not, it's not so much a [American manufacture software developer multinational] thing, you know what I mean? It's like someone in [American manufacture software developer multinational] will say, “why don't we do this?” And it's not …
I mean, don’t they have connections, personal connections with professionals from other companies?

Not, well they would on a personal basis, you know what I mean? It's not a company thing is what I'm trying to say like, you know? I mean they did, they had tag rugby there for a while and it was called the [American manufacture software developer multinational] Sharks because like the company sponsored them for their shirts and that. But even with that, the [American manufacture software developer multinational] team wasn't all [American manufacture software developer multinational] people, it was friends of [American manufacture software developer multinational] people and that like, you know? They're a very social company. I love that about them. They are ...

Some people say that, in the high-tech sector, there's lots of job hopping, especially when you're younger, and so they're always networking with other colleagues from other projects and when the project finishes, they move to a different project in a different company. Do you see that?

No, maybe a couple of the younger ones know. We've had a few younger people in here just out of college that have since moved on and, you know, they do – it's like they come in and it's their first real job, you know? They've done their bits for Intel and they come into [American manufacture software developer multinational] and it's their first real job. I think some of them find that they want more. And some of them find that what they have isn't quite what they were looking, you know? So it's like with anyone starting out. You don't really know what you're looking for until you get there and you realise “this isn't quite it.” You know? There's always going to be a bit of chopping and changing going on. But yeah, no I mean, the people that are here are here, you know? I mean, like I said, we have five or six of them that have been here since day one. And then other people that are here not much shorter terms than that.

What's the age range of employees here?

The youngest I'd say is, I'm trying to think who'll be the youngest now. I'd say Eddie, he's only in his early 20s. And the oldest, who's the oldest? Aidan maybe in his 50s, I'd say. I don't think there's anyone older than that.

But the majority, the majority would be in their twenties or their thirties or their forties?

I'd say it's very evenly spread to be honest with you. We have a number in their 20s, we have a number in the 30s – I'd say maybe the majority in their 40s, and then there's a few in their 20s, a few in their 30s and I think maybe only one or two in their 50s. I'd say the majority is in their 40s, yeah.

And the people in their 40s, are they more administrative or are they more R&D?

Well they're, there really isn't anyone administrative, only myself and Maureen, the HR and the finance, you know? The rest of it is all R&D and IT and ...

Oh OK. You said thirty-five people, right? And twenty in R&D.

Yeah, I'm in finance. Maureen's in HR. We have how many in IT? One, two, three, four, five in IT. And then you have fulfilment and GCA. GCA would be kind of, they process sales, invoices, but they're not – yeah I suppose that's administrative. They're not involved in sales, they're not salespeople but they process the invoices and that. And then fulfilment send out the orders. There's three in fulfilment and GCA there's three. GCA is the pregnancy department, that's the one there's always someone pregnant in there.

The sales and invoicing are for clients only in Ireland?

No it's not. The salespeople worldwide basically go out and get their sales, and the orders are processed through GCA. Now they're not all done through Ireland. We have GCAs in Ireland, France, the Netherlands, and I'm sure
there's one somewhere else as well. I think China has one – is it China? I know there's definitely four or five GCA departments around the world.

**So here you process, I suppose, Europe? All sales in Europe?**

As far as I know it's the EMEA region, yeah.

**OK. Improvement. What would be an improvement that you'd like to see in your work environment or improvements in the high-tech sector. It's up to you to decide ...**

High-tech goes over my head to be honest with you. I'm not technical. In the work environment, just a bit more stability I suppose really would be a nice improvement. Just to feel safe in a job. I don't think that's going to happen any time soon. I really love working here. I love the people, so from that side of the environment, I don't think it could. The only way it was going to get better if we were just playing darts and the Wii all day. No, I actually, I think they're a great company to work for. But a bit more pay might be nice.

**What about the technology park, the fact that you're in Limerick?**

It would be great to see this place fill up, you know? To see it buzzing. It's just, there's so many empty buildings. It's just a sign of the times and there's going to be more and more.

**You've been here for five years, right?**

I'm here about three and a half years.

**So have you seen many changes in three and a half years in the park?**

I've seen it get quieter. I haven't really seen anything other than that. But yeah, see it's very spread out as well. Like these buildings behind us, they were never occupied in the time that I was here. That one was sitting empty up to maybe a year and a half, two years ago. Which is now, I think there's two or three floors of that full now, which is great to see. I mean when Northern Trust moved in, it was brilliant and they are still expanding, it's great. But the ones behind us here, they're sitting empty.

**So they've been empty for a year?**

Oh god, they're empty as long as I'm here, three and a half years, that one. There's a creche then kind of up at this end of it which is great. It's lovely to go out and have a smoke, or I like to go out and have a cigarette and listen to all the kids laughing and giggling, it's lovely. That's lovely actually to hear in the middle of an industrial estate.

**And the kids that study here are they children from work?**

It's a creche, they'd be – yeah I'm assuming it would be people working in and around the technology park.

**OK, so it's people who work in the park who bring their children ...**

They drop the kids there in the morning, go off to whatever company they're in, and then pick them up at whatever stage during the day. I don't know the ins and outs of it, but they certainly do good business and they're always, they seem to have a good number of kids in there so.

**Does the creche belong to the park?**
I don't know if it belongs to the park or if they're just a company that are renting off the park. It's Unikids I think is what it's called. And then you've got Unigolf behind it so I don't know if there's a connection with the ...

**Unigolf is a company?**

Unigolf is, it's a minigolf, kind of a crazy golf thing.

**OK, so it's for entertainment?**

Yeah, they have a little restaurant in there. It's very basic now restaurant, soup and a sandwich kind of thing.

**Have you been there?**

I went there once, never to play golf. I went there just, we went over for lunch.

**Would your colleagues do one entertainment event there?**

No, we've never actually gone over there for golf, no, or anything like that, I have to say. We tend to go for something a bit more exciting.

**It's an option for you now.**

Yeah, well that’s been there a couple of years and I don't know what kind of business they do, but, whether it's busy or not, but it's something different anyway in the middle of a technology park to have a golf ...

**I thought it was a factory of golf balls or something.**

No it's actually like a little – well they say it's not crazy golf. They say it's a proper, just mini golf course. But it's very strange. They have a lot of really weird stuffed animals in there, like a big bear and deer and all and it just looks very weird. It's kind of freaky.

**I'll check it out. But a very final question, is there anything that I didn't ask you that you'd like to talk about?**

God, I don't know. Not really, not that I can think of. I'm not very good with questions, that's why I said you'll have to ask me. I'm useless.

**No, was there anything that you were talking and I cut you short for some reason?**

I don't think so. If there was I've forgotten so it can't have been that important.

**Yeah of all those things about your trajectory, your, about your childhood, coming up here and then your work, your typical day, your use of technologies, right? Your family life, you and your partner, how you organise things. And then we spoke about, you know, the company, gender, right? And society, so you think you covered ...**

I think so. Have you covered everything you have on your sheet, more importantly?

**Yeah, yeah. I think this is it then.**

That's great. That was interesting.
Yeah, thank you very much. This is called ethnographic interview. It’s more about the person. It’s not about systems or business, it’s more about the person, culture and society, you know? And I always try to make it rich and enjoyable. So, yeah, I hope you enjoyed ...

No, I enjoyed that, I did.
INTERVIEW 7
Nomadic Work/Life in the Knowledge Economy - UL

Anthony and Lisa interview Helen (Software Quality Assurance for [small international telecom software developer firm])
- 24 February 2009

Could you please tell us a little bit about who you are in your company and where you're from.

OK. Well I'm working currently as CRQA engineer for [small international telecom software developer firm] R&D up in the technology park. And basically what my role there is, I'm basically responsible for the quality of the software that goes out to our customers. And basically trying, also enhance, to improve our processes that we have in place, to obviously get the software to a higher quality, less issues found, etcetera. And implementing processes that I see fit that should be implemented to improve our working environment and the quality of the software we're producing. I'm working there now for about a year. Before that, I worked as a project manager in Shannon at Clare, and ...

Shannon Development?

No, the company was Technomin, but it was out in Shannon. And basically, I worked as a project manager there, and what they did there was they developed in design software for the telecom industry. And basically they did data projects, pre-paid software, etcetera, and we were responsible for managing the cross functions of the teams. At this we'd have different departments, development departments that would do different, good in different structures of the software. And basically we were responsible for doing up the schedules, keeping track of the issues, reduce and try and figure out what are the risks of our projects being late, how can we make sure that they are reduced or prevent them from happening, etcetera. So basically that we keep monitoring the project and how it's going and how we're progressing and also again, do post-mortems on the projects when they were completed. We'd also support them on site while they're doing the installation of the software, support any issues that they have on site, and then we do post-mortem afterwards to figure out how we can improve the next project. So whatever major issues we had won't happen this time.

How many years were you at this other company?

About two years. Before that I was in Galway.

Also working high-tech?

Again, software QA, the same role that I'm doing now as managing – we had more staff there. We seem to have financial issues here in Limerick. But when I was working in Galway, I was managing up to about ten to fifteen staff, which basically again, what they did, they translated the software, it was a localisation company, and basically they translated the software for, and the switches, the addison switches, if you've heard of them, and routers. So they translated the software and then what they did was retest it to make sure that they didn't break any of the functionality change like the language. And rebuilding the software, we go through it then and make sure that they physically still work the way the do on the U.S.-based software. And again, training the staff up to actually be able – some of them would not have any clue really about the IT industry. They literally, the reason we have them in there is they're freelancers and they're good linguistics and good translators. So their IT skills wouldn't be as high so you'd (inaudible) report to them on a daily basis as you're literally needed to. There also was a bit of a language barrier there sometimes because some of the freelancers were very good at their work, but again, their English wasn't a high standard, so it was kind of, that was the one difficulty that we had there, so
you kind of had to just get through that. We eventually got used to each other and our ways, and you kind of knew then that you ...

What countries were they from?

There was a mixture. There was Spanish, there was French, there was German, there was Chinese. What else? Swedish. So it was kind of a mixture. It depended on the software and depended on obviously the demand for the software in the different languages. So if there was more of a demand, we might start a new language every now and then, but we’d have to go out and get freelancers there that would be recommended.

So at that point, were you already doing software development? Or were you just in translation?

At that time, no. I actually don't develop the software myself. I'm responsible for the quality of the software once it is translated or developed. But at that time, before that, like I came out of college and I literally was working up in Dublin. I got a contract for a year and a half in Dublin and our contracts terminated then. But I was working up there again in the software QA engineer role again, and it was to do with translated software again. It was literally, the Semantic software, the anti-virus software for the computers, literally what we did there, we were responsible for actually doing the testing ourselves there. So that's how then I got the role then in Galway to actually manage the staff that were physically doing the training because I had the experience of doing the physical training.

So I knew what they needed, how they needed to be trained, etcetera, to get to the stage that they could do it and analysing the quality of their work and how we think we're getting on depended on the amount of books that came in from the software, from the different languages, and then you'd know then which, what you needed to do from there, whether you needed to give just a quick revisit of a learning course. Or if they're having problems with logging books, then you know it's an issue with that software maybe. Or depending on where you saw their faults and where they weren't getting on as well, you'd monitor them that way and help them out that way.

OK, so all your career, all your professional career was in the high-tech sector, right?

Yeah.

And, so you went to college here?

Yeah.

Can you tell us a little bit about how you chose to take this course and your family background?

Yeah, well I was actually, I was actually in two minds between whether I do primary teaching and computers. But at the time, my uncle was doing a degree in computers at the time, and he and both my parents were saying that, you know, computers really is the way forward. And it is, at that time, it was becoming the thing to do and there was loads of money to be made in it and you would have a long-lasting career because it seems to be expanding and it seems to be where a lot of careers lie and and where it is going to expand. So then I decided I was going to do – this was the course a friend of mine, her brother had done this computer course and he had said that he really did think it was a very beneficial course because it was broad-range. Like it covered so many different subjects, like you didn't just do coding. Like you had like the software engineering side of it. You had the business side of it. We did some accounting in it as well. It covered so many ranging like topics and subjects that you could actually, there was a variety of different jobs that you could get like. So that's basically then why I decided to do this course.

And if I may ask you, what years was that? Just to think about the Celtic Tiger years.
What year did I – 1999 I think I finished, I did my leaving cert, so 1999 I'd say I would have started college. Yeah, 1999 I think I started college here if I think correctly.

OK, around that time. And your parents, what's your family background, your brothers and sisters, what do your parents do, where are you from, city?

I'm from Tipperary. My mother works in the tax office, she used to work in the tax office. My father's a farmer. My sister is a finance manager for a company in Nenagh. My younger brother did a business and agriculture, science or something in ...

Lisa: UCD, was it?

It was in (inaudible) or BDI, yeah, in that college in (inaudible). And my other brother then is in the farming background at home. So there's four of us all together.

And your family now? Do you have your own family?

No.

You're single?

Yeah.

You live by yourself or you're sharing?

No, I'm in a relationship with somebody, yeah, but we're not married.

OK.

We live together.

OK, now what does he do?

He does a few things. He earns a share of business, it's like, they do meat, cool meats like. They produce meat like and sell it like rashers and sausages and bacon and all that. And then he also is a contractor, he does safety statements, he's a safety officer. And he also does part time as well then, he works for FRS, it's a farming recruitment kind of a service. Do you know FRS? Kind of like farmers can ring up and say "I need a guy like to do some jobs for me or something." And they recruit and they'll go and they'll get someone and they'll place them there for them. So he works part time with them.

So he does management there, or he goes to work for different farms?

He just organises the recruitment.

The recruitment, OK.

Yeah.

All right, all right. OK. And your friends, what's their profession usually?

Well a lot of them are kind of are coming from the IT industry, which they would have been people I went to college with here doing the same course as me, would have branched out into either project management or
developing, being developers themselves. Besides that maybe the people I went to secondary school with would be of a background, they're either primary teachers I suppose, accounting, or IT industry. They seem to be the three industries that they come from.

**And where are they from usually?**

Tipperary or Limerick, they would be the people, yeah, the areas.

**Do you have many friends in Dublin or elsewhere, overseas?**

Well I would, like friends of mine that I would have either been in secondary school with or in college that would now be overseas or that would now be living in Dublin or Cork or wherever. But I wouldn't know people overseas from, unless I met them in college or secondary school.

**And your high-tech friends, I mean, from the high-tech sector, are they people you worked with? Or you avoid working, being friends with people you work with? How is this relationship between friendship and work?**

Oh yeah, well like when I left college here, me and two of my friends that were doing the course here together and that were in college together for four years actually worked at the same company and got the contracts for a company in Dublin. So the three of us were all together for the first two years, say, out in the working industry. And then we went our separate ways. Some of us stayed in Dublin, some went to Galway, some went to Cork. So we came from, and we also met more friends then in the industry at that stage, the people we worked with and you'd keep in contact with them too. So we would have, like I would have no problems working with people that I would be friendly with because it's different, when you're at work, you're at work and your kind of own life is outside that. Like you're still trying to get a job done at the end of the day. But it probably would be different – I've never had to manage somebody that I would be friendly with, so that probably, might be where there might be an issue.

**And why?**

Because I think, I think if you're very friendly and you're a personal friend of a manager, I think they do think that they can get a certain amount of leeway compared to another person that you wouldn't be as friendly with. Whereas like, do you know, they come into work late, they might not be handing up their work on time and they think that they'd, do you know? So I wouldn't like to have, I wouldn't like to employ someone like that I'd be friendly with.

**So your friends are not obedient?**

I don't think they would be.

**In terms of education, did you take more courses and training after college?**

Yeah, I've done a certificate in project management. I've also done a certificate in business and finance. I've also ...

**Was it Prince 2?**

Sorry?

**For the PM work, was it Prince 2?**

Was it Prince 2?
Yeah, Prince 2 methodology is the UK methods for ...

Yeah, that’s one of the methods. Like we would have studied the agile methodology, we studied the, what's the other theory now? I can't think of it off the top of my head. There’s another new one that was coming out at the time that we were studying as well. I can't think of the name of it. But I would have done that like to help me with the job I was in because it was my first time actually being a project manager. And before that I was managing just a team, one particular team, and we had one goal. Whereas when it came to a project manager, there was like multiple, like you literally would have a project manager, you would have a technical lead that would help any of, then you’d have maybe five people per department working on your project, coding it. So you’d have a lead from each department that would come to the meetings once a week and you’d, that would keep giving the update and send out the work to the rest.

But when it came to the technical lead then was basically, if there was any issues when it came to coding or if there was problems between like certain platforms that were due to sit maybe on top of each other and then maybe there was issues with coding on the types of coding they wanted to use and how they wanted it to function basically. There might be issues with that. So he would literally be the standing point there to bear out their differences and agree with them on the technical aspect there.

So to help me in the role I was in, I decided to do the certificate in project management. It was a distance learning course at open university. And then before that when I was working in Dublin, I decided to, I just decided that a certificate in business and finance, because it was something we touched on here and something I did, there were subjects I did like. I was just thinking that it would be beneficial to me and it wouldn't be anything that would be bad. But I just thought it would be beneficial to actually do a certificate in business finance so that if, you'd have more options then, that's it. Because I was just fresh out of college, it meant maybe if there was, I decided to take a job in a different department for a year or two. At least you had maybe something that might help you get that role, so I decided to do that.

Were the certificates your own initiative or the employers offered them to you?

No when I worked in Semantic I did two exams for Microsoft 2003, they're the MCSA exams. They were offered, that they would pay for those for us if we wanted to do them. So I did two of them in the time frame I was there and I got them. And I haven't gotten around to doing the two since. But yeah, they were the only ones that were offered by the company. The rest I did then off my own back.

Into the future, do you plan on studying more, taking more degrees?

Yeah, it's something that I would like to do, but again, it's something that takes a lot of time, so I wouldn't like to jump in and say “OK, I'm going to do such a course,” and then not have the time to put the good quality into it and actually come out with good results. So that is the only thing I'm kind of at the moment, I don't, I know myself, I don't have the time. But in the future, I would definitely like to, yeah.

Yeah, I want to talk about the question of time, lack of time or time available. But before moving into there, do you have any questions, Lisa, that you'd like to ask about any of these things that we mentioned?

Lisa: Not so far, not so far.

So how is your typical day at work here?

At work.

Yeah, meaning since you wake up in the morning, time wise, activities, yeah, everything.
Well on a work basis literally, we’re kind of in a bad situation with our jobs at the moment. Our company isn't financially liable, so we don’t know, it's not going very well, so we don't know how long our jobs are going to last. But when the company was going well, we would have, at the moment now I have no testing department because we've had to let them all go. So when I did have a team, basically what would happen is I'd come in on the day, see are we in a testing cycle, are we physically doing testing now, or are we planning for what testing has to be done.

So depending on what stage of the sprint cycle that we were on within the company, if you were on the preparing stage, we would literally be setting up machines, getting them ready and connecting all the SQL servers and exchange servers, etcetera, and the Blackberry enterprise service all up and getting them ready, cleaning them down, to have them ready for testing. Then if we're at the stage that, and then obviously we'd be doing the estimates for what features we know are due with the next sprint and creating test cases and test runs and ensuring that our schedules are going to fit into the deadline we need to get the software out. And also reviewing the books to see “OK, out of the estimates we have, what other bugs can we fit in to get done to actually make the sprint that little bit better. There's three bugs that the customers are roaring for that they're saying that's causing them a lot of hassle. Can we fit them in and deliver them within the sprint,” etcetera.

Then if we're at the stage that there was a testing cycle, we're actually physically doing the testing, we actually would go in on the mornings and say "right, OK." You literally would have a schedule for two weeks, but you know what needs to get done every day to make sure that schedule comes out in time. So that you'd go in and you'd speak to the other testers, and you’d decide and tell everyone, “OK this is what you're doing today. Is everyone clear? Does everyone understand what they have to do?” And ensuring at the start of the day that there's no questions, no problems on what they are supposed to be doing because what's going to happen is at the end of the day they can come up and say "oh I didn't know how to do this," and then there's a day wasted because they didn't come up and tell you. So literally, I think it's important that you go and everyone knows what they're doing at the start of the day so then people are efficient, people then have targets and they want to meet them on target because they know everybody within the company has targets to meet on that day because everyone is saying "now this is what you have to do, this is what you have to do." So I think it motivates them too not to be the only person to come back at the end of the day and say "oh I haven't that done," do you know what I mean? They're getting there, they might not have it complete, but they’re getting there. And I think it motivates people to get it done.

So really basically, like our days in work at the moment, outside of work time wise, I would do a lot of classes, exercise classes with friends of mine during the week, three days a week.

**Physical exercising? Like pilates?**

Like circuit training and step aerobics and, what is it? Salsa class we did for a while, but (inaudible).

**Salsa dance, not salsa (inaudible).**

Salsa slim, that one. So they're the three classes I do. Then after that then, weekends would be socialising with friends or my grandmother’s quite sick at the moment so she takes up a lot of my time at the moment. And besides that then, just socialising with friends and hanging out.

**Do you have to be at the office, let's say, from 9 to 5?**

9 to quarter to 6, yeah.

**Every day?**

Yeah.
So there is a structure there?

There is yeah.

So what time do you get up? Like where do you live?

I live in (inaudible). So literally I'm about twenty-five minutes away from here, where I live, driving. So usually I get up in the morning at half 7, have a shower, come to work, leave, like I'd leave my house around twenty past 8 in the morning, and I'd normally be in at ten to 9 to open the doors, make sure there's someone there to come in.

Do you drive with your partner in the same car or does he have his own schedule?

Yeah, he'd have his own schedule because he's a contractor and he's coming and going from different places during the day so he'd have a different schedule every day. So he'd go his separate ways in the morning, sometimes he might still be at home.

And a bit about the firm here. How many people are working with you here?

We're down to, we have a very small team now, we're down to four.

Four. And in the high times, the high days before the crisis?

Before the crisis, we had, and then instead, there is, like our base is in Amsterdam, so the company is in spec to the GPSX services and the GPSX software. So we have another guy working for us over there and then we have the management board and there's four of them on it. So there's four in Ireland, there's four, so there's nine of us all together. But before in the Irish office, there would have been, we would have had two offices, one – there'd be about nine, if not say ten of us. So we'd have about three developing ...

I took a look on the Web site, and I saw, it's multinational, I mean it has offices in different countries, but it's only twenty people. It says on the Web site only twenty people worldwide.

Oh, no, no, no. Twenty people worldwide in GPSX, or does it say GPSX software or services?

That's a good question.

Yeah, because the services now would be quite a large industry like, there'd be a lot of employees because they're doing quite well, that part of the company are doing quite well and they are making money. But us, the software side are in difficulty at the moment because we need to get investors involved to help us get our levels of staff up again, like get the quality of the software up, get extra features in there that they want and stuff, but at the moment we have no money to pay wages, to pay rent, to pay bills to keep us going while we try to get customers in. And I think as well, maybe we shouldn't, the software shouldn't be as expensive as it is. That maybe they should do fees, monthly fees, that the customers pay monthly fees instead of paying one big whack bang of a fee, which most companies can't afford now in such a recession, you know?

Yeah, so it was nine people here in Ireland, and now it's down to four?

Yeah, down to four.

Were these nine employees, or were they contractors?
Oh they were employees, yeah, but they started looking for new work, and they have all left due to the financial issues like.

Lisa: They didn't feel secure?

No, they didn't feel secure because they either had a family or a mortgage or something, and wages were not being paid on time every month, so they might be a couple days late or they might be a week late or whatever. So for some people that had mortgage and bills, etcetera, they're relying on their wages to be there on time end of story no matter whether we sold something this month or not. So they didn't have that security to ...

When they left the company, they were not fired?

Oh, no, no. Like we would have, like say, out of, out of what's left – well we let go our testing, developers would have left, right, of their own accord. But of the, we've had testers, and those tests were working with us full time. Then they went to working for us part time because it was half the price to be working half a week instead of a full week. And then it came to the stage that we couldn't, like, we literally couldn't even, which is very bad, we couldn't even pay their wages. So we decided to let them go for a while, and the idea was then they started to work, like our cycle would be two sprint cycles, so we'd have like they'd develop the code, the developers would unit test it, integrate it, make sure it builds and unit test it. Then we'd get it, we'd test it and fix the bugs, and deliver it out to site. So literally, we then stopped them working the first month and got them to come in on the second month like and do the work then. But then it got to the stage then that they just let them go.

Yeah, so you work with multiple clients at the same time? Or you're doing quality for a product as a stand-alone?

Well, it, yeah. We have customers, but literally, there is the management board, right, that decide what the requirements are that they think for this sprint are the most high priority ones that the customer wants. So they make out that these five features need to be in the next release because I know I can sell it to these two customers, because they say they're not buying until that features in. So I put that in, I might get two sales there, and I know this current customer that I have is crying for this feature to be advanced and designed, developed in such a way so that they can not just do this, but that they can do B, C, and D as well instead of just doing A. So, from literally, from their talks with customers and potential customers on a weekly basis, etcetera, that feedback then is what we use to decide what the requirements are for the next sprint.

OK, yeah so for all the nine people, now four, they work in the office, they have to come to the office every day?

Yeah, well we had a manager here in the Irish office and he got married and he lived in Cork. So he decided to sell his house in Limerick and he moved in with his wife in Cork, but so he just came to the office on a Tuesday and Thursday. The other days he worked from home because it was an awful trek for him to be coming up every day.

And how did it affect the outcomes of work by being remotely?

Well not really because he was in a different office anyway because he was involved in kind of the marketing as well, so he’d always be on the phone. So for him to prevent disruptive with those workers in the company, he was always in another office. So like he didn't really have much dealings with as I did on day-to-day basis, if you know what I mean. So it didn't really affect us.

So it was more sales, it was more sales, right?

Yeah, but he was, he was more sales and marketing, yeah. But he was responsible for the staff, for hiring and firing of like our whole team like. He had the end sale, like, do you know what I mean? He was responsible for ensuring that our team were there, that they were doing our work, all though we had the responsibility passed
down to us to do it, at the end of the day, he was the one that had to take responsibility for the entire team in Ireland.

**And your team here has to work with teams on other countries?**

We don't like because the services is what's in the other teams. There's only one guy in the Netherlands that's part of our software organisation, and he literally is responsible for going out and installing the software in the customer's site. So he has a very good knowledge of the software because he'll go out and install it for them on site. He would go and if they had an issue with their software, he would go and he would be the first point of contact that they would contact and say "OK look." They'll send him a log and say, "right, look, this is what seems to be coming up at the moment, this is the problem we're having. What's wrong? How do I fix it?" And then he would be the person that would come between us and the client, so he's our like point.

**Is he tech support?**

Well his actual title ...

**Lisa:** It's client service really, isn't it?

Yeah, it's more client service, yeah. But he's a very all-around person, like he has a great knowledge in a lot of areas in the company so he is one employee that the company would ever hate to see go because he has a very, he's been there from the very start of the company and he has great knowledge about the company and about the customers and about the software, and he has a great input into the requirements for the sprints because he knows from being on site what the issues are, what ones – like customers maybe say to us “oh well, these five features have to be the next ones that go in.” But he'll go on site and he'll know from talking to people in the organisations that they're only blowing you off there and they want those features in, but really what they want, they only want these three. You can get away with these three and wait for the next sprint, or whatever. Like he's good to, if we can't fit everything in in one sprint, he's good to make the priority because he knows from being the person that's in contact with the clients all the time.

**So he is the interface between clients and you?**

Yeah, well he is the interface, but also our, the management board, they kind of also are the interface too, like. Do you know? If they're trying to get – once we have the customer, and the customer is paid for the software day one, he's the interface after that. But like then our management board would be the interface for potential customers.

**OK, that's more business development sales?**

Yeah.

**And they're based in Amsterdam?**

No, well they're based in Amsterdam. Actually one guy is in London, and he works remotely from home. He's in London. There's another guy in the Amsterdam office and then there's our like CEO of the company who's in America.

**OK, where in America?**

I don't actually know.

I think it's New York. I saw the, I read on the Web site.
Is it New York? I don't actually know.

**So anyway, who does sales in Ireland?**

No one now since that guy, since our manager left. Well they have this guy like in London who's supposedly is like – they're at the stage where they need money badly. They can't hire anyone because they can't afford to pay for wages. They know there's people out there who are good in sales, that are good with marketing, that are good developers, that are good this and that, but we can't afford any of them until, and we know people that have good contacts with clients, potential customers that can get us great deals, but at the moment, we need to get up and going with the investors and sort that out. So at the moment, like John in London is looking after the potential customers and the people that Kieran was talking to before he left the company last ...

**And you said he works remotely from his office in London.**

Yeah, like he works at home, in his office at home, like he doesn't have an office in London.

**So he doesn't travel to contact clients?**

Oh he'd like travel to meet clients and stuff, but like on a daily basis, he'd base himself in the office unless he had a meeting with a customer and he was going to go to Ireland or wherever, Amsterdam, to go over and have a meeting with the manager on board or whatever.

**And he doesn't do client service?**

No, no, no. He wouldn't have the knowledge of that, no. So he, I don't, yeah. His role is a bit, like when Kieran was there, I never really knew what he did like. But he used to kind of make like, he used to be involved with the requirements analysis, but like I didn't really know what his role was. Until Kieran left, he's kind of like taken over Kieran's role, like. So yeah, I'm not really sure.

**I read on the news online that GPS bought a local company here.**

Galtee.

**Galtee, yeah, a few years ago.**

Yeah, that's right, yeah.

**So the people from that time remained?**

No, actually, Kieran, our manager and another guy called James used to be the people that owned Galtee at the time. Kieran stayed and he was our manager, the guy I was talking about before he left. And James left. But there was a developer there at that time as well that's still with us. On that side, the other people that worked in the company at that time, I don't know where they are.

**Yeah, there's still this thing about remote work, and so all the four of you, or you or whoever of the four, you all came to the office every day except the manager for personal reasons?**

Just for the last six months, yeah.

**Yeah, so do you think it's necessary to be in the same place at the same time?**
Well it depends on what the job is you're doing like. When I worked as project manager in Technomin, I didn't, like I could work from home some days, but obviously I couldn't work from home every day because I'd have meetings, etcetera. But I could work from home if there was something that I needed to go away at 11 o'clock for an hour, from 11 till 12, instead of taking a lunch break, and I needed to do something at home, like I needed to go to the bank, or I needed to go to something that I couldn't get access to because I was at work Monday to Friday in Shannon, or the doctor's or whatever. So did have the opportunity to work from home one day a week if I needed to. But I didn't do it all the time, I just did it when maybe personal reasons, I needed to take the time.

But like I think for a project manager, it is important to know where you are and to know where, do you know? I think it's important that you are in the office because you know what your staff are doing. You can send an e-mail and keep sending e-mails, but nobody will respond to you unless they see your face and know that she's going to be around the corner any minute now and she's going to want to know how far we've progressed. But I think sometimes, because I've seen this happen before as well, is people get e-mails and people can use the excuse, "oh, I forgot to get back to your e-mail." So you are there and you're responsible for this project and you don't know what the stage is, do you know what I mean? So I think it is important for certain, for especially as a project manager, I think it was important for me to be in the office, to know what's going on and to keep up to date. Like when things get busy in the office and an issue has come in from site, people don't have time to keep e-mailing each other back discussing it. They'll call a meeting and say, "right, here's the issue, lay it on the table." And that's something that's very important, and you can conference into it, but like I think it's important to be there when you're at work because I think you know more about what's going on when you're physically in the office.

Now on a day like at the moment, I don't see why I could not be at home, working at home, because I'd be doing the exact same thing. There's nothing I can't access from home that I can access here in the office like in Limerick. So I think depending on the role you're doing, I think like it's important to be in the office and not working remotely. But it really depends on the role you're doing. If it's something that just you have to get out there, you've been told that this is what you have to develop today and you're a good developer and you know what you're doing, you can go home and you can get it done. You can remote, work from remote. But I think if there's like, if you'll need help during the day or if, maybe if you're a more junior position, you will actually maybe have problems during the day and you'll need someone to help you out, to tell you how to do this or how not to do this. Or if you're in a managerial role where you're wondering where your staff, like you have to keep monitoring your staff, I think they're kind of roles that you should really be in the office, and not – but it depends on the type of work, I think, you're doing.

In your prior employers, was it the same thing, like in-site, never remotely?

Just for Technomin, yeah, in Shannon. The rest were in-site, yeah.

And what difference do you see in working remotely and in person?

Well ...

And in-site?

Well, sometimes when you're working remotely, you can get a lot more done than you can. But I think it's still maybe a factor that we fear that when they're at home, we can't keep an eye on them, we don't know the work's being done. Now maybe that's just our fear of the projects because we're under such pressure, we haven't nice deadlines, that means we have an extra two weeks to finish the project, so we're not under any stress. If any issues arise, we have an extra two weeks, so we're not, or whatever time frame, to complete the project. But most of the projects I've ever worked on are on really tight schedules. So like the fear is if they're not in the office where you can see what's going on, then they might not be working to the best of their ability, or they might finish at 4 instead of working till 6, or they might be gone on a two-hour lunch break. And that again at the end of the day from my perspective was affecting my deadlines, which was affecting a project I was trying to deliver,
which again, I was responsible to say why it wasn't delivered. So at the end of the day, it was my goal and name. Where like you would have some developers that would work from home at Technomin sometimes, or testers, etcetera. But, again, it was harder to contact them, and it was harder to get them, you know, to see how things were going. So, but like, from a perspective where somebody just has to, like I suppose, it depends on what area they're working in.

Like I suppose it also depends on how well you know someone and how well you know somebody's work ethic and know how well they work themselves and like, I suppose that really matters too. Because if you know someone is a really good, hard worker and they're just going to, like you tell them this is what has to be done and they go off and you know they'll just go off and do their work and they'll come back and it's done, and say "there you go." Or if you know someone's that's kind of going to be diddly, daddling around the place and not really get on with it, that then is obviously going to mean that you wouldn't mind the person that's working hard to go home and get their work done because they'll probably even get it done quicker when they're at home and they have no distractions at all. So that's, I suppose it really, that's kind of my opinion on it, that like …

**OK, so it seems it's a question of communication.**

Yeah.

And also trust.

Trust I think is a major thing because I don't know, in the working, in the environment that I ever came up with and the people I've been responsible for, like if I was off for a day, they wouldn't get as much work done. Whereas if you were there and you were there and like, because most of the time, the need for client support too, because they'll run into an issue and they don't know how to get the environment like rejigged like to get the server back up and running. Or they ran into an issue and they don't know is it our software, or is it what our software sits on top of that's causing the issue. So is it a bug for us or is it a bug for the bad server, which doesn't mean it's a bug in our software. So certain things like that like. And if they can't get any further then, they kind of, that's it for the day, you know what I mean? They'll try and try and try. And they could be trying their hardest, but like they can't, they don't know how to overcome the issue because they've never met the issue before or they can't find anything on the Internet to help them out, etcetera. So if I was in the office, like, do you know? You could help them out and explain to them.

And they keep like, we always has the motto that if there was something we came up on that we never met before, an issue, we'd have a blog and you'd write up the issues that arose, like known issues and this is how you fix them, the resolution, these issues. You know? You'd have issues that people would run into so they'd constantly then update that, so again you're just ensuring that the next person doesn't run into the same problem.

So I don't know, like the quality and productivity, I suppose if my role wasn't to be first line support and they had another person in there that was supervising them and helping them, supporting their role, then it wouldn't be as much of an issue. But I suppose when there's equipment involved like, do you know? We're connecting to servers, and if you need to restart the server, you need to go into the room, equipment room and turn off the server and put a CD into it if you need to get a virtual image up and running, you need to put a CD into it, so if you're working remotely from home, you'll have a long drive in just to put a CD into the computer, do you know what I mean? Or then you're disrupting somebody else to say, "can you go down to put such a CD into there? Can you plug in this USB stick?" And that then is affecting somebody else's work schedule like. You'd be annoying someone every day then.

Yeah, I want to move on to the next topic, but I still have two minor questions based on what you said about this thing of being on the road, moving, hyper mobility. It seems that it's not quality, software quality control does not do much moving around. Although, you think you could have to travel to see your clients, right? Or this is not the case.
Well I don't have to travel, no, to see the clients. My, Mark would like in Amsterdam. He would have to travel to see the clients. I don't really fully get you. That quality is not ...

Because there is this stereotype of a high-tech professional being hyper-mobile, right? Always moving from place to place, different cities, airport, also job hopping, like mobility in terms of doing different contracts for different companies and then working for, you know, moving from company to company. So how do you, how do you agree or disagree with this idea?

Yeah, well, it depends on the role you're in I think in high tech, in the high-tech industry like. If you were a salesperson or you're, as you said, in client sales, you're support for the customer, you're going to be in airports every day. You're going to be on the road every day because that is your role. But if your role is to deliver a product just from development and test it and get it out the door, someone else is responsible for the client communication and supporting the client, then you're not really on the go. You're on the go in the doors everyday, but you're not travelling around, so you're not really, I don't agree with it from that perspective. But like obviously it does depend on the role you're in, and if you're in such a role as, do you know, customer support or in sales, you would be on the road every day.

And since you graduated, you've worked for four different companies?

Since I graduated, I've worked for one, two, so Semantic, Technomin, (inaudible), yeah, four, yeah.

So that's four in five years?

Four in five years.

That's considered job hopping, old school, old mentality. That's ...

Yeah, well again, when we came out of college I had no choice. There wasn't that many jobs there. So we went from there's going to be loads of jobs there when you come out of college, to there wasn't that many jobs at the time in 2003, was it 2003? Yeah, it must have been 2003 or early 2000, yeah 2003, I think. So I took that position in Semantic. And then our contracts terminated, was it a year and a half or something down the line, because they got the opportunity to get new employees in India and train them up. And they were half the price if not a quarter of the price of what they were paying us. So they sent out the staff from the Semantic office here in Dublin and sent them out to train them up. So they said, OK, they were doing that for the last six months and then they terminated our contracts then because they obviously were able to get the work done for cheaper.

So then I moved to Galway at that stage. And then at that stage, I was there for again, I'd say a year and a half and my mother got terminally ill. So she wanted to come home, so I had to, she needed to be nursed like 24/7, so there was a (inaudible) care nurse there during the day, but at, like by night and stuff, we were there, and then in the end, my sister and I gave up work and came home and stayed with her until she passed away. So at that stage then, I was working in, well they were after giving me a couple of, I wanted, I said I had to finish because I thought it was unfair on them to expect, you know, to leave work for a certain amount of time, I didn't know when we'd be back or how long it would take, the whole process that she was going through. So they said, no take time off, so they said it doesn't matter how long it was. I think they gave me two months off or something, so I went back working for them, and I stayed with them for another, I'd say six to seven months.

But at the time then, my dad was someone who had never lived at home on his own, so he needed, you know, even day-to-day things, everything was done for him, being a man, so he needed like, my sister got married and she had moved out and my brothers were living away from home. So I knew then it wasn't really fair to leave him on his own so I'd started looking for a new job that would be closer to home. So then I got offered the job in
Merlbrick, and that's as nearest I could get to home at the time, which was Shannon, which took, it took me three hours every day to get to and from work.

Three plus three?

Like it would take an hour in the mornings, because I used to leave the house at half 6 and be at work for half 7, because then there was no traffic. And then coming home in the evenings, depending on what time you finished meetings, etcetera, or if there was a rugby match on or something on, it could take up to two hours like. So at that stage then like, another, I was working there for a year and like it was taking it's toll. Because I was at work from 8 o'clock in the day and I was still in the office at 8 o'clock at night, so then you were getting home at half 9 and then all you were doing was going to bed, getting up, going to work again, and that was my life for a year. So I just, I wasn't willing to move onto Shannon and live in Shannon, so I then looked for another job again, and then we've been, unfortunately this place isn't going so well, so hopefully it'll pick up so I don't have to look for another one.

Yeah, but what I wanted to say about job hopping in the high tech, it seems that it's an industry thing rather than an individual thing, right?

Yeah.

I suppose, how would you see your high tech, friends from the high tech, colleagues from the high tech, I suppose they have similar trajectories.

Yeah, well to be honest, like out of my friends now that I can think of at the moment, one girl's in the same job since she left college, and another girl went to Australia for a year and now she's back, so she's probably on her third job since she came out of college. Another friend of mine was able to get the opportunity, she was working with me in Semantic, she got a new job in Dublin, she got the opportunity to leave work for a year and come back to them. So she's still with that company, the second company since she left college.

So a lot of them really haven't really moved much or hopped too much around. But I think like, like I would have been happy to, like I loved my job in Galway, and I wouldn't have left it for the world because I really enjoyed the people that I worked with and there was always a challenge there because there was always someone coming in that either didn't have good IT experience or that you had to train up. There was always a challenge there on a daily basis, whether it was new requirements or new switches that, there was always something that kept you on your toes (inaudible) that you were trying to train them in. And they were a great bunch of people to work with, and it was a joy going to work every day, like I never didn't enjoy working there. But due to like circumstances like, you kind of like have to change things and get on with them.

The Galway job was because of India outsourcing, right?

Yeah.

So it was industry determination.

Yeah. And actually the company that worked in out in Shannon are doing that as well. They have, they stopped hiring in Shannon and they make out that in, I think it's, it's either a year and a half or two years that they're going to have the jobs decreased by 50 percent in Shannon, some figures like that now. Because one of the developers that left, because he wasn't comfortable with the financial situation, came from Technomin as well, so he went back working there and he was the last person that was hired since. So he's a bit worried about that because he doesn't know, does he only have security for another year or two.

Yeah, yeah. But it seems that some of the most successful firms here in the technology park, they were bought out by foreign groups, right? Indians, by Europeans, by Americans, right?
Yeah. But there's a lot of small companies out there that you wouldn't even know exist like. Like there's a lot of companies there that I wouldn't even know existed like, only that now you're passing them like. Like there's a company up there, [mid-size telecom software firm] Telecoms, and they were created from, they used to work, now this is well before I was there, in Technomin, and four or five of them left and created a company similar to Technomin and seemed to be going quite well and seemed to be expanding there.

So this is indigenous development without foreign investment?

Well I actually think there's foreign investment involved, yeah.

That seems like more in terms of venture capital, right?

Yeah.

It's not like ownership.

Oh, no, yeah.

Yeah. I'd like to talk about, to think about, you know, your father and your partner, you know, about men, women. But before doing that, do you have any questions about this work, practises?

Lisa: Yeah, I was just wondering, do any of your co-workers, or have any of your sort of juniors have families? Like small kids or teenage kids?

Let me think now. Asifa would. Asifa would. And I don't think the other lady did. Now what about John? I'd say, yeah, two of them did have kids like. But they wouldn't have been young people, as in they would have given up work and then came back into the industry then when the kids were a little bit older and they were in school and (inaudible) and there was somebody there to collect them in the evenings and then they'd be home from work to give them their dinner and do their homework with them. So they wouldn't have been young people that were just after having kids that were in the working environment. They would have been, do you know, in their late 30s, early 40s.

Lisa: There's no serious conflict there with the family and the job?

No, no. There wouldn't be any issues like that. There wouldn't have been in the company I worked with in Technomin like. Like people, like in the company I work in now, there'd be no issues like that. But in the company we worked with in Technomin, the managerial board were very, like if you were in a meeting and something, an issue arose and a client signed, I know because a friend of mine left the company because of that, that it was 5 o'clock and they'd expect her to stay there until the meeting was over, no matter that she had two kids to go away and collect from school. So she, like she has at many a times, and sometimes afraid to say it, but she has many a times, I've been in the room, and she'll say "I have to go, I have kids to collect." And they'd say, do you know, they'd be in the, do you know, kind of thing like we're trying to sort out an issue here, and she said "well you know that I have kids and I have to collect them from school. I don't have the opportunity to have somebody at home to collect them." And her partner used to work as a director of that Pulse Jewellery, so he was always around Dublin or Cork. He was always travelling so he was never at home at school-run time like. So yeah, that was kind of one company that that was an issue, that people were actually as well afraid kind of like.

Lisa: The allowances just weren't made.
No, they said that they were going to be met. And oh yeah, they’d give you the sun, the moon and the stars, but then when it came to an issue’s after breaking out on site and the customer’s going ballistic over it, “where you going? You’re going to collect the kids from school?” You know, that kind of “I'm not in the mood for this now.”

Lisa: Well do you leave them there?

Yeah, that now would have happened a couple times. Like they know where they’re going, but they're just mad that there's an issue and how are they going to fix it and this kind of a thing, you know?

Lisa: And would there be any female role models who you could look up to sort of, I suppose in that previous job, who might have had kids and managed it well?

Well she would have been, like I would have definitely looked up to Louise, because sometimes she was kind of, do you know, you'd know by the look of her she's actually sitting there and she's wondering “how in the hell am I going to say that I have to go because the kids are here?” And you know she's worried about saying it, but then she'd get on it and she'd say it and she'd say “sorry, well look, I have kids to go.” And she was good to manage herself well and she always got the job done. Whereas I know there'd be other people that would be there, that I know would be there from 9 to 7 because they'd have nothing to do in the evenings or they'd just were kind of, but they still didn't seem to be as effective and productive as she was in the time frame that she was there compared to, do you know what I mean? Like she did manage her job and she did have like a great like relationship with the people like in the other departments like. She was a project manager as well, and she'd have great, how do I say it? Like they'd look up to her like, and if she had said “oh this needs to be done by today, and quit the messing now lads and get on with it” in meetings, they would listen to her and they'd take her totally serious and her word was gospel, end all kind of, do you know? So she was one in particular.

Lisa: She ended up leaving because ...

She ended up leaving because it was too much then with the kids and like, do you know? She just didn’t know, so she left.

Lisa: Did she go into another job?

She hasn't. They moved on to Tipperary, so she hasn't got into another job yet. She wants to go back to work now because life is a lot easier, but again she doesn’t, like she needs to get somewhere where she can collect the kids, like get something like maybe she could do part time like. So that's what she's looking into at the moment.

Yeah, connected with this, you mentioned that your father was too dependent on you for some things. How is it now with you and your partner in terms of division of labour at home, decision making, time management?

Well he'd be a lot, maybe it's because, like obviously he's from a different generation, that like he'd be able to make the dinner himself, he'd be able to do the washing himself.

Your partner from your father?

I'm saying my partner, like. Do you know like? He's come up in a different generation, so like, do you know what I mean? Whereas my father would have always like have been out working or whatever. My mother would have been at home while we were small because she would give up work while we were small, and she would always have been there making the dinner, doing the laundry, etcetera. And then he'd come home from work. So when she first passed away, he didn't know how to work the washing machine, he didn't know what to, do you know? So it was really a bit of a, do you know, a change for him. But like, I don't know, my brothers are even a lot different now because they've moved out and they live in their own homes with their partners, and again, their
partners are a different generation, so it's not like they’re going to do everything for you. Like you can know that's how you work the washing machine, it's not rocket science.

So your brothers don't reproduce what your father expected?

Well they would have been like him when my mother was alive, because they lived at home and she did everything for them. And while they were still living there when she passed away for like, I think my brother has moved out now, he probably left about six months after my mother died. But for the six months, I was literally just doing her role, right? Making it easier on them. But then he moved out and his girlfriend kind of made him realise, “that's the washing machine, Paul. Use it.” Do you know? So they had to change their way of life because their partner wasn't willing to come home every evening and doing everything for them, that, you know?

So I think that was very good for them, that they now know how to make their own dinner and do their own laundry and, do you know what I mean? That they’re not literally relying on someone to do it for them, obviously, I’m not saying they have to do it, she’s not going to do it for them at some day and age. Do you know? That she’ll come home and throw on the clothes, but he knows as well, when he goes home and he sees a wash needs to go on, he’ll put it on, do you know? That he actually knows how to use the Hoover and this, that and the other now that he’s, do you know? They've become that themselves because the relationship they're in is not like it was I think in a different generation.

And how does it work between you and your partner?

As in when it comes to ...

To home, the household administration, division of tasks like chores and decision making.

OK, well, like literally, it depends on who’s first in in the evenings, so if I was first in, I’d make the dinner. But if I wasn’t first in, he’d make, if he was first in, he’d make the dinner. So it kind of would work that way when it comes to the meal service. Then like say, I’d probably be still more clued in to go “oh right, I’m going to sort out the wash now, do a bit of ironing.” Whereas, he’d only do it if like it was really needed, like he had no clothes left in the wardrobe like, do you know what I mean? He still isn’t fully in the frame of mind that I think women are like, but they’ll do it like, but it wouldn’t be the most favoured task in the world, so. There is some ...

But now it seems that he would have a more flexible time, because as a contractor, he works part time, so would he be at home more often than you?

Well he wouldn't really because he’d either be in the office, like he’d work part time, but he's either in the office doing the safety statements or he’s at home, like in the business they have at home, like he’d never really be, he'd be in and out like. But he wouldn’t really be at home either, like he still would rarely be home before me because he’d travel like. He’d either be in Cork delivering a safety statement or he’d be reviewing a site in Dublin. Do you know what I mean? He has to travel a lot like to even just review a property that needs a safety statement done. Then he has to come home and he has to do the safety statement so it takes him longer to get something because of the travelling and etcetera. It takes, like there’s a lot to go into just one safety statement.

In terms of fun and leisure, do you two do everything together or do you do things separate? Home leisure and public leisure?

Well we'd out a lot together, but sometimes like I might go out or go to Cork, or go see friends of mine from college with just the girls. Or he’d be gone on a stag or he'd be gone out with the boys to watch a rugby match. So we do do a lot and we'd probably go out more often together than we would our own ways, but I always try and keep in contact with my friends and so would he like, and do like activities like that as well.
Because you have a long day, right? You have to drive back and forth, so you finish work at 6:30, you said?

Quarter to 6.

Quarter to 6. So you get home at 6:30, almost 7.

Yeah, well 6:30 yeah.

And then Fridays – so you still have energy to run the household and leisure and ...

Lisa: Circuit training.

Yeah, and salsa classes?

See normally I do my classes during the week, yeah. Normally I do my classes during the week, so you'd just be in a routine that you'd come home and you get changed and you go to your class and then you come home after that and you'd have something to eat and watch a bit of tele or whatever. But then at weekends like, do you know, you'd, you'd know it's weekend, so you'd come home from work on a Friday evening, which usually means you just relax and wind down. And then on a Saturday you try to get some things done and maybe go out for a few drinks if you still had some energy.

So, it's an important detail, do you go from work to the gym? Or do go home first and then to the gym?

Home first to get changed and then, because ...

Why? That requires lots of discipline. It's different ...

Well my friend comes with me, so she'll literally be at my house. So I just literally run down to my room to get changed, and then she'll be waiting for me like.

Yeah, that's an important detail because ...

Because if you go home on your own, oh yeah. Sure if you go home on your own, sure it would be impossible to go back out again.

Lisa: I would never.

Oh yeah, I'd be the same, yeah.

Lisa: I'd have to go straight.

Yeah, but I think if someone like, do you know, if there's two or three of you going to a class like, there'll always be a day that I won't be all for it. They'll say “come on, we'll be on for you at 6 o'clock.” Or there'll be day that they won't be motivated, I'll be like “no, we're definitely going this week.” Do you know? Like so I think when there's more people going, you have a better chance of going and staying motivated and staying, do you know, enthusiastic about your classes than you are if you're just going yourself.

In terms of Internet, you and your partner, do you use Internet at home?

Yeah, we have broadband, yeah.

For what purposes? Do you work at home?
No, I wouldn’t. He would, so he’d like maybe if he was catching up and he wasn’t in the office and he was trying to get statements done at the weekend, he’d use it for research and for working at home. But we’d also use it for just Bebo, Facebook, Internet.

**You use it for those things?**

Yeah.

**Who spends more time on the Internet?**

Probably me, I’d say. Well, like yeah, he’d be doing research like, but it’s work like he’s doing. But when it comes to messing around on the Internet, yeah probably me.

**So at work, do you work more with computers, the monitor interaction, or do you interact more with people?**

It would be more the computer like, do you know? Because you’d only be going up and checking people every now and then or you might train someone if you had a new person. We don’t have any new people. So it would be more, at the moment now, it is more the monitor like, do you know? It is more the computer. You’d have interaction with people, but because we’re all in the same room, you’re still, it’s easy to have a conversation and it’s over and done with quickly to verify something and it’s more the computer that you’d be doing at the moment.

Yeah, so back to work, like as a woman, how are your experiences working in the high-tech sector?

Yeah fine, I’ve had no issues like, like say, I’ve had no issues working in Shannon, as in like being a female in my position or in Dublin. Like I know when I worked in Technomin a bit, like there was this thing that the guys were like (inaudible) “don’t want to think about this (inaudible)”, do you know, as in like – because they asked you to think really in Technomin was, if you weren’t a coder, than you didn’t understand what they were talking about. So how are you going to fix this issue or resolve the problem we’re having at the moment to get either more staff on or – so to be a project manager, you don’t really need to know the exact detail of why this code is causing this issue and how you’re going to fix it. You just need to know what the issues are about, who’s the best person that has the experience in that area of code, like do you know? There’s certain things you need to know about how to fix it, but not to actually sit physically down and fix it yourself.

But there was this kind of a thing going on with the guys in the office, that you didn’t really know like so I’m not going to explain to you what the issue is kind of a thing because you don’t really know what I’m talking about because you don’t code, kind of. So that was kind of going on for a bit like, but it was kind of nipped in the butt too, because then once they could see that “well, hold on a second,” and you keep asking them questions, “now why,” like it did annoy them. But then they got to the stage to know like, OK, well they did fix the issue, they did get us the extra resources we needed to fix the issue, or they did analyse whether it was extra resources or it was this particular resource that was working on another project that only knows how to fix it. Or whether it was like, for the next project, getting training for six engineers instead of having the one guy, that this issue won’t arise again, that only one guys expertise in this area, that we get six more of them, up to a higher standard that we’re not just relying on the same guy the whole time. Or whatever the resolution was, once they could see that there was something put in place, that gave them more confidence in your position. But, I do think that too if a guy came in and he didn’t know how to code, that they would treat him the same way.

**Did you know the coding? Did you learn coding at school?**

I did, but I wouldn’t have known in-depth and as experienced, because I hadn’t been coding as the issue was. But there was no need to get to that level anyway in the first place and it was a different language than I did. But yeah, I wouldn’t see. Because I would think that if it was a guy that came in, that they would have treated them the
same. But I don't think, I think it was just that they thought that "you don't understand what I'm trying to fix, so you're not going to be able to fix my problem, so why should I tell you?"

Because no, I was a PM, project manager, in business, and I had the same issues. Like they had analysts would say, "oh you don't have to, you don't know anything about this task." So I'm trying to see, this is not because a man or woman ...

No, I don't think so. I think it's because they think that they, that you just, you're not like experienced in what I do, so you don't understand, so I'm not going to, you know.

But do you think the fact that you are a woman made this issue more ...

No, it was just at that time we were all project managers, we were all girls there. So it was just ye women, because at that time it was just all women. But then when the guys came, like they were treated the same like, do you know? So I don't think it was a gender issue. That would be the only thing that I'll have similar to it. Besides that, everything ran smoothly. There was no issues being a woman at work.

But why is that the PMs were female and the programmers were male?

Well there was like female programmers as well, but they weren't the team leads at the time that arose with this issue. But the majority of the developers were male and the majority of the programmers, I think we had at the time one project manager that was male and we had one, two, three girls.

Yeah, but why is that? Why this predominance?

I don't know. I think it was due to management at the time. Whereas now, there's only one girl, that's it. All the rest of them, there's five that are boys. And there was, I've seen CVs that came for a position as project manager at the time when I was there, and like there was very, a girl actually that I worked with in Dublin, and she was very like experienced and as a project manager, and she knew her stuff and they didn't hire her. So I really think the time, because of the issue with Louise, that the manger said since then "I'll get the men because the women need to go home early to sort the kids." So I really think that he thought that way after that experience because he's only held onto one girl that doesn't have any kids, that's separated. So she doesn't, I think his attitude is, do you know? Because she's willing to work late, she's willing to be there from 9 o'clock in the morning to half 7 in the evening, and she won't even, when (inaudible) say "oh I have to go home," whereas, do you know? I or Louise, because I have such a long drive home, I was there going "gee, it's half 7, I must go home, I must go and get out of here so we'll talk about this tomorrow." Or Louise would be going, do you know, "I have to go and collect the kids. Bye, I'm gone." So she isn't in that frame of mind because she lives ten minutes away and she's separated from her partner, so it's just her. She lives alone, so to her maybe she prefers being at work because there's more people there, and there's, do you know?

So what are the main difficulties that women face in the high-tech company in general?

What are the main ...

The main challenges, the main issues?

Well I suppose yeah, if you do have kids that is the main thing like, isn't it? If you need to – depending I suppose on the company you work for. Like some companies, do you know, are totally different and people only work 9 to 5 and that's it, they're gone, there's no more, and work 9 to 4 on a Friday and that's it like. Don't even lift the barrel after 5 o'clock like, "we'll discuss this tomorrow," because I don't think their customers, or I think they've just got their customers at the right, that they're treating them the right way, they're saying "OK right well, this
will be discussed, we'll hopefully have a solution for this in a week's time." Whereas it will actually only take two
days when somebody gets down to do it. But they're giving themselves that extra bit of time with their customer.

Or there isn't that much competition out there for them in the world, so they're able to say to the customers,
"well hang on, you won't have that for a while, or we'll have that in two," they're able to have longer schedules
because things aren't as hectic. But I suppose when there's so much competition out there, when they're that, in
that kind of an environment that you are, you have to kind of get people working overtime and try and get them
to stay on in the evenings and, do you know? There's that pressure to say “we need to get this sorted by the
morning, so you, if you need to get it sorted by the morning, well you need to be there for a few hours after work
trying to have something ready to figure out how you're going to sort it or for the meeting in the morning or
whatever." Like you can't just come into a meeting in the morning after leaving at 5 o'clock and go “yeah, well I
need to go in now and do that." And they'll say, “no, that's why we told you to prepare for the meeting.” Do you
know what I mean?

So I think it depends on the environment and in the type of company that it is on those issues. I think they depend
on it. But like, obviously if you don't have kids and you don't have like a partner or a family or issues like that, well
then you yourself prefer (inaudible) does anyway. She prefers to be at work because there's people there, do you
know what I mean? Where she's going home to an empty house, so she works a lot of hours. Whether they're
affective hours, I don't know. Whether it's just being at work, I don't know. But they would obviously be in the
future, like I know my sister at the moment is having a baby, and that's her main issue when she goes back to
work. Because they live like, they moved up to Borrisoleigh, it's in Tipperary as well, but they don't actually know
that many neighbours. Like they don't know neighbours that have kids because they didn't have kids up until,
they're just having one now in May. So her big issue is where she's going to get a babysitter or a creche that's
handy for near work. And like her boss expects her to be like in the office for not 9 to 5 or 9 to 6 like, he expects
her to be there until things are done correctly, and if they're not, things aren't done, then stay there until they're
done kind of thing.

What's her job again?

She's a finance manager. So like they'd have end of year accounts and all that kind of stuff. And then I don't know,
like what really she'll be doing, but like she has to work late and she's already stressing about what she's going to
do when the child comes. Like that, you know, how will she manage this like?

What do you think about that?

Well I think it's terrible that you actually have to think like, do you know, “oh, what am I going to do when I have
this child and I have to go home to collect her from the creche or the babysitters.” And that's why she's hoping to
get a babysitter so that there'll be the flexibility, so if she's a half an hour late, that the creche, do you know, isn't
just going to close. That if you have a private babysitter that maybe minds another child, or that just only wants to
mind one child, that you have the flexibility of that. So you kind of really have to adapt your life to your work like,
and I don't think ...

Yeah, but you see, like children is kind of an external thing that happens to your life and work. But within work,
in terms of work style, in terms of work relationships, are there any differences between like a female engineer
and a male engineer?

No, I don't think there is, not in the environments I've worked in. I have never seen any differences or seen any
issues with either a male or a female doing the same job. As long as they're experienced and qualified in what
they do, there was really no difference, I don't think. I think girls have more attention to detail in the roles that
we've been in, that they kind of like, they're more like wanting to get the job done right the first time around.
Where some engineers I have worked with that are male, and maybe that's not, maybe that's just my experience
with females and males, maybe that doesn't mean it's a gender thing, but ...
Yeah, your experiences.

Yeah, I would have said that the girls have better attention to detail.

And the guys? In these experiences? Would you say they were doing a sloppy job?

Well not sloppy, but like they wouldn't put the heart and soul into like as in to make it, to get it done right the first time, to make sure that like they're catching every issue like. They were kind of like testing what happened, like even the bug logging, like there was steps and a procedure to follow like, and that you had to attach a screen shot of the issue or whatever, and the logs or whatever, and you had to write in the steps to reproduce and you had to write in what actually was the result that you were seeing and what the expected result. So when the engineer comes to fix it or a developer, then they know if they go to reproduce it, if there's no actual result or expected result in there, then they don't know what, how they're going to fix it, so that delays them doing their job. Whereas the girls are very good at that like. They're bang on with writing in, logging the bugs by the procedure. Whereas the guys were more constantly, I don't know, because I had printed them all out, a page that said "this is the process and this is what you've got to do." Whereas they'd still be missing. There'll be something missing in the book, was it the developer – and you'd know just by the developer calling them over and going "hey, come here, what's this about? Hey, come here, what's this about?" And by the times you could say the girls got called over compared to the guys, it just seemed that the girls definitely had bang on head, attention on the detail. Whereas the guys didn't. But whether that was because they were rushing what they were doing or what, I don't know.

So the outcome is different? So coding done by a woman would be more perfect than a coding done by a man? Or would be done right at first?

Yeah I actually have never, like in the small companies like, I actually don't know. Like out of now the company that we have now, if there was a girl working there now, I could answer that question for you. But the other company I worked for was so big, I don't know who was actually doing the coding underneath like, because there was so many different departments.

But if it was in work now, I'd know – whereas at the moment now at work, there was two guys though that were developing code before this and the software that I'm doing. And there was like always about eight or nine builds I'd get in one sprint. Whereas I'm only supposed to get one with the features in it. Then say, right, there's five bugs that I found, please fix them. Give me back another build and verify the bugs, do some other tests, out the door, end of story. That's what you call good quality. And I'm there in the company a year, and the first time that happened was yesterday. But before that we were getting eight to ten to twelve builds of they're fixing a bug and then they cause forty bugs, do you know what I mean? But now it's a guy now I have, but he was there since the company started. So whether he's more experienced that he was able to get us this sprint totally smooth, and before that the two developers that were responsible for it, whether they just weren't as experienced in the software or what, I don't know. But ...

So in terms of age then, do you think that older engineers are better than younger engineers? Or they're more responsible or they're more stable?

Yeah, they're probably more – well see, you kind of got it both ways. You've got like younger people that are eager to get in there and prove themselves in the industry and want to kind of start climbing that ladder. So they are eager and they are willing to work hard. But if they're not experienced, the results aren't going to be the same. They're going to have to, like everyone makes mistakes, to get, to improve and etcetera, themselves and their knowledge and skills.
But if you think about it, someone that's older that's gone through that process obviously might not still be as eager to work because they maybe have gone as far as they can in a company, or don't want to get to the next level because it means extra hours and extra effort that they're not really bothered to it. So they might not be as motivated and might have lost maybe their desire for their job and to progress in their work. But they still will be able to do the work better. But whether they're laxidaisy then about it, their results might not be as good, if you think about it. If they're not putting their full effort into it. So it really depends, doesn't it, on the individuals.

Yeah, I have two situations and I'd like to know your reaction to that. A manager tells me “oh, if I open a vacancy and I have two CVs, one from a woman, the other from a man." They have the same qualifications, the same experience, they say that they will choose the man because a woman can get pregnant. How do you react to this type of choice?

I'd say, yeah typical, yeah. That would be typical of a man if he was hiring someone. Whereas, you'd ask the question then if it was a woman that was hiring the two, who would she pick? Would she pick the man or would she pick the woman?

She would be more understanding. That's what I heard.

Yeah. So you would say, do you know, it's ridiculous, that they would pick the man. I know she might get pregnant, but she might be able to do a way better job than he does. Her results might be better in the office, she might progress better, she might make them more money. They've no idea.

Were you aware of these type of decisions?

I wouldn't have been aware, but you know the way people have always said “oh,” like, that women are still striving to get on in the working environment and to be seen as much as the men are in the working environment. I've never experienced like say any, being treated that I am any way aware of, but like you'd always have heard things like that, that women are still striving, they're not there yet. They're still perceived as, do you know, not as up to standard maybe or not as, like I wouldn't be shocked to hear that. Like I wouldn't be shocked, I'd hope it wouldn't go on, but I wouldn't be shocked.

And the other situation is when they tell me in the high-tech sector, when they open a vacancy for an engineer or technical position, and they say “well, we don't hire women because we don't get CVs from women.”

Oh, I wouldn't really believe that because like if you look at the numbers of people that are doing like college courses, like the percentages that are women, the percentages that are female, like I know even in our class alone, like however long ago that was. Like it was definitely, like maybe a little, slightly higher on the boy side, but it was nearly 50, 50. So I find that very hard to believe that that whatever, 50 percent of the girls that I went to college with aren't looking for jobs. So I don't know about that one now. I wouldn't believe, like. I would find that very hard to believe, that they're not getting CVs. I would say, is that just them saying that to cover themselves? Or like, I wouldn't actually think it was true like. Because if you look at the numbers doing the courses, where have all those people gone to? Why aren't they looking for jobs?

I mean, I suppose they are finishing the courses, right?

Yeah.

The women, both these ratios, they remain more or less the same at the end of the college degree. And that now, both gender ratios, they remain working in the high-tech sector, right? Because many people, they get a degree but they just drop out, they go do other things. Maybe they get married, they have kids, they go do other things, right?
Oh right, so you're saying ...

Now I'm just speculating, just speculation, right?

Yeah, but if you look at it like in every company that I've worked with so far, there's still – like I don't think we're at a generation now that you can have a family and more than like one kid that both parents don't have to work. Like it's a way more, like that was OK to do in the past because the lifestyles I don't think were as expensive or things weren't as expensive. But I don't think families, like I don't really know if any like my younger friends that have families that both people aren't working in the relationship, because they need to maintain some sort of life that they're not looking for the next month's wages. Do you know what I mean? That they're some way comfortable in their lives, that they're not counting every penny, that both have to work. But then I suppose, the other way you could look at it is, the more kids they have, it's more expensive to get them into care, that then somebody's going to have to stay at home and mind them if you have. But I don't think people are having these big families anymore. I think people are having smaller families, so.

Are there supports for child care being provided by paid services or by their families, like their own parents and grandparents?

Are – OK, right, so who takes care of the kids? Oh right, well they all have to pay for the care.

Grandparents or not?

No, not grandparents. They'd be like a parent down the road minds one of a friend of mine, her three kids. But like she has to pay her like. She's just a neighbour like. She minds her kids. Another one sends hers to the creche, so she has to get them on the way home. And another, my sister actually, her sister-in-law, she doesn't work, she only has one kid and she stays at home with that kid. That's the only person now I know.

So integration is not using family as a network of support.

Yeah, I don't think so, no. Well like I know for instance like my sister now, she doesn't have anyone in the family that's not working who could – she has my dad, but my dad isn't going to mind a child, he's 60 something like. She's got her grandparents, or the child's grandparents on her other side, her husband's side, and his mother works. She like does home health for old people. Then his father is retired, but he'd be too old to mind the child. So she doesn't have anyone that she can get to mind this child, do you know what I mean, from a family perspective. So I don't think people do really have that privilege, you know? A lot of people would love to have that privilege I think.

We are entering the final topic. Do you have any questions about this?

Lisa: No.

OK, so we're talking about generations, support, which leads us to society, right? What are the main transformations that you see happening in Ireland in the high-tech sector, work-wise, or lifestyles? And what strikes you most?

In society or in work-wise? I don't really know. What strikes me as in, do you know, what I see that's going to happen in the future like, trends that are going to happen in the future. I don't really know. This recession, none of us might have jobs soon. We might all be at home having families, for a reason to get a bit of money from the dole. I don't know like. I think it's very hard to predict now the future. Whereas before, people would have predicted the future as oh, like from a software perspective, as like if you keep developing software etcetera and keep your software product at a higher level and keep getting the features out before your competitors do and
new aspects to the software out before your competitors do, you'll always be on top, so you'll always have that competitive edge over the rest of them.

But like now, it doesn't matter how much of a competitive edge you have over people. If companies can't afford to keep employees in, they don't have money to buy software to make things easier like. People might all have to accept a lower salary because they want people to come in and manually do the things from now on because they might not be able to afford the high-tech software, or we might have to go back to basic software and settle for a third of the price. Do you know what I mean like? It's hard to predict now with the whole recession thing in full swing.

But like, the other thing too from a government perspective, like the government can't withstand the amount of people that are on the dole at the moment and the amount of payments they're making out. So like that's another trend that's going to have to stop. They're going to have to stop those payments or they're going to have to reduce them. Or they're going to have to do something to try and get the people that are on the dole and are also working part time or something, they're going to have to try and clear some of them off. Because like the country can't withstand those payments, because if they're going to keep on that train to pay those payments, we're never going to, like we're never going to get to the stage where, right we have our debts. Do you know? If we're going to be constantly paying out those fees, which we don't have at the moment, the money to pay them with, and we're supposed to be paying out pensions to people which they don't have that money either, because (inaudible). So then, they're constantly going to be behind trying to find money to pay for them. So they're never going to get us out of debt like.

So they're going to have to come up with something and it'll have to be something that's probably going to hurt a lot of people to get people back. Like a lot of companies at the moment are saying "there's no salary increase this year" or "you have to take a decrease in salary." And like that alone is affecting people because people are living off what they're living on now and they're knowing that, OK, they're assuming and like because it was the norm that you get an increase in your salary every year. To now go, right, you're getting less, so then, do you know, people are maybe, like, do you know, overspending. So people, I mean, everyone's in debt as well.

So do you think that high-tech professionals, how is their consumption levels? Your level of expenditure, consumption, lifestyle?

Well John Paul said, my boyfriend would say it's quite high, but I think he'd say that about every girl. Well like when you're young like, you have a social life and you go out and you buy clothes and you still, like I still like always be putting money aside every month for savings to have. Because we plan on like getting out a mortgage and building our own big house like. But I'll always be putting money aside, but at the same time, like I do like spending money. Whereas like my father would say like, do you know, they would never spend money in their generation like. That they would like, do you know, not be spending as much. Whereas we think we need a new top for every night we're out. Do you know? We think we need it. We don't actually need it, it's just that we want it. But that was the generation. I think that's just the generation we're brought up in.

That like, do you know, some people say that the livelihood that people give their kids, that they've never seen a recession before or even know what the word means. But it'll affect us more because we'll be over, like our generation will constantly be overspending and won't know how to control it and just go "stop, there's a recession here now, stop using your credit cards, start putting some money away." Whereas the older generation will be smart enough to do that because they lived through it already. So I don't know if our generation will be able to withstand not making themselves worse in a recession. Do you know? Getting themselves into more debt than trying to reduce like their expenses or not going out as much or changed their lifestyles slightly.

I don't know if young people are willing because I know every weekend I've been out like since Christmas, the weekends that I have been out in pubs, I know people that have lost their jobs, and I still see those faces in the pubs every day, every, not every day, but the weekends I'm out. So like they obviously don't have money now
because they're on the dole. So like 200 Euros isn't going to get them very far when I know, like I hear that they're in the pubs. You know somebody will say whoever was out last night. So like the first thing obviously you think someone, do you know, our generation would do would be saying “oh, OK I lost my job, all right. Let's reduce the spending now for the next few months until and not get myself into debt until I can figure out where I'm going to get a job or some work from and I'll try and stay in and do these things.” And not going out for dinner.

**Sorry, yeah but in America, it's credit card economy. That's the money. Whether or not you have money, you just keep your lifestyle with a credit card, so you keep on rolling in your debt, growing, growing, growing. And nobody seems to care that much, owing like 50,000, 70,000, 100,000 dollars.**

Yeah but they'll care when they try to get, like it'll affect us more. People that are, like have their homes and have that, and they're in that debt, like that's fine. But for our generation, in a couple years time, you know people in our generation, they want a mortgage now, they want, do you know, a new car. Do you know? Those things are going to be harder to get if you're in debt, because the banks aren't going to be able to give them that much. So yeah it'll be interesting to see what happens.

**What do you think about the technology park and the companies there?**

There's a lot of small companies there that I actually didn't even know existed, but that's the worrying thing. Will they survive? Because the competitors, the bigger competitors, they'll be able to survive a downturn for a while, but will small companies be able to survive it? And there's a lot of empty offices in there for rent. Do you know? So it's worrying to know will those companies keep going?

**Do you think the park could help these companies somehow?**

The park?

**Yeah, the technology park. The management of the park, Shannon Development.**

Shannon Development. Yeah, I think Shannon Development should reduce their rent maybe and then they might fill up those offices. Do you know?

**Yeah, that's a good idea.**

Because if they reduce their rent by like a third of the price, they'll probably fill all those offices. Instead, they have empty offices all over the place in there and like, at least they'll be getting, like they'll be getting money. Whereas they're getting nothing because the offices are too expensive. Do you know?

**Do you interact a lot with people from other companies there?**

Well, yeah, we have, like we're in an office block now. There's actually only us and another crowd upstairs, IC Mask. And there's only two people in there at the moment because they let go all the contractors, they just stopped the contractors for a while until they get another busy period or whatever. And there's only a girl in there, a woman in there that works part, like she's covering maternity leave of another lady that's gone on maternity, and there's a guy in there. So we'd meet them, and then we're friendly with the company downstairs, [software development and consulting start-up], because they set up and managed our equipment for us and got us all set up, all the service and stuff at the very start (inaudible). So we would have a good relationship with them because we would have worked with them and went for dinner with them every day. And then there's another company downstairs that we don't really know at all because we never see them. I don't know what they're called. I don't actually know what they're called. I can't remember, Pulse or something I think.

**But do you think it's important to interact with other people there?**
Well for our, like it's a benefit for us to interact with [software development and consulting start-up] anyway because we need to keep a good relationship with them. Because if ever we needed, it just makes it easier like. That if ever we needed a favour or they needed a favour, like it's literally, we can go, oh we just need to, like because we have some equipment down there that we're leasing off them because we can't afford to pay for it. So I have to go in and out of there every now and then, and just say "oh, I just need to turn on the servers, or do some of this," or whatever. So we need to keep a good relationship with them because they will be helpful to us. Like we know if we get money and are able to expand the company again, we need them again to come back to us and we need their experience to help us build more sustainable environments that have more space, more capacity on them, to be more like our customer and client equipment and software that they have so that we know, OK this environment has got the same capacity and same style like as the environment is, so we can judge our performance. We're still having fierce problems with performance issues, but we don't know, we can't judge because our machines are so much smaller than the customers, we're having problems with that at the moment. So that'll be something that they'll be able to do.

Otherwise from our perspective, we're a small company, like nothing else will really benefit us from, do you know, getting on. Besides, I know sometimes, they'll tell us about where they're moving out this place and going to this other office, so you hear things like that, about where they're moving out and the rent is cheaper, where they came from and where they're going. Different things about them. I think that's just us wanting to be friendly to people and want to hear their perspective and what they're doing. I don't think it's beneficial for us in any way.

**In terms of networking, to get more clients through references? Do you see that?**

Well like we, our clients now would be more banks or like big massive banks or like (inaudible), big companies like that like. The small companies that are in our office, they really wouldn't make much difference to like ...

**Yeah but they could recommend, like say, “hey, I have this client who needs software for Blackberries,” you know?**

Yeah possibly, yeah, that they do have people that they know that could get us those, that could get us those contacts. That's a very big possibility, I suppose. But we don't see much of them like because there's only two people in the office over there, and they never really like, I think it's ...

**What office? Are you referring to management office?**

No, I'm talking about like say we're in an office at this side of the block and at the other side of the block are the two people from I think IC Mask it is. We never see them like. Whereas there's an office downstairs, [software development and consulting start-up], it doesn't matter where we are, we seem to bump into them. So, for some reason or other, we're literally in our office for the day while we're in there, and then we might go to lunch, we might bump into someone then, or on our way to lunch. We kind of go to the same places.

**What about the cafeteria there?**

There is no cafeteria. There's like a room like with a table in it, but we use it as meeting rooms.

**Well isn't there a cafeteria in the park where people ...**

Oh that's the innovation works. We're actually not, we're the building behind that.

**Is it kind of a catering where anyone can go there, they have to pay for it, it is a coffee shop?**
A canteen, yeah, there is one there. We go there for our breakfast in the mornings, then we'd meet the people in that office, yeah, we'd have friends like.

**Does it work as a hang-out place?**

Yeah, we kind of go there for our breakfast in the mornings for coffee or whatever and we'd meet people we know from the other offices, just from seeing them there every day.

**How interesting is that place, the canteen?**

It's fairly basic.

**To get to know people?**

Not really because see, our lady that looks for rent off us all the time is there, Shannon Development are there, do you know? So do you know, like? If they're having issues, they owe bills here, left, right and centre, and that's why our manager left like because everywhere he turned, there was somebody that wanted money like. And for him, he felt like it was giving him a bad name, do you know what I mean? And that his word was not being respected anymore, where it wasn't really his word, it was just our company and our, like, our boss CEO saying "look, just pine him off, tell him go away for a while, whatever." So he was getting the impression that his word was just so – I kind of stay out of it and because it's not my role to pay these bills. There's another guy that's the point of contact now for such things here in the office.

**I missed your point. How does this relate with the canteen?**

I don't think, like that canteen, because they're all again quite small businesses, I don't think they have great contacts. Like they're all aware of what we do, we're all aware of what they do, but like I don't see an interaction. Like I don't like, well we get on well and we're friendly to all these people, but like we've never got a customer off anyone. No one's ever recommended, well maybe they've recommended us, but we've never gotten business off any of those industries, so I don't really see how it benefits us, do you know?

**Yeah, so the issue of proximity helps you in that specific relationship with Dave's company, right?**

Yeah, oh it does help us with them, definitely, because yeah, their technical knowledge ...

**Other than that, proximity's not really helping you with all the other companies in the park.**

No, but their technical knowledge is extremely important to us like, definitely. And they have our service as well, so they wouldn't want to go too far because we'll be following them around the place.

**So finally, given all these social, society, crisis issues, improvements, like what improvements would you like to see either Irish level, high-tech sector, technology park, in your company? What do you think has to be done?**

Within our company, what has to be done? Within our company there's like these issues with like communication between the staff here in Ireland and the CEO. And I think what needs to happen for our company to be more effective and to get out there and to start making loads of sales and be a profitable organisation, is it needs to get the investment money that we're trying to get. After that, it needs to hire somebody to get the communication, or either somebody has to go over their role. And roles are undefined at the moment. Once like they get the investment, they need to define everyone's role. Somebody needs to be responsible for communication between the Irish office and the CEO and things need to be more clear there.
They need to get someone that's full time on marketing and sales to help us. They need to like expand on our sales department because we have software. If we can't sell what's there, there's no point in us adding features. That's not going to, do you know what I mean? They have to sell what's there, so they need to expand the sales department. That's what will get our office up off the ground and get us selling our software. But I don't know if it's the right time at the moment, because who's able to afford 300,000 or 200,000 on software at the moment. Companies are reducing their costs. They're not, do you know what I mean? So it has to be sold to them in the right way, say "well you're going to save this much." And also it depends on the experience I suppose of sales staff that are doing that job.

**Improvements in Ireland?**

In Ireland. Well I suppose smaller companies, kind of. They should be helping smaller companies and Irish companies set up here and like maybe helping them with grants to get them started, I think or something. Something to help them because I think a lot of people aren't, like have good ideas and stuff about businesses, but are, they're trying to set up this business, but they just don't have enough investment to keep them going, to get them out there and get them started. That they're flopping and they're getting into too much debt and they're, do you know, falling off the face of the Earth. Whereas I think like if the government was able to support them – but where are they getting their money from either, you know? I don't know. There should be something in place, like some sort of grants or something that help small companies get up off the ground and supporting them. Or maybe if they could provide a reduced, like reduced rates on certain things for them or something. I don't know.

**Do you know Enterprise Ireland has grants for that, what they call high-potential start up companies, which is small businesses that have potential to become international.**

Yeah, my ex-boss was telling me that he's meeting with Shannon Development to discuss something like that with them at the moment, with a new company, venture he's thinking of. I know we got grants before on other jobs, but we can't get one now at the moment because there's something about our debt has to be all cleared before we can get it. We've applied and they said, "yeah, you're definitely going to get this grant," but we can't get it until all our debts gone. So like a lot of companies, who's going to be not in debt as a small company? So, do you know? I just think there's things like that that people, do you know, will never be able to bypass and get over. So they need to help them out and then when they are out of debt and not in debt anymore, maybe they can give some money back then at that stage because they were able to give them the grant at the time that they couldn't clear their debt, do you know what I mean? Like it's a catch-22 situation. There's not much I know about the grants, but I know from our perspective, that's where we're caught at the moment.

**Yeah but most companies have some level of that and it's healthy, to keep cash flow, investments.**

Yeah. I don't know if they think, I don't know. Maybe they think our debt is a bit excessive for them to maybe do that at the moment.

**Lisa, do you have any questions?**

**Lisa: I think it's been really comprehensive so, it's good ...**

**Is there anything that we didn't ask that we should have asked?**

No, nothing I can think of.

**Yeah, any final ...**

No, I think it's very good, what you're doing anyway. It'll be good to see the result.
Yes, yes. So thank you very much for your time.

No problem.

**DEBRIEF – INTERVIEW 7 (Anthony and Lisa discuss interview) – 24 February 2009**

**Bold Font: Anthony**
**Normal Font: Lisa**

**What do you think about the interview?**

I thought it was very interesting. I think she's in a very difficult position at the moment, so just the recession and everything. So I thought she seemed quite fidgety and nervous at the start, but as she went on she got quite confident in talking to us. At the beginning I felt she didn't want to speak about her family at all. It was almost like those men you mentioned, and then she was fine, she got more comfortable. She mentioned her father and her mother.

Yeah, I mean that's common. All interviews when I start, people get surprised when I ask them about their families. They just try to put it aside. So I think a way that I'm finding to make people feel more comfortable is let them talk about their work, all the details, technical aspects of it, what do they do, their tasks. Then after that, after those five minutes, they start to relax. Then you can throw in more personal questions again. And also very important is to keep the flow of the interview. There were occasions in which I had this tendency to interrupt, and that's not good.

I do that, yeah.

So I have to keep my mouth shut and let the person speak. And then, so I write down a little bit, and later I come up, "oh, I have to ask about this detail," so I write down these important details. So, it's important not to keep interrupting a person, although you have to interrupt at a certain point.

Yeah, in specific, about this interview, first of all, I see that she has the project manager profile. I mean, all PMs that I've met seem to have developed that same kind of personality, a bit agitated and complex. I don't think she was nervous about the interview. I think it was just her expression of personality as a project manager.

Yeah, perhaps.

They are outweighing millions of things in their head at the same time, and trying to translate all that into words, and help organise things, and help make things happen and make people come together.

Very professional and serious about work, I thought.

Maybe a bit tense at the start of the interview. But I also think that it's part of her professional side, as someone with lots of responsibilities.

One thing that I thought was very interesting was that, and I read this somewhere, was that she was, and I think you were getting at it with your probing, that she felt that it was her fault that she was job hopping, rather than the nature of the job. And I think that you had to bring that across her, "well you had to leave your first job because the jobs were outsourced to India." Then she was like, "oh, yeah, yeah, yeah." She blaming herself for the fact she hadn't managed to keep a job, yet her reasons were very valid.

**It might have come across as an accusation, but that wasn't my intention at all.**
Yeah, but no, it's the way she kind of took it. She said, "four jobs in five years? God, why can't I hold down a job?" So then she was trying to explain it, but at the end she blamed herself.

Yes, but my point was that this job hopping thing is a tendency within the high-tech sector. And this is why I had to add, "oh but, you know, I suppose your colleagues also job hop at the start." And then she would oscillate, "yes and no, yes and no." Then, she used some examples, right? Yeah... But I tried to correct my statement, the 'energy' of it, by referring that this is an industry thing, not an individual blame. Of course, you always have those individuals who are a bit a-functional or idiosyncratic, so they job hop and they do things seen as crazy. But I think it's a trend within high-tech, that people job hop in comparison to fifty years ago, right, where, say, people would stay eight, ten years in a company and then move to a different company.

Or the manufacturing industry now where people tend to stay longer.

Yes, and think about the advertising, right? People stay one year...

Yeah, people job hop just as much as she.

And that's nothing wrong when a recruiter sees that ...

It's positive. The more accounts you've worked on, the more industry experience.

Yes, whereas in the past that would be seen as negative. I thought that she would be aware of that. But she was a bit embarrassed. And maybe she was not aware. She experienced many things, but she was not reflexively aware. Like the pregnancy question, right? And the job hopping question.

And the gender in the work place and how people are different. She didn't seem to think that was an issue really, which is possible.

As she said, "I was a PM and those guys were saying, 'you don't know coding.'" But that was the same experience that I had when I was project manager at a consulting firm, and junior analysts would react the same way. "Oh you don't know this, leave it with us." So I don't see this is gender per se. But when she said that most PMs were women and most programmers were men, I asked her, "well, why?" And then I don't think she gave a good answer.

She didn't seem to really want to admit that it was, it's not something she seemed to have thought about, you're right. For me, because most of the PMs because, there were co-project manager where I used to work, my last advertising agency, were mainly women and I thought about that a lot. But I come from a background of gender and sociology, where she clearly doesn't. So it's something that seemed to not even occur to her that much.

In the business company I worked, all PMs were women, all PMs were women. And the analysts, they were either girls or gay men. And then the salespeople were a few women and mostly men. So it was a very kind of clear cut gender crossed with different occupations. So thinking about stereotypes, that "women can multitask, and multitask better, so this is why they are project managers." But that's the thing, it may be the case that only a tiny minority of women are good multitaskers.

She did come down, she did say girls are better at attention to detail in her experience. But then she did say, like it's very much down to the individual. Before that she sort of said, "well it would really depend on the person, it would depend on the individual." And I thought that was good, not to kind of have these gender stereotypes, that it was sort of "well each person is different." But she did admit that her role model had to leave work and isn't working now because she tried to combine working with family.

You mean now? I missed what you said.
No, that her role model, Louise, in her previous job had to leave work.

**Oh, because of her kids.**

Because she just couldn't combine it, which is quite (inaudible).

**The topic of pregnancy, I was thinking about that. Now, that “oh, all things being the same, we hire the men.”**
The two ways I see we can finish with that, is that the government extends maternity rights to men, to fathers. So that, if women can take X number of months off work, so does the man.

The two of them off work? Or one or the other?

**Both. You know, of course, they’d naturally coordinate so the woman ...**

Oh I see, so the woman can go back and the man could take over for the rest of it.

Yeah.

That's a great idea.

**That's what some countries do actually. Because this means that it takes off the burden off women alone.**

I completely agree.

**And men will love that because, you know, they can “oh, two months vacation at home with the baby.”**

Exactly, until they realise.

**An other alternative is to force companies to have quotas of women, or ethnic groups.**

Doesn't some Scandinavian country do that? That 50 percent, or 40 percent of their boards of management have to be women, and there was (inaudible) that these companies are actually doing better now.

**Yes, this minority practices also happens in America, not by law, but by image, by PR forces. So that in their annual reviews, they report on diversity policies, and they say, “X amount of people in our company are minority or ethnic, etc.”**

That's a bit too simple for me or something. I think that's ...

**Oh, people value that. You would be surprised ...**

Oh no, it's good that there is diversity and you would like to see diversity, especially – I mean, I worked in advertising, it is the most – London, which is a melting pot, all the different races in London, and then advertising is white, upper-class, university-educated, English people – upper, middle class rather. And there’s hardly any, there was one black girl and it was just, “my God, there's a black person here.” Just because it didn't happen, you know? So in places like that they need quotas, absolutely. And they should really introduce some diversity in. But I think there could be a lot of resentment then because, are they, there's the issue that they could be passing over some very good people just so they get the woman who might not be as good. But I think that the real, the real crunch comes when, like up to when women have babies, they are the exact same as a man, all things being equal. So it's only when the babies come in. So I think swapping between the male and the female, letting them decide between themselves, is a brilliant idea.
The drawback is that companies may start to hire singles...

Well exactly, well I think that people do that anyway. I have two friends who both took off their engagement rings when going in for interviews recently.

Really?

Two friends. I was like, one of my friends, I was like “Karen, why?” And she was like, “I don't want them thinking I'll be looking for time off to organise my wedding, be having babies.” Two have done that, and there was no convincing them otherwise. Two girls, just engaged, both my age. So I just thought ...

Yeah, you know, the old school thinking is that if you're married, you're more responsible, stay longer...

See there's only a male model, career model if we're talking about careers. Now freelancing is different and contract work. But the male model of working is this sort of, you know, no career break, just this non-stop working period until you retire, if you stay with the same company or different companies. They need to create another model that will work for females, that you can take your time out and come back and build in some flexibility. Whereas at the moment, it's sort of this rigid. But I think women need to kind of get into senior positions and provide role models and let younger women go, "oh this is possible. I don't need to leave." And be more supportive of it.

Have you seen the amendment to Chris’ interview [first one]? He says, “now we have to have more male teachers in primary school as a role model.”

Yes, I read through it. Well let's have some female principals then, you know? Come on. We can't just start solving the problem by letting men have equality.

Yeah, but the rationale here is that it all starts from the kindergarten, that you'd need to have to have gender balance since the beginning. Otherwise, there is a very sharp gender role attached to the job, like, in Brazil, children call their primary teachers “aunts”. So, they have to see the uncle and they have to see the Mr.

But you can see that here. This girl, she was between primary school and IT. So primary school teachers are very much a female profession, but she went for the kind of more modern job.

Yeah, she said she had the option, right?

Well, she decided, her decision.

Yeah, very different futures.

Yeah, but both obviously seen as good careers. So it's the traditional career option for a girl, but then this kind of newer option that she thought, “I'll go for that.” And a lot of her friends decided, like were primary school teachers or accountants.

Yeah. I also found interesting that her father was a farmer. That's a radically different background – it's a very rapid modernisation, from rural to high-tech in one generation.

And the boys, one boy did kind of agriculture type course. The other guy was a farmer, didn't go on to any further education. And the two girls, just by having a very traditional mother, who sounds like she worked, but she didn't say what she worked as.
I don’t know what her mother did. I think she just said, “my mother gave up work when she had children.” So maybe she just didn’t work after that and looked after the father. But the two girls went into IT and finance and had very demanding jobs. So it’s interesting, just the leaps that are made in one generation, I suppose. And that they’re all in very, it sounds like quite egalitarian relationships. You’d just like to see what happens when they have kids.

Yeah, you saw she was talking about her sister who’s going to have a baby in May.

And is stressed.

... a burden.

Would you have asked, because I was thinking about it and just thought, "no," because I was, the one question I was going to ask was, "as a woman," and then you said it, so I was like, “oh, you’re covering everything.” But, so would you have asked "how do you see," because I was thinking about this and then I just thought, "oh I don’t want to," because you were gone off on another topic and I didn’t want to kind of interrupt, but "how do you see your family life panning out?" Or, “how do you see yourself managing a job in your area and a family life?" Would you ask that question?

Yes, that’s a valid question.

Yeah, I thought that might be interesting.

Hey, sometimes my questions are not perfectly asked. Because the structure of the interview is more relaxed, with probing questions, right? Very open, probing, where the person tells a story. And then I have some hit-and-run questions, when I pose specific, affirmative statements and I want to see how people react to those statements. But you have to be careful when you ask this way, because people may try to fit and provide an answer that satisfies the question.

Yeah, I did a pilot interview a little bit back and I have to do the transcript for it now, actually. And I went through it with Breda just in my meeting with her on Friday. She was very pleased with it, but I showed her my questionnaire, and she said she thought a lot of my questions were very leading. You know, “what are the pros and cons?” “And then someone has to come up with pros and cons, you’re assuming there are pros and cons.” And so I was like, "oh yeah." So you should just ask, “Tell me about your job.” So even from that I’ve learned. So I’ll do out the transcript, but I even learned a new way of kind of how to verbalise questions because I think I had been too leading. It’s very easy to lead people into an area.

OK, it can be valid though, because some interesting topics do not come up during the interview, for example, the hyper-mobile worker didn’t come up in her interview. So, at a certain moment, I had to say, “hey, what do you think of this stereotype of the hyper-mobile worker?”

But you wouldn’t have started with that, you know, to see what they meant?

Correct. It would be wrong to say, “oh, tell me about hyper-mobile workers.” You know? It's not the purpose of this interview. But then after a while, when she says, “Oh, we are all 9 to 5 people, we are always in the office, blah, blah, blah, and there is no remote working, very sporadically.” And then I tell myself it is time to give up and to ask this question. But that's only after all is said and done.

You've tried, yeah. I think that's something kind of you need to learn, to do, sort of do a few interviews and then kind of go, “OK, how do I get the most.”
Yeah, by the end of the day, even with the mistakes which are relative by the way because each interviewer has their own style... You can ask the perfect questions but be very formal, with no rapport, or you can make minor screw ups in your questioning, but be make the person feel very comfortable.

And then sort of be reflexive afterwards and appreciate where you might have kind of ...

Exactly. Even if you angled your questions not properly, when you hear the interview, when you're writing down, you compensate for that, you know, "well that was a forceful question."

You can make a note after.

Yeah, so intuitively you know where to discount and you also know “I could have talked more about that topic and I didn’t.” And then you don’t because there is not enough time, or because you missed, or because you had to rush a little to cover the next topics.

Do you think you got some useful insights today?

It was very interesting because she's the first really high-tech professional female I have interviewed.

Now she's one year younger than me.

Did she say her age?

Well, she finished her leaving cert in 1999, and I did mine in 1998. So I worked out that she's one year younger.

So she joined college in 1999?

Yeah, and I joined in '98. I thought she seemed a bit older. Very mature.

I thought she was in her early 30s.

Yeah, I wouldn't have said that I was older than her, but that's just me. Because I still think I'm very young.

You look younger than she does.

She was just maybe, I don't know, maybe it was just her, because she was in her professional mode or something.

It was very good. I think it was way, I can't see the time of the interview, it was way beyond the one hour.

I think it was nearly two hours. I looked at my watch at one stage and saw it was 2 o'clock and I thought, "Anthony will kill me if I interrupt but I hope she doesn't have a meeting after."

That was good.

It was brilliant.
Anthony interviews Denis (General Manager of Eastern European [nano microscope firm]). 29 April 2009

PS: (...) replaces “you know” and “like you know”.

Last night I was taking a look on your company’s website.

Which one?

I saw a couple.

The dot-com one is it?

I saw the dot IE, the Irish one.

Because IE is out of date, it’s going to be changed totally because that was website created about, (...), like four years ago.

And then I saw the wider one which has the offices in America, in Holland and Russia. The headquarters is in Russia, right?

Yeah.

And then there is a whole network of companies, as distributors.

Yeah, we have around forty-some distributors. Worldwide we do, anyway.

Yeah, I saw many different countries, Israel, Brazil, all over the place. (Assistant brings coffee). Thank you, spasibo. So, [foreign nano microscope firm] is nano technology.

Well, there’s actually several translations. The one I use, and it’s NTMD, it’s basically Nano Technology Molecular Device tools. Basically we do microscopes.

OK, microscopes. Are these high-precision nano technology ones?

Yeah. It’s not the standard to one which you use. People normally think of the microscope as some way to look into the optics or so, that’s the kind of, do (...), they’re regional microscopes, OK? Put it this way. And they are obviously very modern now as well, but there’s some limitations, they have some physical limitations through the, do (...), physical properties. They cannot go deeper than a particular level, (...), so that’s why there’s a number of other microscopes in design. One of the types is electro-microscope. You probably heard of that so.

And the other type that what we do is (inaudible), there are a number of abbreviations for this microscope but one (inaudible) to combine all different type of which are doing one, using one particular option, using one particular method. It’s called Scanning Probe Microscope, so SPM, so this means the scanning is being done by a special probe, OK? And there are hundreds of different kinds of probes for different types of scanning, and there’s, do (...), in several dozen different methodics for scanning. That’s why a lot of time you can hear different abbreviation, (...) sometimes you might hear AFM, which stands for Automatic Force Microscope, or STM, Scanning Tunnel Microscope, so but it’s just different methods of doing the scanning.
But one general word to combine all this microscope is SPM, which stands for Scanning Probe Microscopes, explaining that the scanning being done by probe. It's this very thin, very small probe going over the surface of an object. They're going over it or touching it, scratching it, that's one of the options is photography, it's called, (...). Or just going over the surface that's touching it and just registering different fields, like magnetic fields or thermal fields and so on, so again there are many, many types. Or they're optical probes which register lights, so many, many of them, but the core server idea, the probe going over the surface of an object, (...), and register information and through the controller to the special software, it provides image of that scanned surface on the computer. OK? That image can later be analysed and do some external analysis with that image and then you can do some additional, receive some additional information from that particular image.

But the level of the deepness you can go to the atomic resolution, basically you can see atomic atoms there, so and you can go like very, very low so, I mean nanotechnology work with objects from zero to one hundred nanometers. So human hair thickness, normally between 60,000 to 70,000 nanometers, human hair thickness. Nanotechnology only works with objects from zero to one hundred, without going, will not go into one thousand, so that's how you could look.

And what types of clients do you work for?

Like you, (...), like universities, (...). Everyone who's doing serious research has to have this type of equipment because now these days everything goes deeper and deeper and deeper, and even the chips like, (...), they're getting, do (...), you've heard of the forty nanometer chips (...), new generation and so (...), so everything goes very deep and to do an investigation, to do some serious work, you have to have, (...), proper equipment to do that like so. That's why our main customers would be universities and research labs. Sometimes industry, which do in say some R&D project within the company, they might have our equipment. Or say, semiconductor companies might have off the production line like one of our microscope to do some just some additional tests. But mostly it's just research boards or universities, institutes, that's who the clients are.

Yeah I saw on the website that you have 250 employees worldwide. And the headquarters is in Moscow.

Well, it's about 300 now I think, yeah. Yeah, that's where it started originally, from Moscow. Zelenograd, it's basically, Zelenograd is like Silicon Valley of Russia, (...). Same as industries, (...) so, that city was built as a microelectronics city like, (...).

Is it a technology park as well?

Well yeah, it's basically, it's one big technology park, (...), it's actually a city there. There's, (...), a couple thousand hundred, maybe two, three hundred thousand corporations. It's quite a big city like anyway. It's built outside Moscow like, and it's part of Moscow but it's built outside Moscow. It was built originally as a microelectronics city (...). And it's developed furthermore now, but I mean it is kind of a high-tech city like.

And these 300 employees, can you describe them please? Who are they, where are they?

Half of them are probably engineers like, (...), so, we do all our R&D would be done in the house. We sometimes we use, do (...), we help with the different universities, (...) in Russia or here in Ireland or anywhere abroad. But most of the job, most of the R&D will be done in house and I know so this equipment is not just a standard thing like, it's not like computer or TV like. You can have just slightly trained people at the assembly line and they'd be able to do it. Now this microscope need to be assembled by the scientists as well like, (...). So it's kind of not as just ...

It's tailor-made to the client?
Yeah, it's a lot of time it's being made to the client’s specification. But even without that, it is a serious project, (...) serious work. And it cannot be done just like low-skilled person. So it has to be assembled by the particular trained engineer or scientists. Some particular units of the microscope, some units can be assembled just ordinary engineer, but some of the units need to be assembled by a scientist because there's a little, lot of, (...) know-hows and small things, they, without proper education, they cannot assemble like.

This is very interesting. I'd like to come back to this point. But the other half of employees, what do they do?

Well, like generally, like purchasing cells, like marketing, (...), the standard people (...).

And where are they located? And how many here in Ireland?

Well we have nineteen people working in Ireland and ... Nineteen here, and we have half of the staff are engineers, we have a huge R&D department here, I mean for the company, for this company here it is huge, because half of it itself are engineers. And then we just have general admin staff, like again, purchases, logistics, accounting, do (...), warehouse, a person working the warehouse, just we would have, apart from the microscope, we also sell the consumables. Consumables, that's the chips themselves like, (...), and some calibrating regions so. Like microscope can be one (...), but then the scanning process is done by a chip and that's the kind of were used a lot (...), because you might do only one scan and then you have to change the chip in it like. And there again, for a different scan, you have to replace chip for different scans, (...), so that's why these things are small and very kind of, some of them are low value as well. Some, they're expensive, maybe, do (...), they're half chips with the diamond end of it like, (...), so for very precise work. So they could be like quite expensive.

But general chips are not, and they'll be, do (...), consumable load. That's why, even, do (...), people have a microscope from our competitors, chips are the same, (...), so that's why they buy from us. So you have sales, global sales office for the (inaudible) here as well (...), so. That's saying half of our staff are engineers, the other half would be our mean (...) so, and they specialise in different areas.

And here in Ireland, are they mostly Irish or are there many Russians?

Well, I manage as well (...). Most, most of the people are EU nationals, like 99 per cent (...). I'm just trying to guess. Yeah, we have two engineers who are Russians, and no actually one engineer, he is a Russian, yes. That's it like, (...). The rest of them are Irish, French, Lithuanian, Estonian, so but all EU nationals.

And about yourself, would you tell me about your biography? Like how many years have you been in this company? What did you do before that?

Well, I've eleven years now in Ireland like, (...), so I have Irish citizenship now, so. Well, like I was from the beginning of the company so, I was the first, as employee (...) when the company was open here, I was kind of doing part work and kind of a start, (...), and then slightly pull in one or two people, and then only about, we'll say, two, two and a half years ago when we got the grant from IDA for doing the serious R&D project here to do a new, design new microscope basically. So then we had to start heavily employing people, and that's why we employ a lot of engineers for the R&D department. And also, (...), as kind of a work grow, (...), (...) we started doing a lot of other stuff, like we do a lot of (inaudible) sales are growing and everything else. So we had to kind of hire more people as well, so. But it's five years, I think it's August '04 when the company was founded and it's, yeah, '09 now, so in August I'm going to be five years with the company.

OK, 2004 it was founded in Ireland, but it, what year was it created in Russia?

It's 1991.

1991. And you were an engineer there in Moscow working for the company and they brought you here?
Oh, no, no, no, no. I was here, as I said, I'm here eleven years already, so I was just doing some of the work and working a number of different industries. I did the BBS, I had the BBS kind of a degree down here with the Institute of Public Administration (...), so. Bachelor of business studies. I was doing it in LIT, but I mean it's only the lectures where they are, and the institute itself, it's IPA in Dublin, Institute of Public Administration.

So you're not an engineer...

No, I'm from the business side.

OK. Yes, I also have a business administration degree, and then went into sociology.

Sounds good. So no, I was here before and just when they decided to founded the company, they just offered me the position and I came here so. We also have a sales office in Holland, that's the general office in, for the European market (...), so there's the (inaudible) they do sales (...), so they're mostly sales managers or they're, and they're target, (...), go visit universities and meet clients and so, (...). And then just last year we opened an office in America (...).

It's in California right? I saw the picture on the website. It's very nice.

Yes, in Santa Clara, yes, yeah. Nice place. I just was there last month. Yeah, it's nice, good location (...), very warm and it's like, it's just, that's the Silicon Valley as well (...), so American Silicon Valley. So it's like all close, (...), Copperfield, Santa Clara, San Jose, it's all close by (...), so. Nice place, again, (...), it's a sales office there (...), so, because we think, we kind of had before we had the distributor company there, then we had another distributor company here in America, but it always kind of – see, in America, it's very strong competition and there's a couple of global players there who are original, like original from America and obviously they have more strong position there. Like we're able to compete them worldwide, but in America it's much harder because they're, (...), there's some sort of, (...), degree of like say (...) the way they say "buy American," (...).

So I mean that's the kind of, even down to that one (...) so, because they are established there and they're purely American one, so obviously a lot of universities prefer to work with them, so it's kind of much more stronger competition then as well. So and while we work with distributors there were some issues regarding too, do (...), I mean distributors, it's not, it's much harder to control them and so finally last year we make a decision to actually set up our own office there, (...) so, with our own staff.

Do the competitors produce the same type of product that you do?

Well, nobody ever like produces the same types (...). It's like everyone produces these microscopes, (...), but every microscope has its pluses and minuses, (...), so. And again for different applications, there are different types of microscopes, types of microscope. (...), there are microscopes for spectroscopy, for magnetic region, biology, anything like in those, semiconductor, just like surface signs, so and some you might have a strong motive for one particular application, the other company would have for the other application, better microscopes.

So it's historically as well, different company came up from slightly different background, (...), so maybe one company, they were strong in biology and they have a lot of engineers from biology backgrounds, so they were very kind of specifically building biology microscopes for biology markets. So I'm not as good as to do that so. (...), generally yeah, building the same type of microscope, but everyone has pluses, minuses.

So, which anything that is strong enough that is for the past few studies, some might even be almost twenty years now in market, we were able to have a line of different microscope for every application basically (...). We have a microscope for every type of applications (...), so. Have a quite, even on the website that you can see, we have a quite, a large model or (...), role like, (...), different models, (...), so.
Also how we recently captured a lot of market is we came up with the modular microscopes. So a lot of our competitors who build a microscope specifically for one particular application, OK? And if the university want to have a different research or do the research in different to other application, they have to buy new device. So what we were able to do, we were able to build a kind of, kind of a universal device, it is kind of a platform, we call it. And then just, buy one device and then add in additional models, so you can able to convert that particular microscope into different applications. So basically a lot of universities would have, say obviously, all of them have a limited funds, (...) so, a lot of time a group of number of different researchers from different groups gather together their funds and buy one device, and they just have a plan, say one group work one week, the second group work other week. And those groups can be from different applications as well. So by buying one device, buying additional models like exchangeable heads for example, they're able to much cheaper buy one device with additional models and able to kind of work over different areas. So that's how we're able to kind of capture quite a large market for the last five years (...), since the company, that's really when the (inaudible) starts growing and sells a lot so. And obviously build enough new models and building the distributor networks.

And I can see that you have a deep knowledge of the product and you're not an engineer, so you are a general manager of the office at the [foreign nano microscope firm] entity in Ireland, right?

Yes, yeah.

So what type of activities do you do? Because it seems (...) a lot about the product. What else do you do here?

Well, obviously when I started like, (...), I had to just learn a lot like, (...), and like from the beginning since I was just initially working on my own and then like I would just get an additional people so I had to do a lot of just work myself obviously as a small company, (...). Everyone, directors work as well like, everywhere doing that, everything. So I know so just I had to, I was like, (...), being involved in this business, I had to learn a lot about, (...), what we do and so that's how I'm kind of able to kind of, obviously I don't know too technically, (...), into this, but I have general ideas of most of what we do, I mean, most of what the microscope does so I can, so.

As a general manager, what are your typical activities here?

Well, at the moment, (...), I just are getting like, (...), admin like, mostly, admin activity, organising work here. Also I travel a lot because (...), these microscopes are quite complex, (...), as you would imagine. Some of them very kind of a high end models, they might have the size of this room, (...). So that's why obviously we do not produce everything (...), so we use a lot of the third party suppliers.

And for that reason we obviously have to meet a lot of companies and allocate (...) who we work with, who we'd want to, (...), have a good deal, (...). And a lot of time we have to visit, we have kind of like a concept that before we decide if, like that we work with one particular supplier, want to visit this supplier and see, (...), because when you visit the company, you have most of the information received from the visit, and you kind of get an idea in your head as well, (...), how the company's good or bad like because just doing the, like watching the website or doing e-mail exchange, you don't get much information as (...), (...).

It's all marketing there and until you actually view the company, you have, because a lot of time you might think it's a good company but all they do is just buy and sell (...). So they don't do anything themselves and that potentially creates a risk if you have only service or installation or any problem or technical questions the next time you ask, and they're not able to help you. So that's why it's, we do a lot of that, (...), before we decide who we work with. We actually visit a lot of our suppliers, (...), so.

Do you do sales as well?
No, that's not our prime direction of this office, sales. That's why we actually support sales, (...), and we have the sales surveys, like we do a lot of repairs here as well, like so. But my, no I don't do directly sales, (...). I might, can be supportive, like say for example, last year we had three big top level, top branch of our microscope was sold to Trinity College, (...), to three different departments in Trinity College last year, the Department of Clinical Medicine, I think the Department of Physics and Chemistry, something like that, do (...)? And I was kind of at the time in negotiation, being there and kind of doing my part of the job as well so, but no, I don't do direct sales myself. So I've, (...), the things I still do a lot of, as I said I'm responsible for doing (...), meeting suppliers and getting better deals, (...). We also go to provide help, and doing a lot of work with American, to help the American office into marketing and organising exhibitions and visiting exhibitions, so that's what I do as well, (...), so.

You mentioned you travel. How often do you travel and where? Locally, internationally...

No, locally not as much, (...). Mostly it's internationally, as I said like, (...), so. America and Europe, that's the places I go.

Do you travel, say, every week?

I don't, no, not every week, but sometimes every month, sometimes every second month, (...), so, sometimes twice a month, (...), so it's, there's no any kind of particular, but generally say once a month.

So then most of your time, it's here in the office then?

Well, in the office or, yeah, in Limerick, because time by time there's a lot of, do (...), admin work, lawyers, accountants, all these things.

So you also go to city, to businesses in the city.

Yes, yes. Some work around.

Do you work from home?

Well as a manager of the company, you do work here, but then you come back home and you have to do some additional things, like as (...), you might need to write a letter, or e-mails or, talk to, say, since we work a lot of with U.S.A., and have a lot of suppliers there, the like normal working hours here, it's only night in America, so you have to wait until evening to ring them.

Yeah, my wife lives in Chicago. That's a six-hour difference.

I was there last March. Yeah, beautiful place. I love Chicago, very good. We went to – are you into jazz or blues?

Not really, no. But I like techno music.

Oh all right. We went down to Buddy Guy’s Legends club. That’s the, one of the, (...), most famous clubs in blues, and so that was absolutely beautiful. And the next day we went to a jazz bar, I forgot the name of it, but that was good too, like. But I prefer blues better actually.

Did (...) Chicago is the birthplace of house music too?

Oh right. We went down to Buddy Guy’s Legends club. That’s the, one of the, (...), most famous clubs in blues, and so that was absolutely beautiful. And the next day we went to a jazz bar, I forgot the name of it, but that was good too, like. But I prefer blues better actually.

Did (...) Chicago is the birthplace of house music too?

Oh right, yeah. So, yeah we were there around the St Patrick Day, so we saw the river painted green. Yeah, I got a big Irish hat, (...), everyone was trying to kiss me there, old women, (...).

OK. Downtown is beautiful. I love it.
Yeah, beautiful like. Seeing the parade, (...) so. Nice place.

**Good. So you have a laptop there, and I saw you driving behind me as I was coming here, and then as I was parking the car, I saw you come in the office. So you're in and out your office.**

Yeah I do a lot of, yeah, work here, well I'm, do (...) most of the time all business is spent in the office (...), I'm only, if I travel, say big, because we have a number of suppliers that do manufacturing in Ireland, a lot of parts for the microscope being manufactured here.

**In this building?**

No, so what we call it, like now these days, it's a little bit strange word. Historically manufacturing means you do it just in the building and yourself. But now this kind of a word is being used more widely. Say what we do, our engineers, they design drawings, they design parts, they produce drawings for manufacturing as well. Then we use a number of the local manufacturing, precision engineers company, who we give the drawings and say you have to build X amount of this particular part and this part. So they do it, we supervise them, we check the quality control and everything else.

So that's why we do call, we do manufacturing ourselves because it's our job in all. Like I know we don't have the machinery here itself and not making the parts ourselves, but we are involved in the manufacturing process, and that's why we call we do manufacturing here like as well. And that's why we, a number of, time by time we have to visit manufacturers, companies as well, like as well. As I said, precision engineers, companies, because as I mentioned, part of the microscope are mechanical parts, and the other second half of it would be the electronic parts, (...), so there's a controller, but then also every single unit of the microscope has a built in abort inside there as well because it's, as I said, it's not the optical principle, it's the different principle and that involves a lot of electronics like. So that's why we use, and they're all Irish ones so that's kind of a, was part of the deal.

**So when you go to see your suppliers, your potential suppliers, do you go alone, or do you take engineers?**

No, we take engineers. Like I'm not, originally, (...), I was a lot of time visiting myself with one of our head engineer, but now these days (...), they're, I'm not doing that as much because we kind of build up quite a strong team here and they would do that themselves like. Just sometimes if there are any, (...), financial questions or just we want to see. But try to let that job done by the professional people.

**And do the engineers here travel a lot?**

Well yeah, some of time, sometimes (...) because say even for the R&D project, would you imagine like it's very complexity wise and a lot of time we don't have that much experience as well like. Because we get the engineers locally here, so and that's why they had to travel several times to our head office and work in kind of a cooperation with the engineers and designers in there to get some ideas from them as well, as well as give their ideas to them, (...), so.

Our strength is we do design for manufacturers. Because originally all the equipment was designed by scientists, and they don't care about the design, all they would care about is the functionality, OK? Don't care about how difficult to produce this part, or how good looking a part, or non-good looking a part. So that's why in all times, it's not even the, nothing to do with us, it's related to every competitor, (...), so because they have a background, a scientific background, then most devices, obviously devices will be created by scientists. In the early stage, most of the devices are very ugly, bad looking, very poorly functioning with the, (...), wires or angles coming out of different directions.
So, that's been changed, but (...), one of our strengths, one of our targets was first of all to, when we're creating this new in the project, in the grant, which got for creating a new device, one of the targeted first created very cost efficient. Basically, original design was done for manufacturing. So because, like because machines being used to manufacture parts are the programme, computer programme machines. And they, (...), we used to have before just manual machines to produce parts. Now it's computer programme, and for that reason you have to adapt drawings of parts for, do (...), mass production basically, (...), so. That can able to drive down a lot of the cost of sales (...), so. Instead of one part costing you a thousand Euro to produce, you can drive it down to four hundred Euro to produce the part. So that's an ability to bring down the prices, an advantage to working with competitors. So that's why a lot of work, what we would do was design for manufacturing. So anyway, how to bring down the cost without decreasing the quality or functionality, just by changing parts like, making maybe more, easier to produce.

The second part of the work we are doing is the aesthetical design. So that microscope that you're able to produce, it is very nice, very good looking. So we are very big fans of Apple Corporation. And as (...), (...), their designs are very good looking, aesthetic, and the same time very nice and good style and that's why we were trying to, and also kind of, we are very much into this design ourselves. And when we're designing our equipment, we were trying to make Apple style design. That's what we call it. Because as part of the microscope is a computer and monitors as well, as you imagine, like part of the microscope is computer monitors. So if you're trying to use a Mac computer, (...), you want to have a microscope standing next to it which is looking the same as the Mac computer. So making one union, (...), union device, (...), so. And that's where a lot of work was done by us and we were able to achieve I think. Yeah, that's the microscope (inaudible), so it's very kind of a cool, smart.

Oh, it's a very smart design.

Yeah, and we were forced to introduce that one, and if you look, the other thing is it's so close, it's inside a box and it's all closed in. So all the work being done inside. Before it was always open up and everything can be seen. So now everything inside and you see a very nice, good looking device.

So you plug the microscope onto a computer.

No, you plug it to controller, and then controller connects to computer like.

OK. So tell me if I'm right: you're saying that these designs for manufacturers, the aesthetic design, require people to travel, your engineers to travel to different centres to learn about these specifications?

Well, because say, no, well design itself was done here. But (...), prior to that obviously, to get understanding about the microscope and get understanding what was the functionality of different units, they have to learn a lot, and that's required of them to travel to our head office in Moscow and get some ...

Some training there, right?

Training there, but also because it's very complex project, so some of the work being done by the head office as well so, and that's required time by time to group of researchers, engineers meet together, discuss, (...), issues, discuss drawings, what needs to be, proposals done, and stuff like, (...). Sometimes they do it, like you can hear now, they actually kind of were talking to the head of research team in Moscow there currently. So sometimes they do it over the telephone, or Skype, they have, using the video cameras there that would be able to show drawings to each other or give units to each other, (...), so. But sometimes it's required just to travel and meet as well. Because you can do so much over the telephone or video telephone, but sometimes you have to meet and see, be with each other and discuss a lot of things like.

After training, do the engineers have to travel to see clients on site? Or do they stay at the central office most or all of the time?
Well, we get the feedback from the clients, (...) so. And sometimes we ring clients or like yesterday we spoke with the people in our office in America because we had some feedback, because this is a relatively new microscope, and obviously there's a lot of feedback, (...), a lot of requests or proposal for change, improvement obviously. And yesterday they were talking to the office in America because they had some positive feedback and some proposal for improvements. But no they don't have to travel to meet customers, but they talk to them over telephone or e-mail exchange.

**OK. Do engineers in Ireland work with Moscow or America all the time?**

Well, they work with Moscow all the time because that's where the head office is and that's where most of the R&D is being done, (...) like. So we'd be in the request to do particular say units of a microscope, (...). Or sometimes we would be asked to do a full microscope like this one, (...). But again, (...), it still requires work and cooperation with the head office groups as well. Like as you imagine, there's a lot of work in that (...), so. There's like mechanical work, there's work in electronics, they'll work in the software programme. So that's all required time by time obviously, work in cooperation.

**What are the main types of communication that your Irish team uses?**

E-mails or telephone or Skype. In form of teleconference, yeah. That's what you hear, they're doing now.

**Do they do this on a daily basis?**

Several times a week presumably, (...). Maybe not every day but several times a week, (...).

**So there is a good deal of remote working, right?**

Yes, yes. No, it’ll be say, like as I said, there are many, many projects being done. And a lot of time we’re just asked to do a particular job (...), which we do but we also have to work with the head office and even though once we achieve something, we have to kind of report back and say, that's our proposal, that's our design, they may say “oh we want to do this, or change this, and this.” It's all standard to us.

**And do they, you and your associates use Blackberries?**

We do iPhones. It's a good thing like, (...). And as I said, our company is very pro-Apple style like. So, and that's why we kind of, and we try to design like that because we think it's a very, the best design teams like they are, and they're very cool design. Not a, (...), you see microscope, or Microsoft, sorry, and you see Microsoft box, it's all different logos and different things and everything else. And all the sudden you have Apple style, and very aesthetic, very few anything, it's just like... Yeah, clean and neat. Yeah, that’s what we like, that's what we try to achieve in our microscopes.

**Yeah, it has an Apple feel to it.**

Yeah, and that's why we kind of, we like that type of design. And we can even see that they, with this new microscope, you’re able to kind of, not kill, but overcome a lot of our suppliers, competitors. And (...), we launch it last December in Boston at the exhibition. Then last March when we were in Salt Lake City, there was another big exhibition, and we were able to even get more clients in. And we even see now that our competitors are actually, do (...), behind our backs now, they are, some of them, one of them came up with the similar type of design. As I said, originally, all the microscopes were very functional and open. So we forced to come up, well almost forced, (...), to come up with the microscope, which is everything inside and you have a nice outside design. So now we see one of our competitors coming up with the same functional design of microscope, and even they actually started using Mac computers.
Oh OK. Well, do you think that scientists value the design?

Well, it is not that much, but it plays some, (...), when you have two similar type of microscopes doing probably similar type of work and similar specification, and one of them is ugly looking, one of them is good looking, so the good looking obviously have more chances to win if you – [phone rings] sorry, hello? Hello? OK. Sorry. So the good looking is obviously have more chances. Because the competition is very strong and a lot of devices almost have similar parameters and so you have to have some additional things helping (...). That's first. And the second thing, these devices are kind of low to medium class of devices. Not very high-tech and very expensive devices, but for, this device can be used for training students, for example, teach students, or for some kind of a middle class of research. So and we think these people are being influenced by the good design as well. So those like serious researchers who are buying very expensive devices for very deep precision research, they might not as much concern about the beauty. But say for students, for teachers, I think that is very kind of a big, adding up big value to it.

And about the iPhones, do all employees have an iPhone?

Not all would, some.

What about the engineers?

No engineers, they don't need it like as much, (...). I mean I need it like because for travel, (...), so I have a lot of meetings obviously. And it's been as (...), it's synchronised with your computer, with your outlook, so you have all the e-mail exchange can be done through it. Like, (...), you have a lot of the meetings, you have the notifications of daily meetings and those like, like today I'm meeting with you and so on, like you can have it on the screen as well.

Yeah. Do you have any type of personal discipline? You said sometimes you go home and you still have to do some work. But (...), with iPhone, minus six hours in America, plus six hours in Moscow, you could see yourself e-mailing and calling at midnight oftentimes. Do you have any way of limiting that?

No, if I need to do something, I have to do something. Sometimes I have a quiet day, sometimes I have to do very, a lot of work so it's just in and out all the time.

In terms of stress, how would you describe your work?

Just varies like, (...), so. We try to have very kind of positive environment here in the company regarding this one so we don't have, we kind of give a lot of, kind of, how do you explain it, we prefer that people work on their own initiative, so we kind of give them a lot of freedom, (...), so it's not that – everyone is in charge of a particular area so we kind of suggest that people would be kind of, kind of, not to tell them every day and every hour what to do like. They know what to do and they work on their initiative so they have more freedoms so not, we don't have that much supervision over them. I mean, they have a task to do but nobody's actually sitting behind them and watching what they do today and tomorrow.

So, and that's kind of, the same time, we get a much better outcome out of that, people not being stressed and they like the work they do. And that provides a very kind of nice, a good environment in the company. Nobody's on the, well, there are obviously deadlines to do and so like, (...), but at the same time people are given a lot of freedom and they like to work. So if they have to stay later, they stay themselves, like nobody tells them "oh, you have to stay another hour to do that work." So they know they have to.

In your field, is it possible to work from home? Could your tea be able to develop some research at home?
No, no, well, it's not very practical like so. A lot of work, it's done as a teamwork, (...) so. People being outside, home, they kind of basically break communication. I know you have all this modern technology, but still if you work in a part of a team, you're much better to do that work.

And the nineteen staff, do they live nearby?

Yeah, they're all local here, in Limerick. So yeah, I have to ring, I think I have a missed here. Can I break for a few minutes, yeah?

Oh yeah, of course. (PAUSE of few minutes – interviewee leaves the room while speaking in Russian over the mobile phone).

But SPM is Scanning Probe Microscope, the one union word, which kind of a cover as an umbrella for different type of probe microscope. If you Google it, you can get an explanation.

My colleagues in the computer science department, they're from the IDC, Interactive Design Centre. They're very much into the design of new technologies and interaction between humans and new technologies. Would you mind if I keep this?

Yeah.

OK, thank you. So all this information is going to be shared only within my team. We're five people only. There are two PhD students, I am a post-doctoral research fellow, and two professors. So this information is going to be shared only within the five of us. And then when we will deposit the transcript in the library, it's going to be without identifying your company, OK?

Yeah, OK. And without my name as well, is it?

No, I mean, I can remove everything, because Denis ...

Well, Denis is OK like. I mean without the surname.

Oh, no family name or no company, we remove all that. Also, I can give you a copy of this interview. I can send you a link and you download it privately.

Very good.

OK. So we're heading towards the end. I know you're very busy. In terms women and men, do you have many female engineers working here, globally or in Ireland?

Well, in Ireland we have one engineer, but we have a lot of women in the admin department, so we are about 50 per cent women here working in Ireland. In the engineers, only one. But in Russia, there's a lot of, well, not a lot but there are good percentage of engineers, women, and a lot of them working in marketing, (...), admin department again.

But not on R&D?

Yeah, there are some of them are researchers. Yeah, some of them are scientists from R&D. They don't, (...), we do not distinguish between men anymore. We just, we are always kind of looking for the best people, (...), so. The gender is the secondary obviously so it's not kind of important like, (...) so. Because I mean it is not important at all like, (...), so it's basically if this person is good, we'll take them, if not ...
So when you open a job announcement here, do you get many applications from women?

Very few. We actually, we just, I mean even if you look at the percentage wise in the educational level, (...), there are less women engineers going to college, (...), for that particular area, (...), so. No, we just look, who are the better, the best one. (...), down to this way, at the time we were employing the first engineer, the guy who is actually now the head of the engineering and R&D department here, there was actually a lady as well applied for the position. And at the time, we chose her. And then we offered her the position, and she actually did not accept, so. And then we interviewed more people, and then we found another guy. So, I mean, so it, do (...), it wasn't even down, that one, at the beginning when we were actually starting and choosing the first engineer, we actually liked the lady. She was very good educated and good, (...), everything around. So and but unfortunately she decided, I think she came out saying she was up for a better position with someone else. So, that's fine, (...), that's life. And then we found someone else and I don't think he's sorry now. He's actually leading a team of seven, eight engineers now.

OK, about your clients. I see that your company has a care for design, like the Apple-style design. Would this be associated with more researchers being women, and preferring a certain type of style that men wouldn't typically care about?

No, no it just, no it wouldn't be doing it that way, no. Historically again, (...), especially in the states, all the researchers, all the kind of academic staff, were using Apple, Mac. It's from a time when Mac was very kind of a luxury thing. They were always expensive computers, and then also they were always associated with the high-level expensive people, and kind of a little bit on the posh level, say and luxury. And that's why all the academic staff, do (...), all the professors, (...), they like to have Apple computers like.

So high definition of images, right? Graphic design.

Yes, yes, yes. Not because they're woman or man, but because of the academic staff like these computers. And that's where one of targets was, to target academic staff and to show that we are into their level, (...), and we have devices specially for them. Not because, do (...), it's more beauty looking to target women? No. Just targeted general like.

And the design of the machines, is the marketing department involved in that?

No, our engineers. They, that's their style (...), so they, do (...), they're educated for the design, for manufacturing, and design for, aesthetical design, (...), so. I mean it's, design engineers, that's what the positions are (...), so. That's their speciality, (...) so. The way it's been done, they do a lot of sketches like a first-time hand, (...), and do a lot of sketches and general lines of how they imagine this equipment would be. And then only after (...), they start getting down to they mechanical thing, like how to feed that into the, whatever they design. And so, and then they start putting in the special mechanical software and so on, (...), so. But no, it's engineers who do the design.

I forgot to ask you: do you have your own family? Do you live ...

Yeah, yeah, obviously, yeah.

So your wife, you have wife and kids?

Yeah.

And can you tell me a bit about your family life? What you do in your leisure time? What does she do? What your kids do?
Well, generally just working, playing not too much. As kind of a, sometimes as we do, obviously with the type of work I have, maybe not always have a lot of time. So I’m not working from 8 to 5 like, (...) 5 o’clock and then go home, enjoy life so. I do, (...), because I’m in charge of the company, I have to, do (...), do a lot of extra work and stuff. Just, nothing special, (...), like we travel sometimes, we play, (...), just general.

**Does your wife work?**

She works, yeah, my wife.

**What's her career?**

Oh, she’s in the health area. She does work herself.

**So how do you two manage your children?**

Oh, they go to creche. My wife is obviously finishing early and I mean, more general hours, and she will collect from the creche. And that’s it like.

**What age are your kids?**

It’s only one son like I have, a 3-year-old.

**Do you live far from here?**

No, just locally. Casteltroy area.

**And then weekends, what do you do? You and your wife? You have to clean the house or go have some leisure?**

Well it depends on the times. It could be different. It could be anything. (silence)

**In terms of society, the knowledge economy right? And you've been here for eleven years in Ireland overall. What big transformations you've seen in the high-tech sector or in the knowledge economy?**

Well, as (...) yourself, (...), you read probably newspapers, a lot of companies are pulling out of Ireland. I don’t know, hard to comment like on this. It’s first of all, (...). Some industry come in (...) originally ten, fifteen years ago, there’s a lot of computer companies moving into Ireland. Now these days, they all move forward to Eastern Europe or Asia. But there’s some new companies coming in different areas now like I know, as for instance, now there’s a lot of biology research being done now and the companies in biology are coming up to Ireland, but not as much as before. And generally, I don’t know, you see yourself, so many companies in the current climate closing down. I don’t know, there’s something government has to do about that like.

**In terms of work style, had these new technologies like iPhone, laptop, Internet, any significant impact in your work? Or you feel the same way?**

Well, it’s help you, like I know, you would imagine, (...). Now these days, it doesn’t really matter. I mean the modern technology, (...), it does a little bit for us for example. But we generally, if you have just standard ordinary company, they’re manufacturing or, do (...), sales company, you don’t really care where you’re located (...), with all modern technology. Because a lot of work, a lot of business being done over the Internet (...). All the purchase sales can be done over the Internet, e-mails, (...), faxes, even less faxes but mostly e-mails now (...), so. That’s why you can even be somewhere in the middle of nowhere (...), just in the country side and can work.
We just like to be associated because it's a big thing, (...), National Technology Park, it's kind of a, it's a good name, (...), as well, high-tech companies being here. And obviously we are part of the high-technology as well. Do (...), it's a good thing for just marketing point, as well as close by with the University of Limerick, if we ever need to do any R&D work with the help of UL, that's kind of can help as well, (...). Though we actually currently are doing more work with the Trinity College, (...), than UL. Just, as I said, that's for us, that's our reason to be here. But generally, they're not as big, not a big reason. We as well just located somewhere in the counties area, whichever, the countryside.

Or, would it help to be located in Dublin?

Doesn't matter really, like. Located in North or in Mayo or Cork, any place really. Because, well, we prefer to be close, it's a little bit hard, there's a little bit help like and obviously we have a lot of suppliers near by because it's more established area here. Same as would be Dublin, (...). Though if you move to Mayo area, it would be less, but doesn't make any difference.

And also, close proximity of the Shannon Airport, which we use, because (...), we are the logistic operation, doing a lot of logistics here, as in buying third-part components or shipping a microscope from here. So obviously, that's a big kind of plus for us (...), we have a close by airport. And a lot of logistic companies operate from Shannon and it's been used to connect in Europe and America, and do (...), this one. But it's all kind of additional pluses, but the, even if you'd be based somewhere, do (...), in the country far away from all these things, if you have Internet there and that's it like, (...). Could develop from there, well, may be a little bit harder.

So, to be located in the park is a convenience, it's a nice convenience, but it's not fundamental?...

Well, I mean, it's, yeah, it's, yeah, it's not fundamental but it's a part of a style (...). If you distinguish yourself as kind of a high-tech company, and (...), good company, you have to have a good location and good name. You have to associate being, it's like, (...), if, good managers, they all have to have a good technology equipment, they might have to dress properly, so (...), it's kind of a convenience. It's a part of the, do (...), presentation park, that's fortunate that a lot of people are actually making a decision on you based on how you look like, (...). Saying, “where are you located?” A lot of, not all, but a lot of people would still (...) make a contribution to that, (...), if you're located in the technology park or if you're located somewhere in the very cheap industrial place, (...), so. They may see who you're surrounding with, (...) so.

Exactly. Do you connect with other companies here in the park?

Well, time by time we do occasional work with someone, not as much, no. We're quite stand alone (...) so.

Informally? Like do you connect with them informally, like, out of work, networks, events, cocktails, or events like that?

Well, as a part of the technology park company, time by time we've been called by Shannon Development to the innovation works centre where they have some say Christmas parties or just, (...), small lunch, research and stuff like that, yeah. Like me, personally, be a number of times asked by Shannon Development or someone else to help with the kind of translation wise, (...), so. If there are some visitors from Russia, like business companies which have been visiting here, the area, that they will ask me just as a translator or just kind of show that we also have kind of a Russian-original company here as well kind of (inaudible).

Finally, improvement. If you could improve your work practise or the company or the technology park or Ireland, I mean, what's your top priority to improve? Anything work or business related.

Well, first of all the government kind of has to look into how to help companies now, I mean, as (...), there's a lot of strain already with the current crisis put on businesses. And increasing taxes doesn't make it any better for that.
I mean, I know the government has to kind of drive, get some kind of a hold on, do (...), get the revenue to spend on, (...). But by increasing taxes, they increase the strain on the company, which many of them already kind of under the big pressure, so that's what would drive possibly more companies out of the, or out of Ireland, (...), as originally understand the most companies came here because it was an attractive package like, (...), done by Ireland and a number of areas. That's how a lot of business came here. So by, just solving a short term kind of issue, I don't think government look in too much into long term relation, and the long term, it's company will just pulling out, and then they have less revenue, and then we'll go in a loop, (...).

That's what I personally, myself think. That's how like twenty years ago, the Celtic Tiger started, (...). So that's the, they significantly decreased taxes for companies and offered them a lot of attractive packages, (...), so that's how many initial companies came here, (...). They're doing it different now.

Yeah, but then the cost of living in Ireland went up, so the salaries went up, and now this is why some companies are moving out to cheaper countries, right? So the strategy now is to focus on added value, and highly skilled activities. As you were saying now, to produce these machines, it's not anyone, you have to have a scientific background to produce.

But putting more tax on the company wouldn't help, and again, like Ireland is not the only one, (...), far not the only one, so there's a whole Eastern Europe, or say Russia, (...). Russia has much more educational, scientific, much better scientific background than Ireland has, and the cost of living much lower there and the salaries much lower there, (...). And the Russian scientists are being followed worldwide (...), you look at any university in any country and you will see a Russian scientist there, (...). That shows how good, (...), they are, (...). OK, Russia had maybe bad time economically wise, bad times, but the level of education is much higher.

So by doing increasing strength in the company, Ireland not helping any so. Like they're much more educational force with the low pay like. And (...) countries like, (...), Poland, Czech Republic, all the countries, they're all quite established countries like Russia like and the cost of living is much lower there, so by just saying "oh we have good engineers here and OK, we'll just drive all the low-force companies out of here, but all the high-tech companies stay here," that’s I think is fooling around, (...). I think it's not the right decision. There are many other options for this high-tech company to (inaudible).

Yeah, I was thinking about this last night. Why did your company open a branch in Ireland, and not in Finland or Israel?

Well, there's a number of reasons, there was like, (...), first of all, this was an attractive package. (...), doing the R&D, so Ireland had at the time, well they change a lot of now, I don't know, is it better, but they change it. But at the time, I know, there was a number of reasons, a number of, as I said, the precision engineers company quite good around here, we have attractive R&D package, (...), low tax obviously on the profit, logistic help here. So a number of reasons. They could probably pick out some other country, but they decided to stay with Ireland, which is good for us like who are working here.

They obviously were considering some other options but, they decided to stick here, (...). But as I said, it wasn't the only option, they could as well stay in Britain, (...), which is good. Or some other places, (...), so, OK, they decided to stay here where the level of technology is much higher, (...), because historically Britain, there's a lot of companies in Britain, high-tech companies, originally from Britain, (...), and historically they'd be located in there. So Britain would probably be even better, more attractive for [foreign nano microscope firm] to have an office there, but I mean, just the decision was made on Ireland.

I think the costs and taxation in the U.K. are relatively higher.

Yeah, but now we see in like in Ireland, (...), this, if they try and to get more revenue and increasing tax. I think, as I said, they're just going on their own end, just trying to sort out the short-term problem, they're actually making
it worse for the long-term (...). So companies will be moving. Instead of trying to get more companies into Ireland, and by that increase the revenue because more companies, more tax will come into the government. So they just try and to put more taxes on people to, or companies to generate revenue so.

**OK, Denis. Is there any topic that I didn't ask you about that you'd like to talk?**

No, that's pretty much everything.

**Yeah, OK. Yeah, we basically covered all the topics. I really appreciate your time, Denis.**
INTERVIEW 9
Nomadic Work/Life in the Knowledge Economy - UL

Anthony interviews Simon (Marketing Consultant, and Marketing Director of [software platform developer firm])
- 30 April 2009

Usually phone interviews end up being shorter than in-person interviews. My first question to you is, if you could describe a little bit about yourself, actually repeating a little bit of what you said to me before, about being a consultant with multiple business projects?

Yeah, OK, let me just, somebody has put up a Skype message to me here, so I just want to get rid of that – for the next hour here. Grand. Right, what I was saying to you is that I, you made reference to IT, technologies or something like that, but I just wanted to clarify, I'm a consultant, my background's in marketing and sales and that sort of thing.

I work for [software platform developer firm], which is probably my principal client and I'm the director of that company, but I also work for other companies. So about half my time goes to [software platform developer firm], and half to others. And I was mentioning that just so that, if there was some misunderstanding that I was a full-time employee of [software platform developer firm], not the case.

OK, can you mention what sectors are the other companies?

Yeah, sure. One is, they're all high-technology within their sectors. One is in sludge handling, sludge destruction. The other is in controlled environments, that's clean rooms, containment booths, that sort of an area. The other is in the area of forestry, funny enough. But it's, you know, it's software in that area.

So actually, listening to you, I think we can focus more on you rather than on [software platform developer firm]. I haven't interviewed anyone like you who splits times across different projects. Maybe if you can explain to me like how you came up to being involved in different projects at the same time and, for how many years have you been doing this in relation to [software platform developer firm], and then to the other companies you've been working for.

OK, let me think. OK, probably the best thing to do is to take a step backwards and say to you that I'm probably typical of people in my age group in that I, you know, I did school here and the university and immediately went overseas. I went to Germany and I worked for RJ Reynolds, a tobacco company, and gained a lot of experience. RJ Reynolds at the time was the fifty-second largest company in the world, and they put me through a training, a sort of marketing, sales training thing over eighteen months there. And then I worked for the company for another couple of years. And then I went to work for Nobel Consumer Goods, which was part of Nobel Dynamite at the time. It's now Axel-Nobel.

And from there, there was a very active head-hunting business at the time. I don't know whether it still is, but certainly at that time, you know, we were being constantly called about these, about jobs and a really interesting one came up for a company called Nike, which I didn't even know of at the time. It was a very small company. It was looking for people who would be Europeans who would go to the states being Nike-ised, was the phrase they were using, and then come back and work for Nike in Europe, but they wanted the natives working in Europe. And so I jumped at that job, and that ultimately led me to be in the states and then back, work for Nike in Europe.
And then a job came up in Ireland, and it was the first time I contemplated returning to Ireland. Funny enough, my brother who's working in Saudi Arabia at the time sent me this ad from a company called Dubarry Shoes up in Galway. And, you know, I took a look at the ad and it was fairly obvious that given my experience that I might fit that, what they were looking for. And I did, so that brought me back to Ireland. However, I wound up in a big problem because I was used to, you know, the smallest company I'd worked for, Nike at that time had hit the three-billion dollar mark. When I started it was about 800 million, you know, so it was, by American standards, pretty small. But all that said, you know I'd worked for very, very large companies.

So I came back and I had great difficulty dealing with the Irish psyche, which amounted to, you know, "well, look we've got ourselves six-cylinder cars now, so we don't really need to do much more. Let's just enjoy it." And so the imperative to grow wasn't apparent, you know. I took it for granted, I must say now at this stage of my life. You know, I do wonder about the imperative for growth beyond a certain point. And so, I basically found myself unable to work for that company, just there wasn't enough action and dynamism and growth, and so on. So, I made a decision and it was forced upon me as well because they couldn't work with me either.

So I came back to where I live which is in West Cork, or where I was born, I guess I should say. And then, and I had to do something at this stage. I had to develop a business and swiftly. So I sat down, and I thought about, you know, well look, I've got a lot of experience in marketing and sales and that sort of thing, and to be honest I thought people would sort of drop on one knee and rush to hire me. That wasn't the case. And so over time, I evolved an outsourced marketing management model that worked pretty well.

Essentially, I'd go to companies, I'd assess their marketing capabilities and their knowledge. I would, in any individual company, I'd look at, you know, at what it had and what it knew, and I'd augment that or fill the gaps, if you will, do sort of gap analysis, fill that, put structure on its marketing process, i.e. product development, insuring that the products are correctly priced, particularly if they were exporting, look at how they were doing their sort of order taking, and handling. And order taking was just beginning at that time. People were looking at things like Web and e-mail, that sort of stuff. Nobody was leaping at it, I have to say. And then we'd look to things like sort of the promotional element of the marketing mix. And very often people were coming to me looking for, you know, basically, they entirely misunderstood the meaning of marketing, so they'd come looking for a brochure or a press release or something like that, or even (inaudible). And it was, I found it worthwhile to stand, to get them to stand back and say, look, if we're advertising and promotion, that sort of stuff, you know, that will be a flick of the wrist if you've done the proper job of marketing, which is to understand your market, adopt a position in it that is, you know, is sort of a competitive position, and work at sustaining that position and developing it. And so, that sort of weed out – the people who could understand what I was talking about, who were more ambitious companies and people worked with me.

So I did that for about, I don't know, I've done it since then really. And the only thing that's changed was that for about five or six years, I imagine, I did the execution of everything. In other words, I set up a company that was effectively an outsourced marketing department, so we would place ads for people, we would do press releases for them, all that sort of stuff that centred around marketing communications. We would do market research for people. I mean, literally ring up, you know, do the, as the field research, do what you're doing right now. The actual gathering of raw data, the analysis of it, and so on. We would go to trade shows to do research for people.

But what was happening was, in the good times, companies were yelling and screaming, you know, for results and wanting this, that and the other. In the bad times, people didn't want work done, but I still had, you know, three people working for me that I had to keep busy, so what I found was that I was going out, you know, finding work for them and not necessarily paying myself. So over time, I cut that back down so it was just me. And in other words, you know, became a pure consultant as opposed to an outsourced resource. And that's what worked, it worked reasonably well.

I did one other thing that was turned out to be clever in retrospect, which was I got a job with Kompass. Kompass is a business directory, and I was covering the Munster region. And that gave me an opportunity by the by to,
while I was out selling to all these manufacturing companies mainly, to see the lie of the land in Munster and to work out that in fact, there are very few ambitious companies out there.

So that caused me to refine my thinking even further to say, you know, I would talk to companies, but if I didn't get the sense, when I'd go out selling myself, if I didn't immediately get the sense that they were very ambitious or at least ambitious companies, then I wouldn't go up to them. So you'd get signals very quickly. You know, guys would say, “well, you know, I have the daughter working in the business, and she's in finance, and then I have the young fellow and I'm bringing him on,” and you know, you hear “I want this company to be able to afford to pay my family a decent wage.” Outsiders are number two by a long, long shot. That's not an ambitious company, you know?

Yeah, given this that you told me, I have two specific questions. You didn't feel like returning to the corporate track when you came back to Ireland and decided that you were too ambitious for …

Oh, I tried. I tried, but the, the situation at Dubarry Shoes, I found really traumatic. I was simply unable to understand or accept that, you know, you had – I wanted the company to go over and buy Church Shoes in England, you know, I had ambitious ideas for this company. I wanted to get salespeople who weren't, what you would term bag openers, guys who go in and say, “look, I got a new thing here at 19.99 and that you might like to look at,” when our mean price was 59.99 and we're trying to sell, you know, 99.99 shoes. And the Nike way to do things, actually can I just interrupt you for one second? I just need to grab myself a bar of chocolate.

**OK, that's fine. (time). Hello? Are you there?**

Sorry, Anthony.

**No problem.**

I have diabetes, so.

**OK, no problem, Simon. Yeah, so you were talking ...**

So I did, I did try to get jobs.

All right, but I mean you didn't feel like travelling again overseas, moving back to America or going to continental Europe?

No, I wasn't prepared to contemplate that again. I tried to get work here in Ireland, but this, this was in the, in the early '90s and there wasn't, A, there wasn't much work about and I think I completely undermined myself, you know, I believe that my, it's hard to look back on it, because you know, I was there at the time, so it's hard to analyse it, but I think my confidence was shattered by, you know, I couldn't, for a long time afterwards, I couldn't say I, I could only say we. You know, I could only see myself as a corporate animal. It took me a long time to get out of that.

**OK, the second question that follows up on that, how did you move from marketing, consultancy into high-tech projects?**

Because the activity level is low. It was a deliberate move. If I tried to stay in FMCG, fast-moving consumer goods, they're the, the level of activity in a marketing department within the marketing communications end of it is very high. Whereas if you go to business to business companies, the level's quite low. In other words, they tend to treat a major customer as a market of one, and will research that customer and understand it very well. And I knew how to do that. Sorry for the eating, but.
No problem. So your college degree is in business?

Yeah, I did a bachelor of commerce in Cork, and as I say, then I got this job at RJ Reynolds, but I was lucky because I was working as a yacht, at the time it was called, as a yacht skipper for a guy called Richard Fenolds. He was the boss of Guinness-Mahon Bank in London. So, when I said to him just in passing, “oh by the way, I got a job offer from, or an interview offer anyway, from a company called RJ Reynolds,” he just said, “do you know who RJ Reynolds is?” And no, I hadn't a clue. And he said, “well, next weekend, you come back up with me to the office, and I'm going to have somebody brief you.” So I was brought up to London, brought into the bank and briefed about RJ Reynolds, so when I went to the interview, I knew a lot more about RJ Reynolds than the people interviewing me.

I know what that experience is sometimes. So, still about yourself, can you tell me a little bit about your family life, your family structure, and how you guys organise your time and tasks?

Well, at the, OK, let me just think, when the last job I had overseas was working for Nike, in Beaverton, in Oregon, and there my first wife and I, who also was a senior person in McCann Ericson at the time, we tried and weren't able to have a baby. So when we went to Oregon, we set about adopting, and went through various option and eventually came to the conclusion that to go to an adoption lawyer was the best and most direct method of dealing with the thing. And we did, and we adopted Una, and immediately, literally, she was born on a Wednesday, and we were pregnant on the Saturday, so it was the usual story, you know, as soon as you adopt, it seems to release the barrier if you will. And that meant that we had two small babies, and living in Oregon which was miles from either set of parents. So, we made a decision to move back, and moving back to Germany just wasn't an option, so we moved back to Germany. And I got a job with Nike Germany as a sales rep. And, sorry about the sound but, and I dealt with key account sales in Bavaria and (inaudible). And, I should say, from all this working in Germany, you know, I can speak German.

So, you knew German before going to Germany, or you learned it because of your job?

I learned it at school, and then I went to school in Germany for a semester and then learned it again in university. So I was reasonably OK. In total, I worked there for five years before I went to the states. So, quite honestly, you know, the average German wouldn't know I'm not a German. They wouldn't hear it.

So your wife, at that time, how were you guys travelling together? Who moved with whom to Oregon and then back?

What happened was by then she had, for all sorts of reasons, reduced her work to three days a week for McCann Ericson. And so when I went to the states, she decided to follow, and what she did was she quit but kept on as sort of consultant to do a job here and a job there. And did so for McCann in New York. Now, in effect, that meant I had about six months in Oregon on my own with just visits. When we came back to Germany, really I had to just concentrate on selling. So when people ask you about Skype out calls, but won't ask you about the quality of Skype calls.

Yeah, so and also, so you said your first wife, so you got married later on?

Yeah, well, I got married in Germany, I don't know how many years ago, fifteen, sixteen years ago. And, seventeen years ago I guess, more, 1988, that's twenty years ago, now. And yeah, we had two kids, but what I was saying to you was that in effect, once we had children, she focused on that and I focused on work more.

OK. So your current family situation, you have a second wife, right?

Yeah. Cornelia and I got divorced and she lives nearby and has the kids. And my second wife also has two kids and lives here with me and with her two boys. So in effect, we have four kids fairly close here.
Could you elaborate a little bit about your current family life? How you organise your time, your chores and what she does?

OK, well, so my second wife is a hair dresser. She works, you know, Wednesdays through Saturdays. And in the busier season, we live in Schull in West Cork, so it's sort of a holiday place, so it's much busier in the summer than it is in the winter. And I work from home and try to focus my travel. I try not to travel every day if I can. And instead to do trips that would be more rational if I can manage it. So I might go to Limerick, but come home via Cork, if you follow what I'm saying. So do it so that’d be a triangular trip, a triangle, you know, geography. And so I try to make it that I'm either working from home or travelling. And if I'm travelling, I take my work with me if I can at all. So I might, say work a Tuesday in Limerick, sorry on a Tuesday in Limerick, have meetings there, stay Tuesday night, work Wednesday in the hotel or in the office, and work come on down to Cork maybe late on Wednesday or on Thursday morning, you know? That sort of approach to it.

OK, I see, you plan your travelling as you go out.

Yeah, I try to treat myself as sort of a business in itself and do that as efficiently as I can.

Yeah, it's still a bit unclear to me how you got involved with [software platform developer firm] for example.

Pure chance. I'm laughing because in retrospect, it's amazing how involved I did get. I told you that I got a job as a rep for Kompass, Kompass Ireland which is this business directory, K-O-M-P-A-S-S. And that took me up to, you know, I knew sort of business around Cork fairly well because, you know, from West Cork to Cork is sort of natural, a natural inclination if you will. And I hadn't done much work up in Limerick or Shannon, but one of the companies that I went to visit was [software platform developer firm], and for some reason or another, I was ushered up to meet the managing director, which wasn't always the case. And it turns out afterwards, he thought I was somebody else sent from somewhere else to do something else. And we just got chatting because, obviously one advantage that I had when talking to customers as the Kompass sales rep was that I probably had a bit more experience than your typical sales rep, you know? I had run my own company and been involved in big companies. And so, we were able to empathise pretty easily and pretty quickly. And Robert, you know, described some day-to-day issues that he was facing, and I had a point of view about them and one thing led to another, and you know, he, even while I was working for Kompass, that was only a part-time job. So it was easy enough for me to say, “well, look, you know, I could put my thoughts together in the form of a proposal to support you in a particular area being strategy development and market-led strategy in particular,” and he said yes. And that led on to me doing a lot of work for [software platform developer firm], and eventually the opportunity came up to buy into the company, and I did. And that's where I am now.

All right, yeah. I see a section on the website where there is a VP of sales in America, and you are VP of marketing in Europe.

Yeah.

So, you don't do sales, whereas the VP of sales does sales?

Well, you know, those are titles, so I do, a lot of our selling would be this selling to markets of one, so you know, we sell to one of the biggest companies in Ireland, and naturally, that's, you know, you need to know a lot about that company and how it works and where it's going. But more importantly, we need to know a lot about our customers' markets. So one area that we've dealt in is avionics, and of necessity, I know a lot about avionics and the aviation industry because there's not much point in us dealing with just one company in a given sector. You know, we have to invest so much into understanding that company and its markets that it's worth our while to keep going, keep digging in that particular field, if you will. So what I do in a lot of these cases is to say we're into solar, the solar cell market, so I investigate that. We're into the education market, I investigate that and brief the
others, which makes it easier for them then to go to other potential customers in those sectors and to
demonstrate corporate knowledge about those sectors.

OK, yeah. Yeah, you were saying you spend about half your time with [software platform developer firm]. And as far as I understand here, that company sells supply chain and innovation systems software. Is this correct?

No. It’s interesting to hear what you just said. Say how you described it again? Because I need to learn something here.

Now, this is what I got from reading your website, that you work with innovation support and supply chain services. And what I understood from this is that you develop software that are used by these clients. And you said it’s not that.

No.

Because I can see supply chain as being a central element in corporate strategy, right? In defining the segments that provide the highest profitability, right? And you are a strategy marketing person, so ...

Yeah, well your analysis, if we followed it, would probably make the company more successful than it is. But we haven't got there yet. So what we're doing is, you're correct. We're developing software, a business process platform, on which companies can base their product development and supply chain activities. So ultimately you might say, Anthony, yourself come up with an idea that requires electronic hardware, so you might develop, you know, a new sort of mobile phone or something like that, and come along and say, “look, I'm good at the software and I need the hardware. Can you do the hardware for us?” And we would then look at it and say, “OK, well what we'll do is we'll develop a product like this, we'll as it were, contain or carry the software for you, and we'll manufacture it and get it delivered to wherever you want it delivered.” So that would be our approach to somebody who was, say, a software specialist.

We also come across companies, which are marketing specialists and they might take the, come with the same products and say to us, “look, we found a need for a low-cost cell phone, and we have another company that's going to do the software for us, but we don't have a company that's going to do the hardware for us. We, you know, people need to be able to physically carry this thing.” And in that situation, it's just a larger construct really, where we would then say to a company like that, “OK, what we'll do is sit with you, talk to you about what you understand, we'll talk to the software people, and we'll develop a technical specification from there, and then develop a product for you,” which means, you know, that we're starting from concept and working our way through it.

But, the point that, the differentiation I'm making to you is that in the first instance we deliver a solution, which is the physical hardware, to companies. Ultimately we are also working on developing software, this business process platform, that would allow you to go to a Website to do what I've just been describing, to get an innovation solution to put together. You know, you might meet a series of questions that would help you to sort out your thinking as to what sort of a product you needed. And then we would go into sales mode and approach you and say, “OK, well we think you need this, this and this, and it's, you know, it's more about the mechanicals than it is about the electronics,” or whatever.

All right, I suppose that at this point of the sales pitch, you have to bring in your team of engineers and maybe programmers to develop a proposal to the clients.

Yeah, not programmers. It would be engineers, who would be mechanical engineers and electronic engineers, to develop the product. The line of business that relates to programming or anything like that is a separate business that's only just beginning to develop now.
It is your connection with India that I see on the website?

Yeah, that's low-cost engineers.

Oh OK, it's not the software developers or programmers.

Yeah, it's a grey area. A lot of electronics requires software to run them, but what happens is you get modules and the modules come with software. So that module will regulate temperature or something like that, but it needs to know who it's telling to regulate the temperature and where it's getting its information from. So there is software work within electronics, but it's not software in the classic meaning of a software solution.

So in a sense, the engineers that work for your company, they are consultants, right, in the field of physical structures and supply chain?

Yeah, they are, they are. The supply chain, less so. That tends to be the, we probably need for you to understand better if I divide the company into two bits. One is what we call Innovation Support Services, which is essentially product design, right? Managed design of products. And the other is called supply chain services, which is outsourced supply chain. If I take the first bit first, the managed design side of things which we call Innovation Support Services, involves in the first instance, understanding what the requirement is. In other words, developing a Technical Specification with capital T, capital S. And to do that correctly, certainly, you and I between us could work out a technical specification at a very rudimentary level, you know? It has to be a phone, you have to be able to switch it on and off, it has to have a battery, you know, this sort of thing. Will it have a screen, will it not have a screen? But to really get down to detail, we then have to pull together a team of electronic engineers, and you might have to get an RF engineer, Radio Frequency engineer. You might have to get an optics engineer. Depending on where the requirement lies, we bring together engineers who will have deeper expertise who can ask the right questions. And they then develop this technical specification. They then take the technical specification that they develop with the client, and execute it or parts of it. So it's sort of, there's a circular iterative process there, you see?

And the end of that is a prototype, and the prototype then goes into a sort of transitional area between manufacturing, between design and manufacturing. Where in the final analysis, manufacturing engineers are the best people to tell you – I'll give you an example. You know, there's this great new Bugatti car, there's only a few of them made. They cost five million to make, and they're selling them for a million pounds sterling. To change the spark plugs, they have to lift the engine out, OK? Now, you can imagine that a guy who ran a garage wouldn't design a car like that, would he? And it's the same sort of thing. Guys who run factories don't design products where people have to, you know, stand on their heads in order to reach bits, or where the hole through which they need to pass something is too small for the part to go in and out. So what you would call "stupid stuff" when you see it, but in the design, it was a brilliant solution to a difficult problem, in the design. It just needs to be developed further to make it, it's called design for assembly, design for manufactured, design for test. Right, so there are adjustments. So we go through that. Then you're into the supply chain job. And what I'm trying to make, distinguish for you here is that the people who have been working up to here tend to be consulting engineers. From here on in, you're talking about factories and employees who deal with things like, you know, sourcing components, setting up the manufacturing, managing the manufacturing, managing quality and managing logistics. So the shift in the nature of people.

Yeah, so the engineers, your staff that works with you, are they employees of [software platform developer firm] or are they freelancers?

No, they're mainly freelancers. The people that we have working for us are two types of people. One is engineers who are project managers, but they're, they've developed their skill in project management more than they've developed their skill in engineering. So they have, they have basic engineering, and very often have, you know, twenty years of experience in engineering, but they apply their energies to project managing other engineers. And
the other sort of person we have reflecting the discussion that we've just had in the past few minutes are programme managers. So where a project manager is engaged to manage change, a programme manager is engaged to manage a steady state system. He's not to change it, he's to make sure it happens the way it was, you know, done yesterday, so long as that's right. And those programme managers are very often manufacturing engineers. They've come from a manufacturing background as opposed to coming from an engineering, a design house background.

OK. Moving into the issue of mobility and connectivity. You mentioned before that you plan your travelling and that you take your work with you.

Yeah.

Can you describe, can you describe how you work on a day-to-day basis and how you move with your work and take your office with you, so to say?

Well, it's more to do with experience than anything else. When I worked for Nike, we were very mobile. Nike had e-mail back in 1988, '89, you know, before anybody heard of it. We didn't even call it e-mail then. It was called something mail, but I can't remember what. And the fact was that we would do product design work in Beaverton, but then have to go and sell our designs to the Nike, you know, to the Nike operating units in, you know, Germany, China, Australia, wherever. And so I was on a constant tour, you know, from Beaverton to Frankfurt to Hong Kong, to Beaverton to Frankfurt to Hong Kong. And it just wasn't acceptable that because you went to Frankfurt for a week, and then onto Hong Kong for another week or possibly longer than that, that stuff at your desk wasn't done. So one learned to take work along, and got good at filing and, you know, the sort of Peter Drucker thing, you know, the good executive knows where his time goes and knows where the information is. Well, that sort of a thing.

So we spent a lot of time and effort on time management, on personal productivity, and on file management and document management. And so, when I then set up my own business, I invested a lot of effort into things like Word and Excell. Now, I've been working with, I had a PC in 1986, which was one of the first IBM ones. It was about the size of a suitcase. But it meant that I, I worked with Excell when Excell was really a rip off of Lotus123, and was really basic. I mean it could do about seven or eight functions, that was it. You did what your, you know, what a girl's calculator, that sort of thing. I'm not saying anything about girls now, but you know, a pink calculator could do now, that you might have on a cheap phone. That was as much as it could do, and recognise an array obviously. And so I grew up with Excell and I grew up with Word, and I knew at a fairly fundamental level what they do and what they don't do. And that meant that I was able to – oh hang on, listen I'm going to have to get, one second now that I see, I think there might be a guy putting a horse in my field.

Would you like to take a break?

No, I think it's OK. I think it's OK. No, he's gone away, good. So, is he? I'll just have to watch him for a minute. So, the, for me it seemed, you know, I developed sort of healthy disrespect for people who, when you ask them, "well, can we make an appointment?" They say, "well, I'm not at my desk now." And you say, "well, what the hell does that got to do with making an appointment? Just pull out your diary." And so you've got a lot of people who are, and I'm getting more like that as I get older, you know, I find it easier to work, you know, it's like a dog, I suppose. You just develop habits. But what I'm trying to say to you is that, you know, it wouldn't occur to me to not be able to work, to, you know, to not be able to work wherever I was. And what I found in particular, the most valuable thing you could do is a long-haul flight, because you've got nothing else to do. I get tremendous amounts of work done. So I'd say I'm very much more productive when I'm travelling then when I'm not. Actually, that's not, sorry, my per hour productivity while I'm working is higher while I'm travelling. Obviously the fact that your travelling means that your productivity is down, you know?

Yeah, I can see your logic. It's actually that time, of travelling, that you use to work more.
Yeah, which means, which is why international travel is a boom, because you're almost always flying then, or maybe doing the train if you're in Europe. It's the people who are bound – when I only work in Ireland, which I did for a number of years, the stress level nearly killed me, I mean, literally nearly killed me. I, because I was driving, and I looked into all sorts of things, could I get a driver to drive me? Even if I could, I couldn't pay for it, but even if I could, I would have been sick in the back of the car. All this sort of stuff. I worked for a long time in Dublin, and I'd go from here early in the morning, but I had the train ride up and the train ride down. And what that meant was that if I was going up to meet you, I'm coming to meet you, you're busy doing all your stuff at your desk because you're at your desk and you're doing, you know, twenty minutes of this and ten minutes of that, and you know, a quarter of an hour of that, and a phone call, and so on. And I had three hours on the train to do absolutely nothing except think about Anthony, and to focus on the meeting. So I was extremely effective in that time. But it's the link between the travel and being able to use the travel time where you've got, there's no opportunity cost. You just, I have nothing else to do except prepare for you.

Yeah, but even so, in order to be able to carry your work with you, you need a whole technological apparatus for that, for example, you need a good battery to be able to work on a plane for longer than two hours, right?

Not if you sit (inaudible), you can plug it in.

Oh yeah, but that's business class, right?

Yeah.

And also, in order to be able to, if you're not at your desk, in order to be able to have your Blackberry and laptop operational and in front of you. So, I suppose you have these tool at your service...

And a little bit of old common sense. You know, I try hard, when I'm working effectively, which isn't all the time I'm afraid, you know, I don't look at my e-mails until midday and until 5 o'clock. Because the problem with connectivity is that there's too much of it now and you can get nothing done.

Do you have any type of discipline to check e-mails at the times that you want and not 24/7?

Well, I only, basically, it's a bit like the, you know, the manager of old. I just make myself inaccessible. I don't, my e-mails, I only get if I do send and receive. They don't come, I don't let it come in automatically. I usually have the Skype set at hidden, and actually Skype drives me nuts because, you know, I can be on the phone, and you're ringing, and it's the same presumption, that, you know, that there's a binary presumption. Either you're not answering my call or you are answering my call. The fact that there might be a third possibility, which is reflected in your message on the phone, you know, “please call me when the message is gone,” that you might be doing something else, doesn't occur to most people, particularly people who are not used to, they're not as technologically savvy, say, well as I might be. They just don't understand. I say, “well, I'm on Skype,” and they'll say, “yeah, I know but I was ringing you on the phone.” And I'll say, “yeah, but I was just on a different phone system.”

They don't get it. Anyway, the thing is that the discipline is very much based around the One-Minute Manager, you know, there's a famous book. And this manager organised his time such that he was, he would have a meeting with each of his staff in the morning on Wednesdays, which would give them time to prepare for the meeting, but it would also give them time to act on the outcome of the meeting. And I had that perfected, I must say, for a while. I finished working, while I was in Germany in one job, I'd finish work about 1 or 2 o'clock every day, spend the rest of the day wondering about.

And the people you contact with on a daily basis, are they internal to your business, or are they clients and potential clients, external?
They, on a day-to-day, well there is only me in the business as in, you know, the consulting business. Within AI, you know, I'm in contact with somebody at AI two or three times every day. I try to do it that I do a day for one client, a day for a different client, it's more effective. My argument to people is, "look, the thing is, that you do have to do stuff in twenty minute intervals. I don't if you leave me alone." So I can do that document that requires three hours of solid concentration and work. I can do the research that, you know, is done much more effectively if you continue to gather similar information from different places. Say for instance, a competitive analysis, something like that. Trying to do that, there's a learning curve in it that means you're much more effective if you keep doing it for two hours than if you do it, you know, for ten minutes a time over two days.

Yeah. Another question that I have for you related to this, in terms of stress levels, how do you compare your current lifestyle with the lifestyle you had say twenty years ago when you were a corporate person?

Oh it's a different sort of stress. It's still stressful. In the corporate world, the bit that bothered me most was the politicking. I'm very bad at it. And there were people who could run rings around me who probably weren't half as intelligent but just had a different sort of intelligence, and would spend their time, you know, progressing their careers by way of, you know, I don't know, lushing up to people and positioning themselves and spinning what was being said and not being said. Whereas now, my stress – so there was a stress level associated with being within an organisation. I'm just not very good on, you know, the emotional, the EQ, emotional quotient intelligence, I don't have much of it. So I find it difficult to deal with groups of people and so on.

And then, in the sort of second phase, which is when I first set up the business and ran it as an outsourced marketing department, the problem was the sheer volume of work, you know? It's ridiculous to say that the business was too successful, but in effect, I probably wasn't charging enough and I was getting too much demand. My, you know, what you call demand management wasn't good. I should've scared away some work.

OK, that was the second stage, but now you are in the third stage of your career.

Yeah, and my ...

Hello? Oh I lost you for a short while. Could you repeat the last twenty seconds, please?

Yeah, sure. I'd say my stress levels now are very low, you know? There's stress associated with particular problems, but there isn't that background noise stress, this ongoing worry and anxiety that comes out of just having too much on the plate all the time, or comes from continued confusion. The continued confusion would be related to the politicking in big organisations. And funny enough, I mean, I can see it within my client organisations. I'm sort of able to blithely walk in and out and not worry about this. And you can sense that there's a mood, you know, people are upset about this or that or the other, or they're all talking about such and such, and you say, "yeah, yeah." And the fact that I don't know about it doesn't seem to do any harm, and it releases me from a lot of, you know, listening to rubbish really.

But the fact that now you can work from home and somehow control your own time, or your office time. You see that as a bonus or as negative, in relation to a 9 to 5 office?

Oh, it's a bonus. It's, the determinate of my productivity now is me, so the only battle is with me and my laziness or tendency to just get distracted. But for somebody like me who's, you know, and I like people and I like meeting people and all that sort of stuff, but I'm just not particularly effective in a group situation. I'm better as sort of a lone warrior. It's the ideal way to do things.

And how do you... Hello? Hello? Oh, I lost you again. Are you there?

Yeah, yeah, there was a gap there. Skype always deteriorates after a time, so. Anyway, shoot, say again?
I was going to ask you about how do you manage your time by working at home with your family life and domestic chores?

Oh yeah, it's way less of a problem than people make out. I mean, obviously, you know, you have to have a separate room, and ideally, I mean, in my case, the way it works is that first of all, the house is large, that's just some good luck. But the room in which, from which I am speaking to you now, is you've got to walk through a drawing room to get to it from the hallway. So I'm at a suitable remove from day-to-day life. The children all go to school. My wife works, and even when, on the days, Mondays and Tuesdays when she doesn't work, you know, she's pottering about the house, but, you know, she goes running or she goes swimming or whatever, you know. I'm not necessarily being distracted too much. And I've got good at, you know, when people come, the problem with living in a holiday village is that the people who are here during the summer have nothing to do except be on holiday while I'm working. So I've got reasonably good at exhibiting a sufficient level of stress and worry and fidgeting to make things go away.

Right. Yeah, I mean from family life to issues of gender. Do you see differences in the way like women and men work in your sector?

Well, I'll make one general point about gender, which is that, it's funny, because I stay at home on, you know, quite a lot of the time, there is a sort of a lessening of the value of your work. And, you know, I'll often get, “would you do this, would you do the dishwasher and will you sort out such and such, and there's a guy going to come and deliver such and such, will you sort him out and tell him where to park or where to put things,” that simply don't occur to people who are going off to, you know, “the office.” Very few people I know who go to the office are asked to at 11 o'clock come back home and, you know, meet a delivery man or something like that. So that's one thing that is ...

I lost you again. Can you hear me? You were finishing your first point of lessening the value of work by being at home.

Yeah, there's a sort of, well, OK, I think I made that point. But that leads me on then to say that it's interesting that I had terrible trouble when I came back to Ireland and say, “I work in marketing,” because the expectation was then that you're probably closet gay, that you do pretty things, that you think that brochures are more important than, say, a profit and loss statement, and that you're pretty ineffective, and the fact that, probably, you're a girl. So I had a lot of difficulty coming from sort of American and German background where, you know, marketing is very often the powerhouse of the business and coming here, trying to explain, so I put a lot of effort into it and it upset me, I must say. Trying to explain, you know, that marketing is about market (inaudible) strategy, understand your market, you understand your relative position in it and you make something of that, I found very difficult.

So I, on the gender issue, I see a lot of women in marketing who work extremely hard, because I know how much, there's as much detail and attention to detail required in marketing as there is in finance, and don't get credit for it. I think that it's actually quite a strong person who can set up a business on their own and run it, you know, without having the back up of a downtown address. But I think that there's an ambivalent sort of attitude to women who do it. It's sort of, “OK, so you sort of put your career on hold, have you? And you're sort of in cruise control mode?” I think that's the way people see it.

All right, yeah, so my question is about your origins, like, what led you from being in Ireland doing college in business, commerce studies, and then going into marketing in the first place, considering that you indicated the misperception about marketing in Ireland is that people see it as soft marketing (communications and advertising), whereas you see marketing in the hard sense of marketing, logistics and finance.

Yeah, well, I see it more in a hard sense and I think it's much more science based, and it isn't sort of an outlet for, as I say, closet gays in the corporate world. And there genuinely is that sort of perception of it as being sort of
touch-feely, wasteful, sort of carry on that real companies, for which real men, don't do. I find that odd, but it's changed.

Let me tell you how I got into it, it's very simple. When I started at UCC in, I can't even remember, 1979 or something like that, there was no such thing as marketing. It was truly a new discipline. And I started off doing law, and by sheer chance, somebody else was going to talk or lecture, whatever it was, I went to a talk by a new guy called Leonard Wrigley, Professor Leonard Wrigley who'd just come to UCC to take up a chair of marketing, which was funded I think by AIB at the time. And he talked about marketing and explained how he would approach it, and you know, used case studies and this, and that and the other thing. And he said, look, you know a lot of people are fighting at the moment about what the definition of marketing is, and mine is fairly simple. He said I think it's about finding out what people want and giving it to them and making a profit out of doing it. And I really did think, "what a fine way to live your life." You know, you're both giving and finding a place for yourself in the scheme of things, and it sort of fitted my Benedictine sort of school background of, you know, just decency, and the more you have to give, the more you give. I just thought it was a fine philosophy of life, that it's that simple. That's why I chose it, which is why I get so upset when people then treat it as some sort of trivial thing.

Yeah. If I may ask you, what's your parents' background? Did you grow up in the city or in the rural?

No, fifth generation in this house, out here where I am now. And I, this is a small village, and my parents would be sort of, you know, the business people, if you will, in the village, but, in fact, shopkeepers. But people who tried out lots of things, you know, had a restaurant, had, you know, coffee shops, housing developments, that sort of thing. You know, good people to try things out.

Your siblings? What are their careers?

All professionals. Let's see, lawyer, dairy science, scientist, engineer, you know, stainless steel stuff, lawyer, and lawyer-stroke-banker.

OK. Now heading towards the end of our conversation... Given your trajectory, your expatriate and repatriation experiences, the corporate and then autonomous career, what are the main transformations that you see over time taking place in your life and in Ireland?

I think the big one is the acceptance that business isn't necessarily attached to a building. That's been a big one. So you've got a lot of people who got very successful during the boom economy whose business is, you know, a big car or even, you know, a van going from one building site to another and being very successful, and basically running their business off a mobile phone. It's been a big acceptance that it's possible to do well without having the trappings of doing well. I didn't say that very well, but.

So you're referring to the physical structures or the logistical structure for the business that people think is necessary, and you were saying it's not?

Yeah, I'm saying people seem to be more accepting that somebody can be successful in business without having a big address. You know, they don't have to be on, I don't know what it is, O'Connell Street in Limerick or Henry Street or whatever it is and have an address there. They don't have to have a headquarters out of the university or out at Shannon to be seen to be successful. And how I noticed that is when people who don't know ask, you know, "so what do you do?" And you say, "well, you know, I live in Schull and I'm involved with some businesses around the country." And there's a much more sort of positive reaction than there was ten years ago.

And what's your opinion about this idea of a post-Celtic Tiger years versus Celtic Tiger years?

Well, I think that the, that if it can lead to more middle class solidarity, a sense that we're going to pull together and sort things out, then that'll be good. Because I believe that the foundation of all successful civilisation over
the longer run is the – sorry, I just need to – is the, a strong middle class with, you know, a big interest in society itself. Interest as in wanting schools and all that sort of, medical things and so on. So if it pulls us back from the path of a divergent economy – you go somewhere like South Africa and you see, you know, the rich being really rich and the poor being excruciatingly poor, and very few in between. You say, it's just an inherently unstable society, you know. The weight is out at the ends of the see-saw, not the middle. You look at Ireland and you see the weight is in the middle of the see-saw, so it's much more stable. But it was beginning to flow out toward the certainly, the rich end, the annoyingly rich, demonstratively rich, and I think the fact that those people are behaving differently now than they did even two years ago is a boon.

It's a, you mean, a positive or a negative.

Positive, boon, positive, yeah. So I think the post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, it's being put up to Ireland now, "look, you've been going on and on about how successful you are and the fastest growing and the largest and the this, and the richest, and all that sort of thing. And now you're in trouble, so let's see what you're really made of." Because otherwise, certainly in England, it's very clear. Read the newspapers and hear, you know, commentary in the media, the sense of (inaudible) is enormous. You know, "those cheeky Irish prats," you know, "let's put them back in their box," is a really prevalent sort of undercurrent to what people are saying.

And I think it's up to Ireland now to say, "no, no, we are different and we have come out from under our own shadow and shadow of history and so on, and we've proved ourselves to be extremely effective people, and what we did was we got distracted with this blasted building boom, but if you look away from that and look to the export engine of the economy, those are good ideas being bought by millions of people and thousands of companies around the world because some clever Irish guy and Irish girl or somebody who's come to Ireland and has worked within the sort of enabling environment that we have here, has come up with a great idea and is selling it."

I'm ranting a little bit, but what I'm trying to say is I think we've done a really good thing by turning this into a knowledge-based exporting economy, and we allowed that to get overshadowed, so we moved from sort of the driving a Passat to driving a, you know, a flash Mercedes. I think we need to get back to the Passat, which is still going to get us to exactly the same place.

Yeah, but how do you react to these claims that, "oh, all the multinationals are leaving the country now, what are we going to do?"

Well the fact is the multinationals are leaving the country and have been because we had a situation in which we had a rising cost base, and just completely ignored it. And we have unions, which I consider to be the most self-destructive organisations ever invented, who are, who continue to push that rising cost base up and at the same time, you have a declining or a lowering comparative, competitive ceiling, you know, China is much less expensive, and so is Eastern Europe and so on and so forth, and so is England and so is France and so is Germany. Come on, guys, get real. Of course the companies that came here for tax rates and low cost, when those circumstances do not continue to prevail, of course they're going to leave. But it's up to us to fill the gap, and we can.

Do you know there are only eighty companies in Ireland that turn over more than 100 million Euro? Eighty companies, eighty Irish companies that turn over, did you know that?

No, I didn't know the exact number.

Eighty. It's tiny, absolutely tiny. So, you know, what we need to do is to build up more, make the companies like [software platform developer firm] stronger and more powerful and grow them because that's how we turn Ireland into a really self-sufficient, self-sustaining economy and move on from the fantastic help that's been given to us by the international corporations that have come here and have taught people and have shown them standards and ways of doing things that were unheard of.
My final question, the key word is improvement. I think much of what you said already embeds this topic of improvement. But if you could elaborate a bit more, like, what types of improvements would you like to see implemented, whether in your business, in your region, or in the country?

I would like to see at the very top level, I would like to see, say, the president and the government, you know, reminding us of our successes and talking about the sort of national persona if you will. This is a country that can do things and it's proven that it has, and focus on that. Next level down, I think that government needs to concentrate more on doing the things that sort of fall into the, what you might call a natural monopoly area, things like the electricity grid, the phone copper, the roads, concentrating on those things. And at the same time, concentrate on dealing with people who fall to the bottom net and provide that sort of final sucker for people in unfortunate circumstances, be it health or financial or otherwise.

And in the middle, to enable companies and people who are creative to go about creating wealth and income as quickly and as fast as ever they can, all within the bounds of the first thing I spoke about, which is the sense that, to get across this notion that, you know, you can be wealthy and successful and so on without trampling over other people, without disrespecting people's interests and rights. You know, you can push hard in a negotiation. That doesn't mean you actually have to hit somebody. So those are the changes that I would like to see. Where Ireland was a place that people could easily understand and say, "OK, it's got a sense of purpose and self esteem. It's got a government that can, that enables success but doesn't allow the unsuccessful to fall by the wayside." And I think that alone would be a fantastic achievement. If we could do that in a more coherent way.

Yeah, based on what you said about a link between government and business, how positive or not is the fact of AI being based in a technology park?

I think it's, it comes later in the cycle. I think that when a company's struggling in just growing and developing, I see three phases. One, I see people at innovation centres and they spend more time talking to each other about what they might do and should do and could do than doing anything, and I think that's bad. They need somebody like me to come in and say, "right, OK, now enough talk, this is the action plan, this is how you do it, these are well, you know, tried and trusted methods of moving from an idea to a product to a sale." So in the early phase they need to be there to gather ideas and to compare ideas and to sort of work technological synergies.

In the second phase, there's no value in being in a technology park. In fact, it gets in the way because he who talks the most tends to sort of slow down the whole thing. In the third phase, which is where [software platform developer firm] is approaching now. I think to be in amongst people like students and academics like yourself, which is why I took this interview, I'm not hugely interested in, you know, the subject matter isn't anything that drives me, but what I want to know is what interests you and why you're asking these questions and what you're thinking about becomes very valuable again. New ideas, moving beyond the tried and tested to, "well, let's get out into the not tried and tested." And that's where I think that the sort of, the potential interaction that arises in physical proximity is a good thing.

So does your company have connections with the university?

Yeah, the labs, that sort of stuff.

Yeah, how many employees does your company have currently?

I think about thirty, low thirties, thirty-two, thirty-five, that sort of order. You see, some of them are in China, India and the U.S. as well as here. So, you know, somebody takes on an assistant, somebody lets, you know, gets a new engineer, I can't keep track of that on a day-to-day basis, but it's in the thirties. In other words, it's a very low number, I would point out to you. But, but our payroll is higher now than it was when we had fifty employees.
Yes, I asked you this because you mentioned that the company’s reaching a third stage now, and that reminds
me of the need of internationalising SMEs, rather than only focusing on multinationals. So I was trying to probe
how international your company is becoming in terms of sales and business development. This is why I asked
you, so to have an idea of how internationalized your company is.

Well I can tell you one observation that I’m sure of. All of the successful exporting companies that I know of have
had senior people in market. By senior people, I don't mean senior sales people, I mean more than that. People
who are senior in the company and have a sales role or a business development role. So the company’s partly
directed from outside Ireland. The ones that are directed entirely from inside Ireland, I've just never seen them be
able to get out of the bucket.

And what’s the reason for that?

Because they, to gain that international perspective, you can't gain it on a sales trip or going to an exhibition. You
have to actually live in the other markets to understand it and to, I mean, look, I’m coming at it as our you with a
certain knowledge that culture is very real, and that, you know, if you live in a different culture, there’s, it's not
just the language is different, entire understandings of things are different. And people who do not go live
overseas just do not get it. So what I’m saying is internationalising, my, I think the most fundamental requirement
is that a substantial part of a management team of a company actually operates overseas, lives and operates
overseas. Not forever, but you know, more than a month.

Yeah, but in this sense, I think that Ireland is well situated because there is a whole diaspora of Irish people like
yourself who've been overseas for ten, twenty years and then came back during the Celtic Tiger years, and
brought a whole wealth of experience and skills.

Actually, it was amusing when I first came back and I was trying to, you know, get roots down into the business
community, the number of people who had stayed in Ireland, you know, and worked for things like the Kerry
Group and they're very successful companies, but who'd stayed in Ireland, but who deeply resented the, you
know, "so you didn't stick with us when things were bad in the '80s, and now you're back looking to see if you can
do work with us," you know, was amazing, absolutely amazing. So there is a very real, you know, what you're
saying is absolutely concrete, Anthony. The people who've been overseas and this diaspora thing, that is a
enormous strength, but you have to accept the corollary, which is that those who stayed at home are a
fundamental weakness.

That's not fair, sorry. That didn't sound right. I didn't mean to say that they're a, the fact that they had stayed at
home and have, you know, retained certain views and some things that go with that, that's a weakness. The
people themselves of course aren't a weakness. I didn't mean to say that.

I understand what you mean. But then wouldn't you connect with the Irish repatriates who came back?

Oh yeah, very easily.

Wouldn't they represent a segment that could propel a new wave of business and orientation?

Absolutely, absolutely. Well, a lot of them came back for the comfortable life. You know, they could come back to
Ireland having earned relatively big money overseas. They could come back and buy a bigger house here than
they might've had overseas and certainly a bigger house than they left when they left Ireland. That wasn't the
case for the last five or ten years. And I think that prevented a lot of, it slowed up what should've been a steady
flow of people back into Ireland.

I think we're missing about 20,000 top people who would've come back but were clever enough to say, "well, why
the hell would I come back to a smaller house than I have here in Georgia or in San Francisco or in France?" You
know what I'm saying? So I think you're absolutely right. I think that diaspora is a particularly powerful group, but it often has some difficulties, you know, it didn't stay close to the politicians here in Ireland because you couldn't, you were overseas. So there's other guys, so there's sort of an undercurrent here of who knows who that is quite powerful.

OK, Simon. Is there anything that I didn't ask about that you think that I could have asked or that you would like to talk about?

One, I'll just tell you one little hobby horse. I think it's really interesting to see how many people, the most underused asset in the world is Microsoft software. I hate Microsoft, the same as everyone else, right? But I see people, I got a document from the bank there the other day, and it's type written because they sent it in as an e-mail attachment. There's a return at the end of every line. Can you believe that? I mean, just phenomenal. And what I'm getting at is that I think that Ireland needs to, we need to get more detailed about sort of using technology, and more certain that we're using it productively. And I guarantee you, we'd run rings around people.

So what I'm saying is there's productivity gains to be had throughout management certainly that isn't being taken absolutely definitely by people who stayed here. I'm continued to be amazed at the difference between people who've worked overseas and their ability to use technology, and people who've stayed here. I think there was sort of a, a sort of, there's a pride, a false pride in this "oh, you know, I'm actually a bit of a, what's it called, you know, I don't like technology, and I don't understand that," and you know, the implication being, "it's all right, I have people around me who do, minions who do it for me." Or that "what I do is so specialised, it's nothing to do with technology." And I just think that it's a pity because, you know, productivity is the one thing that we stopped gaining in Ireland. That was the hobby horse.

OK, Simon. Thank you very much for your time and for this interview. Is there any concern that you have about this interview?

No, none. There's a couple of guys at [software platform developer firm] that, you know, I think might be interesting people to talk to over time. One of them is a guy called Michael Higgins. He's the new CTO. He's a real smart cookie. He's one of the guys who worked at Netscape at its inception.

Oh really? I remember Netscape.

Yeah, I remember Netscape too. The battle of whatever. And he's since worked at Dell and now he's working for [software platform developer firm]. And he's over in the thing there in Limerick, and he's a really interesting guy who knows an awful lot about technology. I don't know about sort of technology and movement and all that sort of stuff, but I thought it might be worth chasing up.

OK, yeah. So, what I will do now with this interview, I will transcribe it. If you want, I can send you a link so you could download the interview if you want.

Yeah, that's fine. That would be the most practical thing to do, I think.

Yeah, I'll send you the link. This interview will be transcribed and our team will study the transcript. At the end of the study, you will receive a brief summary with my findings.

Super, now that would be interesting. I would like to see that.

OK. Thank you very much for your time. We'll keep in touch. I'll e-mail you.

All right, bye for now.
Could please start by telling me about your role in the company?

I am the chief technology officer, the head of IT basically, for “Manufacture Design”. I was hired into the company in January of this year, so I'm fairly new to it. I have the role of creating the strategic vision and architecture for the company as we continue to progress from the, let's call it the post-entrepreneurial stage into the medium-sized business stage. We're experiencing significant growth in both revenue and the number of external people that we touch, customers and partners. So, I was brought in to basically significantly mature the IT capabilities of the company.

OK, and Simon mentioned your work at Netscape. Could you please tell me about your trajectory?

Certainly. I served in the United States Navy, I was born in the U.S., I served in the United States Navy, and upon leaving the Navy, I went into the IT field. I worked in private industry at very long periods of time, ten-year and twelve-year kind of jobs. In 1992, I was called by a friend of a friend, as typically happens in the Silicon Valley, I was living in the San Francisco Bay area, called by a friend of a friend and asked if I would interview for a job in a company at that time called Mosaic Communications. And I went down and had a talk with several of the founding, senior founding, management founding members, and made the decision to go ahead and take a chance. And it was, you have to understand that at the time, there really was no Internet, there was certainly no Google, no Amazon.com. But it intrigued me and the role I was offered intrigued me as solutions architect for the company.

So I joined Netscape in '92 as basically a founding member, I was badge number thirty-two. However I'm quite upset by that fact because your badge number was based on your telephone number, and there were two fax machines ahead of me. So I was actually the thirtieth employee hired at what was to become Netscape Communications. We had to change our name for legal reasons. And I stayed with the company of course through the IPO, which was, as you may know, tremendously successful, really the first dot-com stock to go absolutely nuts. We were all sitting around on the day that the IPO was due to go live hoping that the stock might open at as much as two or three dollars a share. We had all, most of us in senior management had taken fairly significant pay cuts and large handfuls of stock which had split many times prior to the IPO. So we had a great deal of paper which we were hoping might be worth two or three or four dollars a share. Of course if you know the history of Netscape, it opened at a 112 and closed at 178 on the day. So about forty-two new millionaires were made on that fateful morning.

I stayed with the company until the point where it was decided that it would be broken up. And that decision came about because in those early days, it was very, very difficult to create a revenue stream from the Internet. Again remember, there was no advertising model, there was no pay-per-use model, and basically we were giving away most of our product, the browser, the Netscape browser was given away as a free download. And although I generated very significant revenue for the company in terms of, we, I built the first Amazon.com Web site, I built the first NewYorkTimes.com Web site. But those were large amounts of money that were in an unpredictable pattern. They were not a steady and predictable revenue stream. And so it was decided, again, keeping in mind that all of the founders were now multimillionaires, it was decided to try and simply quietly break up the company. The decision was made to send, what I call the kids, the young fellas from the University of Illinois that invented the browser, they were kind of sold off to Time Warner AOL, and my division, the electronic commerce division, was sold off to SUN Microsystems. And I chose not to go to work for SUN Microsystems.
Instead, I chose to move over here to Ireland and that was in the fall of 1997. I took a year off just kind of relaxing and getting settled in Ireland, and then I got a call from a senior vice president at Dell who found out I had been doing a bit of consulting around Ireland just for fun, and somebody in Dell found out. So I was offered an IT manager's position at Dell Computer at the end of 1997. I joined them and stayed with them until October of last year with a one-year hiatus in the middle, just the desire to have some time off and kind of get a new career track in my head. I left Dell in October, principally because it's basically closing down, it really won't be a viable entity in Ireland for much more than a year. And I simply did not want to be the last man out, so to speak. At the level of my seniority, I would have been offered some other position, but of course it would have meant relocation, and I would not have been interested in that. And although the redundancy package would have been quite attractive, I'm not in a financially challenging situation, shall we say, or at least I wasn't back then. October, November, December, it was in late December that I interviewed here at AI, and took the job in early January.

And if I may ask you, what, why did you decide to come to Ireland? [note: more bio info on last pages]

I have strong family roots. My, two of my grandfathers, both of my grandfathers, I should, I guess I should say, would have had Irish roots, and I had been coming over for years, and I'm an amateur horseman in my spare time, and of course, Ireland is just heaven on Earth for people who own and train horses. So having been quite familiar with Ireland in my holiday travels, and specifically a place here, just out past Adare called Clonshire Equestrian Centre, I decided that I would pack up myself and my horses and move to Ireland. I had no family, no like wife kind of family, I have sisters and brothers, they still live in California, but I would have had nothing that would have tied me down. I had cash in my pocket and decided I would go and be a horseman in a country where a horseman is greatly respected. So and I have no regrets. I've loved every minute of it in Ireland. About five years ago, so let's say 2000, oh perhaps as far back as 2002, I became an Irish citizen, so I have my Irish passport and all of that (inaudible) if you will. And really have no intentions of ever leaving Ireland.

So you don't have your own family when you came and ...

No, I'm not married, no. So I have sisters and brothers who are married, so I have neices and nephews and all of that, but I have no, I guess you would use the phrase immediate family.

OK, and do you have a college degree?

I have a masters degree in physics. An interesting story about that, I started out in political science thinking I was going to be a great politician and absolutely detested it. My first couple of semesters at college, I just thoroughly did not enjoy political science, and changed my major. It's very different in the U.S., you don't have the, the whole points thing in the U.S. Once you're in college, you can pretty much declare any major you want. So in my, at the end of my second semester, I changed my major to physics, which in all honesty is just about as useful as a political science degree, but it gave me great exposure to advanced mathematics and computer science. And I was in college on a scholarship, what is called ROTC, Reserve Officer Training Corps, so the United States Navy paid for my college on the agreement that I would owe them four years of service after I left college. And they were more than happy to have me move into a physics major because that was much more amenable to service by an officer in the Navy. I don't think they need too many political sciences on an aircraft carrier.

That's very interesting, that you moved from political sciences into a technical, scientific engineer environment.

Well, I had always had a very technical background, and in high school, I had always taken the advanced science courses. So I actually came to college on my first day with a significant number of semester credits already earned from what was called advanced placement classes in my high school. So I had already had, what in college would be chemistry 101 and 102, I had had those in high school, physics 101 and 102, I had had in high school, I had had calculus already in high school. So I always had the bent around that, but and again, you have to remember you're a 17 or 18-year-old at this point, so I didn't really know what I wanted in life, but political science sounded, on
paper, at least, like a very interesting path. I just turned out not to have the temperament for it. And perhaps I had stuck with it, it would have eventually peaked my interest.

But at the same time, there were great revolutions going on, the mini computer had finally become available, there were beginning to be hints about personal computers. So it was, and it was also a very interesting time in physics. I studied particle physics and subatomic physics, and there were a great deal of very important discoveries being made around that time, I mean even to the point where they were making it into the public press, not just the scientific press. So, it, there was a definite pull to that, and then of course, once there, I found it to be remarkably comfortable, whereas political science, I was struggling to do the reading and struggling to keep up with current events and those things that you do early in the political science education. Whereas the early physics was so, oh I've already had this, I'm going to sit the test and do wonderful.

Was your master's after the Navy or before? Is your master's in physics?

Oh, before. I completed my education, so I was able to do a four-year masters. I did three years for my bachelors. Again, because I came with a head start, I really had more than a year's worth done before I had started college. So I was able to achieve my bachelor of science in three years, and then did a one-year masters.

So I suppose that in the Navy you learn something related to IT that enabled you to move into the private sector.

I'd say that would be a fairly fair statement except that the kind of IT that you would do in the Navy would not necessarily lend itself to a direct correlation with civilian service. I was a pilot, so I knew how to handle radar intercept capability, electronic warfare, gemming and counter-surveillance, and not a lot of banks do that. So yes, I had very good experience to very state-of-the-art platforms, you could imagine that the U.S. military is always significantly above the civilian infrastructure capabilities. So I'd very good exposure to interesting platforms, but I certainly did not learn how to balance a general ledger in the United States Navy.

OK, so in the private sector, how did you learn new skills, or were you trained?

Well, I basically came in at a very low level, at a programmer level, and spent several years paying my dues as a programmer. It turns out though I had a very, an interesting bent if you will, I'm tremendously good with databases. And again, just at that time is when database technology was really flourishing and people were going away from the punch cards and the tape reels into these very sophisticated databases. And I just seemed to have a very good way with databases. We got along, shall we say. And so that allowed me to advance fairly rapidly than perhaps a programmer that might have come up through a normal path. I bypassed several steps in the ladder, became a DBA, database administrator, then a senior DBA, and then a data architect. And so I very quickly filled roles that were very new to the industry. There was a tremendous vacuum created when you suddenly found out you needed a DBA and you didn't even know what one was. And along came I waving my hand. So I did quite well. Because you were a pioneer in this new industry...

Well, I wouldn't say pioneer, and certainly I didn't invent anything in those days. I'm very proud of a lot of the work I did at Netscape in terms of patents that I hold and things that happened on the Web that were a direct result of my creation. But in those days it was simply a matter of, to be quite blunt, I wanted more money and these more esoteric roles paid better. So I worked quite hard to be able to move up into those roles.

OK. And, currently, could you describe your typical workday?

I typically get up around 6:30 or 7 and check mail from home just to make sure there's been no significant issues. This is a company that spans from here going towards the west, so two offices in the United States and an office in China. So I won't say that the sun never sets on AI, but things can often happen during what would be our night.
So I get up early, check the mail, usually there’s no issues. We run a fairly tight ship here. I shower, shave and head in here. I'm usually here by 8, 8:15. Again, boot up all the paraphernalia, check the mail, check the status of our servers and that our applications are all highly available, and then basically settle down into trying to take things off of my to-do list. Unfortunately usually adding more in a day than I remove, but, you know, trying to do the tactical things as well as mixing with the very strategic things.

We're at a point now where we're beginning to develop a architecture that is going to be significantly state-of-the-art. We will be deploying very, very interesting technology called SOA, Service-Oriented Architecture. And we will be deploying it in the cloud. We will be actually at a point where we will no longer buy or own servers. We will be in the utility building model, where for every hour that our database runs, we will be charged a fixed amount of money, usually cents, cents on the hour, forty cents, or something like that on the hour, but we will actually have no idea where our servers are, what they're running on, how they're maintained. That will no longer be our business. So we will really be back where I believe IT should be and that is focused on delivering capability to the business. I won't have to then hire assist admin, a network administrator, a security specialist, I won't need to have any of that capability because I will be paying for it in this cloud architecture that we're going for.

You're outsourcing some activities.

We outsource all of our IT activities. I have only one full-time and one open-rec. So the entire IT department here is three people, and I will never go larger than that.

OK. That was going to be my next question, because you said that in the morning you check up the servers, if they're running OK, and you are CTO, so I suppose that this task would be handled by a more junior professional.

Well, and they certainly are, but again, because it is a very painless thing to do, it's a matter of clicking a button and seeing if all the little knobs are green, and I consider myself a very hands-on CTO. Now, could I necessarily figure out how to run the cable to that monitor, no, I have people that can do that. But I do like to know what's going on with the application environment, and be very close, perhaps not at the coal face, but very close to that. Now that will probably taper off as I become more familiar with the business and the newness of my role wears off, but right now I have this desire to see and be seen in the business, and to see and be seen as having knowledge of the tactical things, the day-to-day things. So, and that's, as I was going to say, a very small part of my day, perhaps an hour throughout the day is spent on things like, you know, looking at servers or making sure, you know, just a quick walk around the office, that the terminals are working, that people are able to do their job. Really, right now, the focus of my job is on this strategy, creating this architecture and figuring out how to do this with the technologies that exist in the world today.

Yes, Simon explained to me that there are two parts in the business, one is supply chain, and the other is design-based applications.

Well, it's interesting, that of course would be Simon's biased, right, towards it. If you ask a supply chain guy, you would get a slightly different view. If you would ask a buyer, you would get a slightly different view. Basically, this business is built on the premise of a model if you will that you can come to us with an idea or with an already done design or with an already created prototype, you can come in anywhere along that chain, and we will take you into production manufacturing. So if you come to me with just an idea, of I have a better way of building this pen, this biro, we would go and get designers and design it, you would approve the designs, we would get someone to prototype one and you would say, yes, that's it. We would, perhaps it would take some sort of compliance, if you wanted to sell it in the U.S., maybe you had to have a compliance certificate that it didn't cause carpal tunnel syndrome or something, we would handle that aspect of it for you, and then at some point, we'd say, OK, how many million do you want?
So, again, Simon is right, but it’s not really two separate business. One flows into the other. It would be very, very rare that you would come to us, have us do the design for a pencil, and then walk away from it. You would, you would normally carry that all the way through to the production. So yes, we do design, but we do it as an entrée into the production, manufacturing end. Because that's where we make our money. If you come to us with an idea and we design it, or we don't, we don't employ designers, we have partners. So we go to our partner and he designs it and maybe he charges us, let’s just pick a number, 30,000 dollars. Well, we charge you 40,000 dollars. So we really didn't make a lot of money on that deal. But when we go into production on this, our cost might be a dollar fifty, we might charge you a dollar seventy. So we might be making twenty cents on each of these pens that we produce for you. And of course it's in that volume manufacturing where the profits begin to really come in.

**So moving along the day, you arrive here in the morning, do check up tasks, and then, how does your day progress?**

Well, then I always try to meet with Terry, that's my enterprise architect, so we usually spend between a half an hour and an hour describing what tactically he's going to work and what things I may need to accomplish things on my to-do list that he has to facilitate. We review the state of any open issues, although, again, we have very, very few. And then Terry will kind of go on his way, and I will then spend a few hours before lunch again perhaps dealing with vendors or reading Web sites on how to deploy things in clouds and, you know, doing a bit of learning.

I also do quite a bit of my own design and modelling work, so I begin to then draw things out either on my white board behind you or in software tools and say, well, now that would work if I did this and this, and so on. I typically take about an hour for lunch, but really only a few minutes to eat, and then I love to take a walk, working here in the middle of the campus, as you know, is a huge advantage, a huge perk to the job. I then come back after lunch and again, might review with Terry where we are, again might begin now to deal with vendors that are located in abstract time zones, so if I need to call somebody in New York or whatever, you know, it’s now their morning and I can begin to deal with them. And again, mostly strategy work, keeping an eye on things. I might take a break in there somewhere to just surf the Net, go to a couple news sites and see what’s going on. Interestingly enough, I used to be absolutely addicted, I had to have at least two newspapers every day, had to. And now I find it's once a week, I make sure I buy the Irish Times on Friday because that has the business section, and that's the only newspaper I read most days, most (inaudible).

**They now have their news online.**

Exactly, I now, I resisted it for a long time, even though I helped invent the Web, I just liked the tactile aspect of the paper because it made you get away from the computer, it made you go and sit in a chair and relax and so on. So I’m not necessarily saying it’s a good or healthy thing, but it’s certainly been an interesting change in my life over the last year or so, that I find myself far less addicted to newspapers.

**So then at 5 …**

5:30, 6 o’clock, I tend to head out and head for home. It's not a very bad commute, it's a short commute from here. I live in Adare. It takes me about fifteen, twenty minutes.

**OK, so you live in the countryside?**

Yes.

**All right. And, that seems to be a positive for you?...**

It was very, very important to me. When I moved over, keeping in mind I had no job at the time, I had two priorities. Number one, find the right place for my horses to live, and number two, find the right place for me to
live where I could have my horses with me from time to time. They aren't with me all the time, but if I had maybe three horses in work, well I can't ride three, so during the summer, I'll bring one or two of them down to my property so that they can just eat grass and rest and create a little rotation of horses. Whereas there's always a working horse at Clonshire so that I can go and ride. And again, as the stretch continues to get better and better during the day, I do tend to ride during the week in the summer, not so much in the winter, it gets dark and cold. But it's very easy for me now to get home at 6:30 or 7, change my kit and go up and ride for an hour or even two and still have plenty of daylight.

**OK. In terms of mobility, how often do you travel and how much do you travel?**

I haven't yet been to the Huntsville, American office or the Chinese office, but I do intend to visit both probably within the next month. I would envision probably being in Huntsville about once a quarter, being in China twice a year. And being in Alexandria, that's our other U.S. office, probably six times in a year because that's where the CEO sits. So you know, probably six out of the twelve of the monthly senior management meetings, I would plan to attend.

**How long do you stay in China each time?**

To make it worthwhile probably at least a week. And Huntsville, the same, I mean, by the time you get there, you've lost a day, and by the time you get back, you've lost a day. So to be effective, you'd probably fly out on the Sunday and fly back on the Friday.

**So would you see yourself becoming more mobile?**

Well I always have been. When I was at Dell, I was in India four times a year, Austin four times a year, and Bracknell, that's in the United Kingdom, at least once a week, or at least it seemed like once a week. So I've always been quite a bit, I mean, when I was in Netscape I logged something over 400,000 miles of travel, again going to people and explaining what the Web was and what we could do for them.

**And how do you experience travelling?**

I think like anything, it loses its shine with age. I can remember my first trip to Japan, my first trip to Brazil, as being very exciting and so forth, and you know, getting concessions from an employer, well look, I'm going to be in Japan for four days, let me have to extra, let me have two days off when I'm there so I can do some exploring. Now it's like, what's the latest flight I can take to get there, and the earliest I can take to get home. But at the same time, it really doesn't present any problem with me, again, I don't have an immediate family, my horses are always cared for if I'm not around. I have a groom at Clonshire. And so it's, the physical act of travel has become tedious but I always like when I'm there and always like getting home again, so.

**It seems that it balances out then, given your valuation of a lifestyle in a nice place in the countryside, and the need to travel to different places which is something that you don't like as much, right?**

Well, you know, it would be lovely if everyone was here and all of our partners and customers were here and everything was in Limerick, but that's just not the nature of a global business. I don't, I would not in a survey classify travel as a detriment in any way. It is just very tedious, you know. We were coming back from the UK on Tuesday night, and because of, you know, the downgrade of Shannon and all of this nonsense, there was really only one flight back to Shannon from Manchester and it was at 8 o'clock at night. Well, we were done with the customer at 2:30. So, you know, that kind of leaves you not enough time to do anything interesting, but you know, still at the same time being, well, I've got to make that flight. So that part of it is tedious, and then of course flying RyanAir, that's the definition of tedious. But ...

**Do you travel locally to see potential clients or in other nearby countries?**
Define locally?

In Ireland, within Ireland.

Oh within Ireland, yes. Unfortunately we don't have any in the Limerick area, but Dublin, Wexford, Waterford, potentially a new customer in Galway. That'd be about it for Ireland. But as you know Simon is based in Cork, so there will be times, especially as he begins to help me with some projects, that I will probably spend a day and go down to Cork instead of making Simon come up here.

So when you travel, are most of your trips to contact internal people from your company or with external clients?

Right now, internal. I hope as we begin to mature our IT platform, I hope that to become the opposite. I would actually like to spend, you know, a week a month meeting either customers or suppliers or manufacturing partners and helping to integrate our IT systems back, their IT systems back into AI. So, but right now, the focus is still, I mean, you can imagine, what am I, five months into the job, there are a lot of people at this company that don't know what I look like yet. So that'll have to happen first.

So as the company grows and you need to hire more people, would you travel less or more?

Well again, I don't envision ever expanding IT beyond three people, myself and two others. So from an internal IT point of view, the travel would probably remain fairly consistent, again, the desire to be with the CEO probably every other month, to be in China a couple times a year, to be in Huntsville a few times a year. Those will be ongoing. I do envision that there will then be the addition of, oh "Mark", we have this new customer in Huston, Texas, and we'd like you to fly down there and talk to their head of IT. So I envision trips like that coming as we continue to grow the portfolio of the company.

OK. In terms of remote work, as you describe, you come to the office to work. But couldn't you work from home? Say, set an office in your farmhouse and work from there and spend less time here? In this sense, what are other alternative ways of work that you consider?

I'm not a very big fan of working at home. Now there have certainly been days where for example I've had a package due to arrive and because there's no one else at home, I need to be there to sign for it and it has suited me to work from home. So I have all of the technological capability to do so. But I just find that you're not then interacting with staff, not, you know, kind of hearing the thread or the buzz that's going through the business. No, I'm just more comfortable in the office. It creates a discipline for me. If I'm at home, there might be the temptation of, oh, I'll go out and pet the horse's nose, or I'll go cut the grass because it's the first dry day. Whereas here, it's simply easy to stay in the discipline of I'm at work and if I need to cut the grass, it'll be around 6 o'clock tonight.

So after 6 or at night, you don't do any work, or you don't have any discipline ...

Oh I wish I could say that. No, I tend to, if you will, save up a bit of strategic stuff, never tactical stuff, but I'll save up, I might find a link to a very good article on integrating ERP data, and rather than read it here, I'll just e-mail that link to my home mail address, and when I get home and have some dinner, and if I decide not to go ride or meet somebody for a pint, then I'll call up that link and read it at home, study it there, instead of necessarily doing that here. So no, this is not a job you leave at the desk.

OK. In terms of international travelling, would you see teleconference as a substitute to international travel?
There's certainly some potential around that, but the main principals of this business are Irish, all of this. And I think there's just something in our blood about wanting to shake the hand every now and then, you know? So could I attend a management meeting either by teleconference or by video conference, yes, I've done it in the past. But again, there's just this desire to have that little bit of intimacy, and I mean that in the very generic sense.

**The face-to-face interaction?**

Yeah. And again, I haven't met much more than a quarter, oh, maybe a third of staff at this point. So I may decide having gone to Huntsville once that I don't ever need to go there again. It would serve no purpose. I do doubt that, but at this point, I haven't. And again, with China, given that you have significant time zone issues, Irish plus seven in terms of time, some moderate language issues, often very hard to tell what someone is saying unless you can see them say it and see what the context of it is, I would say there will always be a couple of trips a year to China (inaudible).

**OK. So in terms of technology, mobile technologies for communication, it seems you use them, like Blackberry, iPhone?...**

iPhone, couldn't live without it, absolutely could not live without my iPhone. In fact, I can't live without it so much, I have two.

Really, a bit revolution. At Dell, we weren't allowed iPhones, Michael Dell doesn't get along with Steve Jobs. But we always had Blackberries, it was always very sophisticated Blackberries, which are nearly as good. But I always had one personally from the day they first came out. And then joining here, iPhone is the platform of choice here. And I envision doing some very creative things with the fact that I have all of my senior management with iPhones. I could then begin to develop iPhone applications that would allow them access key process indicators, key business indicators, some graphs, whatever, through the iPhone. And with a fairly, about due any day release of the software actually able to push data to the iPhone, so that, you know, I could ring the bell and say here's today's booking report, and not necessarily have senior executives who are perhaps not a hundred per cent technical literate tell me oh, well I don't know how to get the sales figure. It's like, fine, I'll push it to you every day at 4 o'clock. So, I'm quite impressed with that capability.

**Do you have two because one is private and the other's for work?**

Yeah, yeah.

**OK, so you think it's better to separate these two sides completely?**

I do, I'm one of these people, and it's not a company policy at all, but I'm one of these people that believes that I should pay for my own phone calls, even though I probably only make five a month, I still believe I should pay for my own phone calls. So I do cheat once in a while, and I won't really call it cheating, once in a while, I'll forward one to the other so that I only have to carry one if I'm travelling. But here, sitting on the desk, there's no harm in having two.

**OK. So in terms of male and female experiences, do you see differences in the way that of high tech professionals being male or female in the high-tech sector?**

Oh, we're going into an interesting area here. Do I believe that there is a gender imbalance? Yes. Do I believe that imbalance has some genetic factor? No. Do I believe it has a sociological factor? Yes. I think girls don't like to be nerds. I've met very few women at my level or even lower than my level that were as comfortable in the work as most of my male peers are. And I believe that those are sociological factors, not genetic. I actually think women are a good deal smarter than men. They just don't excel in the boys' club of IT. Now I've certainly seen some changes. You look at the chairman of the board of HP is a woman, you look at my equivalent, the CTO at Bank of
America is a woman, so there are certainly exceptions. Unfortunately they are exceptions and not the rule, in my opinion, you’re paying for my opinion right? I don’t believe it’s genetic, I do believe there are sociological influences at play all the way back to early education.

**In terms of team dynamic and in terms of outcomes, do you see any differences?**

Teams that are well mixed tend to be more successful. There are again social clues that begin to occur, if a woman’s in the room the man doesn’t yell. Men tend to be more amenable to compromise in the presence of women, especially if the women can take a lead or dominant position in the dynamic. Dell was very good at trying very hard to create gender-balance wherever they could. And so I do believe that in medium to large dynamics, now if you’ve got two people, I don’t think it matters if one of them is a woman or not. But when you get around five people, it’s certainly nice to see somewhat of a balance. I think there are, as I say, social clues, cues that begin to occur that tend to, I won’t say soften, but perhaps expedite the process of, at arriving to compromise. And of course that’s, again I’m not dictatorial, so perhaps if I was a dictatorial manager, I would have a different view, but I like to arrive at consensus. I may force consensus from time to time, but I tend to like to get to consensus, and I like people to believe that they have contributed to the direction of the consensus.

**OK, and on the user side, like as using the Internet, do you see any differences?**

In my generation, yes. Again, mine was really the first Internet generation. And again, it was toys for boys and that nerd stuff. Nowadays, I would say most women are probably twice as good as most men at Googling things, because they think better, they don’t become emotional in the search, whereas men do. My next door neighbour has a ten-year-old daughter and she’s massively more literate than her thirty-year-old mother, and exponentially more IT literate than her granddad and grandma. So yes, I think the generations have begun to level the field. But in my generation, there were very, very few women at Netscape, at least in technology positions now. They were the marketing department, they were the sales department, they were all senior positions, but none of them in, in IT.

**Right, so in terms of society, the knowledge economy, what types of transformations have you seen taking place here in Ireland over the years?**

I don’t think I would have a strong base of information to be able to make any insightful statements there because, again, if I go to the pub, I don’t look to see what phones my friends have or ask them if they’d Googled up such and such. Again, I see it more with the, you know, you meet a young person and you ask them a question and they might go away for a while and then come back with the answer. And you know what they’ve done is gone and Googled it and come up with the answer. But society as in my society is notoriously non-technological. Of course people don’t tend to adopt technology. Not because they’re not smart enough to, but because it doesn’t do much for their day-to-day life, you know, it doesn’t enhance their day-to-day life as much as it does for other people. So I’d be reticent to put too many comments on record about, about that part of it. I mean, certainly it’s growing, certainly we have a very high penetration ratio for broadband, a surprisingly large number of people that have said they have bought things on the Internet, a surprisingly large number of people that haven’t been in the lobby of a bank for the last three years. So it’s there, but to me it’s ubiquitous. It’s either ubiquitous or unimportant, I’m not sure which.

**Now people start talking about the post-Celtic Tiger years, do you see this kind of decline?**

Well, if you’re talking about my stock portfolio, I certainly do. Yeah, I mean it’s hit Ireland, it strengthened us greater than others during the boom, so it’s therefore going to hurt us more than others during the bust. I think it’s a shame that it happened, but I always kind of had a feeling that it was due, that a correction was going to happen. It’s a shame that it happened so badly in the U.S., in other words, it happened, but it also happened badly. Shearson Lehman should not have been let go out of business in my opinion. But because that was the first domino, there was no recovery mindset. It just happened to have been the biggest domino. I think if a couple of
small banks had failed before Shearson, the U.S. government probably would have bailed Shearson out. But
because they were the first and it happened so quickly, that first domino guaranteed that a whole lot of other
dominoes were going to fall. So you have what, you have general motors declaring bankruptcy on the first of June,
I mean that's, that's tragic. You have the Republic of Ireland owning more shares in its bank than the bank does.
But, we'll get over it, we're Irish.

Like Dell’s moving out to Poland...

Those were pre-Celtic Tiger crash. Those plans were made long in advance of the bust. They were made, and you
may quote me on this, they are the wrong decisions made for the wrong reason. I believe that in less than two
years time, Dell will go, gees, I wish we had a factory in Ireland. And of course it will be way too late to be able to
reconstruct that capability. I think a series of people were able to penetrate the board and senior management at
Dell that have no word in their vocabulary other than cost, and when it’s about cost, it will always be about China
and India and things like that. I think tonight I believe is when Dell announces their first quarter. I think it will be
disastrous for them, proportionally worse than their competitors, and I believe part of that reason is because of
this move to the ODM, the outsourced manufacturer, and I also think that their reputation has suffered greatly by
this.

In some of my interviews, I hear people saying that many multinationals are moving out, and thus the
manufacturing base is moving away. And so how do you react to this type of statement?

It's unfortunately true. I think you'll see a bit of a swing back of that pendulum now with the changes in the
offshore tax laws in the United States. I don't know if you saw the news, but Accenture, one of the largest
consulting companies in the world, will be moving it's headquarters from the Bahamas to Dublin. But again, those
are not manufacturing jobs, those are high-end knowledge economy jobs. I think that Dell will keep some
presence in Ireland, but again it will be at the very high level of profession, not anybody that holds a screw driver.
And I do think that's a shame. Dell's Limerick operation was always the most profitable and the most productive
of all the Dell factories including the Chinese, Malaysian and Indian factories. So like I say, I think in about two
years time, somebody at Dell is going to go, damn it, we shouldn't have sold that factory. But it will be too late by
then to be able to re-establish.

I don't think Poland will have a Dell factory for much more than another year or two. Again, the, whether it's
called the Slovakic Tiger or something similar will happen in Poland. Wages will go up, cost of living will go up,
wages will go up, cost of living will go up. And pretty soon Poland will be only a slightly cheaper Ireland instead of,
you know, the slave markets of China and Vietnam. I think as Dell gets better at being an ODM consumer, that is
to say where they really don’t feel any need for manufacturing, the plants in Brazil, Poland and Chennai in India
will simply go away, because it will no longer, there will no longer be an economy of scale.

See the key to Dell’s success isn’t so much driving cost out of margin, it’s driving cost out of piece parts. When you
can buy a million disk drives in a quarter, you get a much better price than if you buy a hundred thousand in a
quarter. The fewer factories you have, the smaller disk drive order is going to be each month, the higher those
piece part prices are going to rise. So, I think by starting the avalanche or this slippery slope, if you will, may have
doomed themselves, forced themselves to get completely out of manufacturing. There's no half-way down the
mountain. Now, I could be wrong, again, I'm not an economist, I'm a physicist. But basically, when you put a
particle in motion, it stays in motion, and they never should have put that particle in motion.

OK. My final topic is improvement. If you could recommend any types of improvements at three different levels,
like your work activities, or the region, or at the national level, what types of improvements would you like to
see being taken?
I'm awfully content at my level. I have the very good fortune of having the trust and respect of my CEO and the board. I have the money I need to do my job. I have very good people around me, you know one of them, Simon. No, I’d be very hard pressed to come up with anything at that level.

Regionally, of course, I would have the typical voter response, could they not get rid of the crime lords, could they not get the traffic circles moving a little better, could they for please, God's sake, hurry up and build the Adare bypass. But again, nothing too serious. I would certainly like to see better technological infrastructure available. I have two megabyte broadband at home. My sister has 25 megabyte broadband in California. She doesn't even need a tenth of that, and I need all of mine. So there's room for improvement there, although that perhaps may be a national issue.

What else regionally? I do find one thing interesting, having lived in America so long, in America, there is more power vested in the regional politician than there is in the national politician. So in America, you vote for a senator and a congressman, and they go off to Washington and they make global laws. But if you want your pot hole fixed, you go down to the council and you get your pot hole fixed. I find that that's not as evident, and perhaps this may be an issue with the West, I've only ever lived here in Limerick. But I find that local politics tends to be much more about who you know and shaking hands and going to the right parties than it is about, you know, a politician coming to my door and saying, “how's your road?” You know, that's never happened here.

And then that leads, segways very easily into my biggest complaint at the national level, and that is I don't care really what party's in government, but once a government is formed, all the rest of them have to leave. This idea of an opposition that does nothing but piss and moan for year after year after year, I mean, I would gladly, gladly pay Enda Kenny's airfare to leave Ireland forever, first class, anywhere he wants to go, and especially if he promised to take all of the labour party with him. They're useless. National politics in Ireland does not work. In America, you have Democrats and Republicans, and the balance swings all the time. But you never have, well let's see, what's in minority now, the Republicans are the minority now, right? You never have a minority, a Republican saying Obama's useless. I can't turn on the television without one of those idiots from the opposition saying, "oh, Brian Cowen is a complete moron.” No he isn't, he's the Taoiseach. So I detest national politics. I would love to see some way to even reform it, or simply say, look, once a government's been formed, the rest of you go home because you're useless anyway. Maybe the next election.

**What about the technology park? Yeah, the National Technology Park.**

This one? Oh this is lovely. This is lovely.

**Would you know why “Manufacture Design” came to this park and not to another location?**

I don't know the history of that, to tell you the truth. “Manufacture Design” evolved out of Shannon so they were in Shannon when they were a contract manufacturer. When that became no longer tenable, about three and a half years ago, they decided instead of abandoning the company, they would evolve it into this supply chain, managed supply chain company. But I actually have no idea whether they made an IDA deal or a, who's the other one besides the IDA?

**Shannon Development, which runs this park.**

Yeah, so I don't, yeah, well Shannon Development, the IDA is the same thing, what's the other thing that I'm trying to think of that does investment with small business?

**Enterprise Ireland?**

Yeah, yeah. So I don't know what the history, nor do I care. I just know I have the best office in the building and I like it.
So do you connect with other companies in the park, either formally or informally?

Informally. I'm not sure, I'm not sure I'd get involved if there was like a, you know, bring a nerd to lunch day or anything like that but, and interestingly enough, I run into quite a few ex-Dell people that have found seats in various companies around here, you know, just around the corner is Pearl Systems, and I'd say there's two people that used to work for me and one that I used to work for, and at least two of my peers from Dell working there. So I'd see them in the Canteen or walking, and if some day I can throw Pearl Systems some business, I'd be happy to do that. I do believe spending locally where it makes cost-effective sense. But I don't know of any sort of, you know, the NTP user group or anything like that. I think most of us are working pretty hard just to keep our heads going, that we don't really need to be going to potlucks or anything like that.

OK, so you don't see that an agglomeration of high-tech companies in the same physical space is a positive?

When they're smaller, at the entrepreneurial level, if you go up to the incubator, up in Plassey, I think that is brilliant. I think the fact that they have to all meet once a week in the big room and talk amongst themselves, I think that's very healthy for that entrepreneurial phase. But we're post-entrepreneurial here. We're not going to learn anything from some little two-guy company over in that office over there. They might learn some things from us, but that's no longer our responsibility. I think we're maturing to the point where we're that, what do you call it, conglomeration or agglomeration of different companies probably doesn't make a lot of sense for us. Maybe, and again, maybe I'm only speaking from an IT perspective. Maybe the engineers or the finance people or senior, obviously senior management would have a different opinion for their own space.

Marketing people value the fact that you can associate the company with a technology park. So it's a kind of brandification or self-presentation.

Again, we don't, our marketing people aren't here, they're in the states so, well, other than Simon does a bit of marketing. But no, to me the only advantage of this is great parking and great afternoon walks.

OK, so your UL connections - the fact that UL is right there, is it relevant or not for your work, or for your networking?

Oh well now you've changed the subject. You've gone out from the business part to UL. No I'm very pleased that we're close to UL. I'm very anxious next year to take at least one co-op student, and I mean really do a good job of it, not "hey, go get me coffee," but "hey let's sit down and figure out how to do IT" kind of co-op student. And I am sure that once I get a bit more settled in the job and start to look at some of the adult education offerings, seminars, I would be thrilled to be asked to be, you know, a one-day guest lecturer in an IT programme. I have in the past sat on interview panels, on boards, for IT hiring at both UL and LIT down in Clare. So no, I definitely see some advantage to a linkage with the university.

What about connecting with professors and researchers, for example, computer science or …

Well, again, I would be delighted to be invited to bring my view of business and IT to a classroom every now and then, I'd be fascinated to do that. I don't think that we're doing anything in the IT space that is cutting edge enough to be involved in an R&D programme, but that doesn't mean we couldn't, you know, go and talk about how to do MRP to a class of MBAs or potential future IT managers. I do find, and I've found all my life that the university degree does not prepare, and this may be true of every profession (inaudible), that the university degree does not prepare a student to come in and work for me. You know, it's lovely that you've done all of these esoteric classes and you can do this and you can do that, but we haven't done that in industry for ten years. So, I wouldn't mind seeing similar relevance brought to the IT curriculum where people like myself are brought in to say, guys this is how we build databases today or this is how we deploy servers or, you know, this is what Web 2.0
really means, and things like that. But again, that’s just making work for myself, isn't it? I mean, that’s above and beyond the call of duty. But I would enjoy that, I've always enjoyed when I've been invited to do things though.

**And networks of expatriates, as you are an American in Ireland...**

I have no connections with the American expat community at all.

**Oh, no, you don’t?**

No interest in it.

**The Americans who work for Dell or other IT companies?...**

No, Yanks, can't live with them, can't shoot them.

I know Irish people who worked in IT in America or UK, now they are here in Ireland, as CEOs or other c-level functions - but they have a background in diasporic mobility. So you connect with any type of expatriate culture or networks?

No. There's a few American riders that when they come to Ireland, you know, horse show riders, that when they come to Ireland, I make a point to connect with, but that would be much more on a personal interest basis, in other words, we have the horse in common, not the nationality in common. In other words there's also two German riders that when they come over, I'm just as good of friends with. And I have no German blood in me, please God.

**So when you got an offer to work at Dell Ireland, was your nationality a positive factors, in a sense that “Well I'm American, he's American, let's bring him in”?**

I believe, and again if we keep the anonymity of this, I can be bold in saying that I believe that the boss that hired me who was a senior VP was exceedingly pleased to have hired someone with both my skills set and my cultural background. I often heard him say things like, “I wish the Irish managers would learn what you've learned, I wish the Irish managers would stand up to the Americans the way you do.” I mean, the one group of people that most hated my being employed by Dell Ireland was Dell America because now there were IT managers that they couldn't push around and call dumb poor cousins. Now it often got me very close to being fired, I once hung up on Michael Dell’s admin with a good deal of force. That is the only think you can't do with a mobile phone. But to be honest, I do believe that Larry made a conscious decision, well I don't think there was any other candidate for my role, but I think had there been two equal candidates, I believe he would have chosen me over an equally qualified Irishman because he was anxious to have that kind of different culture and kind of different attitude in the mix.

Yeah, this that you're saying is interesting because the Irish CEOs that lived in America, UK or Asia say very similar things, that Irish people who travel and have an expatriate background behave differently.

**So yeah, please be reassured that anonymity will be kept. Respecting your wish, I will make sure that we remove any references to companies or to your name.**

Oh no, I have much less of an issue with this than you think. If you do nothing more than simply remove my name, I will be quite comfortable with that.

**OK, and would you like to have a copy of the audio file? I can send you a link and you can download ...**

No, I'm boring, no interest in hearing myself.
OK. Is there any question, any issue that I didn't ask you that you would like to talk about?

Oh well, no, I mean, it depends on the goal of your study. There's a lot of places we could have gone and we probably could have spent a month on the gender disparity issue. But I'm glad we didn't. But no, I mean, I talk for Ireland given the right topic, but if this has met your needs for your study, then I'm pleased.

All right. Where in America are you from?

I was born in upstate New York, farm country, lived there until I was seven, seven. And we moved to Southern California, San Diego, lived there until I was, well lived at home until I was old enough to go to college, went to college, and then of course went straight into the Navy, lived on an aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean for four years, came home long enough to change my clothes and move up to Portland Oregon, lived there for eight years, same job, came down to San Francisco, the Bay area, and lived there for fifteen years with two different jobs. And then I lived here what's it, about eleven years, twelve years, yeah. Twelve years.

So would you see differences between Europeans and Americans in terms of mobility being seen as a positive or as a negative?

Again more based on culture, you know, the French don't like to leave France, the Germans aren't that fond of leaving Germany, the British will leave England at the drop of a hat, the Irish won't wait for the hat to get halfway to the floor. You know, it's different culture by culture. What I do believe is that those that do travel, as you said, become expatriate at some point, are of significantly more value to the company they work for regardless of what area they work in. I believe that a person that's been in India for a couple of years, or Japan for a couple years, or New York City for a couple years is culturally and personality wise stronger than a person who hasn't. I think travel does broaden the horizon.

OK. Thank you very much.

You're very welcome. I hope that was what you were looking for.

Very useful, yes.
INTERVIEW 11
Nomadic Work/Life in the Knowledge Economy

Anthony interviews Deirdre (Comptroller of [mid-size telecom software firm]) - 22 Sept. 2009

If you could tell me please about yourself in the company. I don't know what your role is.

OK, I'm financial controller of [mid-size telecom software firm]. We've, I've been here from the start. We set up the company in '99, and there were four technical founders of the company, who've all come from the same industry and the same company. So they really focused on the technical aspects of it and I focused on the administration and finance, some HR, basically anything that's not technical.

So can you describe your typical day here?

Typical day, I work, usually I arrive here about 8 o'clock. I sort of go through emails and basically there's always something new in those, so that sort of decides the day really. We, I finish work at, between 6 and 7 usually, sometimes 8. Because we have our offices in different parts of the world, I need to be here early to speak to the people in the Asia side, and then later to speak to the people in the America side. So, but that's not always, it's just, I mean, we are a lean organisation, so there are basically only two of us looking after the administration and the finance, so there's quite a lot to do and the work days are fairly full on.

So do you also control the accountants, accounts payable and accounts received?

Everything to do with finance and administration is my responsibility. And company secretary. I attend board meetings, I, you know, do, you know, financial sort of presentations, forecasts, budgets, that kind of thing.

I saw, on the website, the ownership structure of this company, like there is venture capital, Shannon Development.

That's right, they have a very small stake, yeah. So, like I said, it was originally set up by the four, the four technical guys, and then what they did to the other thing is roll in the, enlisted the head of the venture capital company and then we also had a partner invest in us from a different country. They each have a representative on the board.

Still in your typical day, can you tell a bit more? You come at 8 and leave at 6. Do you have your own family? What's your family life, outside of work...

I'm single, so I don't, work actually sort of encroaches then a lot on sort of free time because I find that if there's something to be done, I just stay back and do it. And, you know, so it sort of eats into the evening I find, you know. Leaving to be home for 7 is good, you know. So I am trying to cut down the hours all right, and, you know, have a life outside of work. But, yeah, work would be sort of a big part of my life.

Could you expand a little bit about what you mean by have a life outside of work?

Well, just in terms of socialising, in terms of even exercise and just having some free time basically. I feel the day is gone if you don't get home until about 7, you know, 7 or 8. So, yeah, I think, you know, half 5 or 6 would be, should be plenty, you know, should be, would give you a good stretch to the after, to the evening then, you know. So, I generally don't work weekends. I try to fit the work into the five days.

What are the favourite things you like to do out of work?
I entertain quite a lot, you know, I would have parties, and I like hillwalking, sailing, go to the pub occasionally, go to GAA matches, rugby matches, you know, the usual.

**So do you have a boat?**

No, I don't, no. I crew. Some friends of mine have boats and we crew, we just race in a club a few times a week or the weekends, depending on the time of the year.

**And the friends you socialise with and entertain, who are they generally?**

They would, many of them would be, have their own business. They'd be, who are they in terms of professional, would they have professions? Most, I would say 99 percent of them work in, you know, are professional people, have their own business or sort of work in, you know, one of the professions, law areas or accountants or whatever. Well, medical as well, I have a few friends that are gone into the medical profession.

**Are they somehow connected with your family, like your parents, uncles and aunts?**

I would have met some of, like through the sailing, I would have met some of them through that. I would, no they wouldn't be, they wouldn't be through relatives.

**Can you tell me a little bit about your background, like your family background and where you come from, what you studied?**

What I studied? I'm from a rural background. My parents were farmers, they're retired now. I went to college, I did a primary degree, I did then an MBA in UCD. I then did one or two other post-graduate certificates in, I did one in computing and I did one in, no just the one, I did just the one in computing. I used to do quite a lot of, you know, just interest courses, like philosophy and wine-tasting and various things but, you know, in the recent years, I have sort of not, I suppose I, they've outlived their usefulness or, you know, I sort of got bored with them so.

**Like sailing, now that's very interesting.**

Yeah, well it is, but, you know, I mean, I suppose, you know, you do it once or twice, you know, and then it's sort of lived its lifespan. So what, oh yeah, I've worked in about three, four companies in my, three companies since I started work. One of them I spent a long time in, about 15 years in, and then I spent, I've been here 10 years, and then the other one I had a short period of time in.

**From what region of Ireland are you from?**

Kerry.

**And these companies, where were they located?**

Limerick, they're all Limerick. I've been in Limerick all my working life.

**And these four companies, what industries they are in?**

All, one was a computer company, one was actually a furniture company, that was only for a very short time, and then here for 10 years.

**And you said four companies, the other?**

Was Shannon Development, that was again, a very short time.
OK, all right. So you spent most of your years, professional years working in high-tech companies like computer companies.

I did, yeah.

And do you find anything special or particular about working for a computer company?

No, actually just, it just happened. I mean, the first, the one, the job I had for about 15 years, it just, I was shortly out of college, it was the early '80s and jobs were quite difficult to come by. I, oh yeah, I also have, I did a teaching qualification, so I had thought about going teaching after college and I did, I couldn't get a job for, you know, full-time job, and then this job came up in the computer company, and I took it and it just sort of, you know, the way, just stayed there really rather than, just lethargy more than anything else, I think. So, and it's a multinational company, you know, it had quite a lot going for it in terms of, you know, there was quite a lot of exposure to consolidating accounts and, you know, the technology of accounting packages and accounting practices between companies. So it was actually quite good experience. I probably stayed there about five years too long, though.

Was this before you MBA or after?

I did the MBA towards the end of that time.

Now, about moving and commuting, do you live far from here?

I live in Limerick, I sometimes walk to work. It takes me an hour and twenty minutes to walk here. I drive because I come early in the morning, I can drive in about ten, fifteen minutes. If I leave it later, if I leave, were to leave at like say 9 or half 9, it would probably take me much longer.

And you grew up in Kerry, and you studied at UCD?

UCC, UCC and post-gra in UCG.

And why Limerick? Why did you end up moving to, and working in Limerick?

It was the job, I got the job first. I was applying for jobs all over the place, and I had only planned to stay here a little while because I never liked, seemed to like shopping in Limerick as a child. So I thought, no, it'll do, I'd like to get back to Cork. I suppose people like where they go to college as well, so I thought I'd like to get back to Cork, but it just didn't happen, you know, it just, I just sort of stayed in, stayed here.

Why not Dublin?

I'm a country person. I don't think I could live in Dublin. I mean, Limerick is, I know Limerick is a city, but you know, it's small enough to, I couldn't do too long a commute, I would just, wouldn't be able to do a too long commute in the day. And just, I'd feel very claustrophobic in Dublin I think. I go there for GAA matches, and it's plenty.

All right, yeah. So you come, you come to work walking most days?

No, not most days, a few times a week. Those days I'd be a bit later getting to work. I'd leave the house at about 20 past 7, I'd get here maybe half 8, 20 to 9.

Wow that's good exercising.
Oh it is, yeah, that's right, you know, to build exercise into the day is great. Or I find sometimes, especially when the weather is so unpredictable that, you know, it's not always possible.

And about your colleagues here in the company, in terms of mobility, do they all live in the region or do they travel far?

We have a number of people working here commuting from Galway, about five, I'd say. A number of people working from Clare, Ennis and Shannon. And I think most of the others are in Limerick. Oh sorry, there's one guy, there are two guys, sorry, two or three guys from Cork. They commute, they sometimes work one day a week from home.

OK, in terms of, now I know that there is, there are offices in the Emirates, in Indonesia, in Malaysia, in the U.S., is there much travelling around?

We have people employed in those regions and they would, where possible, service the region, you know, in terms of customer operations. We, most of our customers are, all of, nearly all, 90 percent of our customers are international customers, and like you said, Malaysia and Indonesia have been very good to us. At the moment, Africa is good. So we would have people travelling quite a lot. Mostly the customer operations people, the people who install the products and also the sales people, so those two groups would make up about twenty people that would do a significant amount of travel.

And the engineers who develop the projects?...

They're based here.

So, the R&D is located here?

Here, yeah, we don't, we develop in-house so mostly engineers wouldn't travel.

And do you travel, have you been to Indonesia and to Malaysia?

No, no I don't, I prefer to travel for holidays. I don't, I don't particularly like, if I can at all avoid it. It seems that I will not be able to avoid going to Malaysia for much longer, but we have changed a legal entity there now so I will have to go a few times a year.

A few times a year?

Twice a year, I think. Yeah, for these meetings that have to take place in Malaysia.

The international, the staff overseas, are they Irish or are they locals?

We have two expats relocated, but all the others are local.

OK. And so you, you don't really like travelling internationally.

Not on business, not on business. I mean, I do, I mean I have done quite, I have been, I've travelled a bit around China and Tibet and Nepal and I did a bit in Australia and, you know, I do travel for holidays, but I just find the business travel very cumbersome, I don't like it.

Now that's true. I worked as a consultant for a short while and I travelled sometimes, you know, on the other hand, the business covers all expenses, hotel, tickets.
Yeah, you’re in an anonymous hotel, you know, and they’re all the same and, you know.

You may eventually do some sight-seeing. You have to work, but then after it there’s some sight-seeing.

I suppose because I, because I don’t like it, I would always try to have as many meetings in a short time, so I rarely had the opportunity to have, the sight-seeing or the nicer side of business travel, you know. So no, I would limit it as much as possible.

And in your career, have you ever considered moving to the U.K., the U.S., or ...

No, no, I really enjoy living in Ireland, you know. I would possibly enjoy it a bit further if I was living out in the country, you know, if I could work from home and live in the country a bit. But I think, I enjoy the culture here, I enjoy the social life, I enjoy just, you know, just the standard of living I have here. And I feel I can travel to these countries, you know, when I’m feeling restless.

You mentioned work from home, which is a very interesting topic that we sometimes cover or hear in our interviews: remote working. Your work, would it allow you to do some remote working from home if you wanted or if it was necessary?

It would be, it’s, it would be quite difficult to organise in terms of, some of my work involves, you know, sort of HR and meeting people and meeting vendors and meeting suppliers, and sort of management meetings and stuff like that. So, you know, I could occasionally work from home but, you know, there would be so much organisation involved. I feel it’s easier just to come in and, you know, like I said, the commute time is not a problem. So (inaudible) the real benefits except that I was living more remotely, you know, if I was living out in the country a bit further or something like that.

And how do you see technology into your work?

Well, I mean, the introduction of broadband and the Internet. The Internet wasn’t around when I started work. You know, it just turned everything on its head, you know, it’s been so fantastic. You know, I’d expect almost to get a response now to everything immediately, you know, and in terms of information, it’s just at your fingertips.

And what other gadgets do you use? Like do you use a Blackberry?

No, I’m not a gadget person. I have a mobile phone.

So your work doesn’t require you to have Blackberry or electronic devices?

They have, I mean, I would be responsible for giving them out, you know, to the management and staff here. So obviously, I could put myself first on the list, I just don’t want to. I feel that at the moment, just with a work mobile phone, I’m contactable enough without getting emails and all sorts of other sort of intrusions on my time off. I feel, you know, I’m here, I’m here when most people, when you need me, when most people need me during the day or when, so I don’t travel like I said, at the moment, so you know, I don’t see the need for it really.

OK, so you work from 8 to 5 or 6 or 7, and when you step off office, do you take work home?

No.

So you leave it here.

Yeah. Very occasionally, obviously, I’d have, read a report at home or I’d get a phone call about some problem. But, you know, it would be only a few times a year.
OK, and how do you communicate with people in other countries about work? You know, Malaysia, Indonesia...

We use Skype quite a lot. Skype, or you know, emails or phone.

OK. And what, you know, I use Skype with my wife to, because she's in America.

Oh really, OK.

And so we commute back and forth sometimes.

Jeepers, oh my God, that must be the worst situation.

Do you use the video, the video feature when you use Skype?

Not with work.

Oh, you don't have, you don't prefer to see people on the other side?

Not really, no, some of the laptops, all right, the guys have the video feature built in. I have a desktop and I don't have the video feature, so I'm happy that they don't see me cringing when they're telling me the wrong answer.

I know what you mean. So do you guys do simultaneous teleconference, like various people at the same time?

Yes, we do, we use a teleconferencing company for that.

So that's like people in different offices around the world, they connect at the same time to have meetings.

Yeah, we would do that, yeah. The sales guys I know use Skype as well for that, they can do that through Skype. But even for the board meetings, we use, we will occasionally use the conferencing facility.

OK, yeah, I know you are the administrative, financial side, but would you know how the people at the R&D, the more technical staff use Skype or how often they meet internationally?

They don't. No, they, I mean, the developers, generally we'd get a spec from the, or one or two of the developers would sort of work with the sales people to develop a spec, and then most of the other people would be working on that spec, you know. We did have an outsource, we had a contracting company in Romania there a few months ago, and the developer, the developing company, the developers contracted in Romania, and developers were in contact with them, but they would use Skype or emails mostly.

Would they do that on a daily basis? I mean, how intensive is this remote work?

Well, the, it would be really, it's really, really important for the customer operations group. You know, we have about eight or ten of them based here, and then we have some, you know, in the various offices around the world. So they need to be contactable or be able to talk to each other, you know, 24/7. We provide 24/7 on-call for our customers, so if a customer rings at 2 o'clock in the morning, our guys need to be able to communicate with each other to find out, you know, who's the problem, what's the problem, who's going to fix it.

OK, so in some, about technology, do you think technology makes people more mobile in your company, makes people less mobile?
Oh, definitely, it, you know, it makes people way more mobile, but then sometimes it kind of reduces the necessity for people to travel so much if you can have teleconferences or conferences or Skype or, you know, constant contact. The only thing is sometimes I feel that a face to face meeting is, you get a little bit more from a customer if you have a face to face meeting rather than, you know, a telephone all the time.

**Talking about face to face interactions, have you met the office people in person, face to face.**

Yeah, the people we hired remotely is it, that are working in the remote offices?

Yeah, for example, people in Indonesia, Malaysia, have you met them in person?

Yeah, they would have been brought here, they would have been brought here at the beginning for some training and just sort of company policy and how we do things.

**So initially, at any point you met them in person.**

Yeah, well I mean, most of them I probably would only have met once, you know, yeah once, I'd say, or twice, unless they're the sales guys who come here quite often, you know.

**Do you think it helps to have met the person before ...**

Oh absolutely, yes, because, you know, it's very difficult to get a picture of somebody and, over the phone, and the cultural differences are sometimes quite difficult to understand. So I think if you meet somebody face to face, it's easier to say, well, this is how I want something done and this is the way we do it here and this is why we do it. You can see their reaction to it and then you know yourself, you can kind of gauge a little better than, you know, and you can make allowances for the cultural differences.

**OK. The two Irish expats, why were they sent rather than hiring local people? Why in this case did you have to send Irish people?**

One of them was sent, is now living in Malaysia and he, he's sort of, he's heading up the office there. The reason he was chosen is that he has a huge, he has a very high level of expertise and we were, we were fortunate enough to receive his CV and he wanted to be in Malaysia. So he's only ever spent a few weeks here, so from the time we hired him, he's been living in Malaysia, or Indonesia for part of the time.

**Is this a permanent relocation or is it just a period of time and people will come back?**

That particular fellow, I think, would only work there, would only work in Malaysia. And the other chap, he was working here for a few years and expressed an interest in going to Mexico, so we have a customer there and they insisted that we support them by opening, by having a presence in Mexico. So we opened the office there and we sort of promoted this guy then to be more sales role than sort of a customer support role. And he, and we hired a few people then to do the customer support. So he's more involved in developing the sales in South America.

**And he relocated permanently as well?**

Yes, he did. It wasn't sort of a fixed return date anyway on his contract. We would have to see, you know, in terms of how the business is going and that, you know.

**Moving to a different topic about men and women, are there many women working in this company?**

There are about 60 employees altogether, and there are six women. Six out of 60.
Are they in administration or R&D, or the more technical stuff?

They're, two of us in administration. There are two in sales and marketing, and two in technical development.

Are they all Irish, the six ladies?

One is French, she's living in Ireland. One is British, she's actually, she works from home, she works from the UK. And the others are Irish.

Looking back at your career, how have your experiences as a woman being, working in high tech companies or in offices in general, you know, your studies, your jobs?

Well, there was a time I think where I felt that guys seemed to get a promotion a bit easier. But in the last number of years, I suppose I don't really have exposure to it now. I don't think it's, I think, not sure really if it has changed so much, I don't know to be honest.

You don't feel any differences over the years, like the Celtic Tiger years, before and after?

Well I still don't see that many women at senior level in organisations. In general, you know, if you were talking to somebody senior, it's generally a fellow. Now there are some, obviously, but it's the exception I think.

Well I think, I think women sort of give up a bit of their career, especially for families, I suppose for families, really. The career takes a back seat when the family comes along, I presume that's the main reason. I noticed that some of the women here that are married would tend to sort of have a bit more leave than others, you know, sick leave or absences. You find, you find, you don't, I don't have many guys coming to me saying that the child is sick, I need to take the day off.

And is this a problem for furthering their careers?

For the women, is it, here?

For women to take more time off to take care of the family, do you think that this besets their development in the market, in the job?

I think it sort of restricts in terms of, you know, mobility, in terms of, you know, having meetings, attending meetings abroad and that kind of thing. Some women would find it difficult to manage a family and to be able to do, our meetings are scheduled very quickly, I mean, people will be told today that you're going to Indonesia tomorrow, you know. You need to have that flexibility to, for some of the jobs in this company, you know. It possibly doesn't suit everybody, you know.

Thinking about recruitment, when you open a position, do you get many CVs from women, is it 50-50 applications in terms of candidates?

Well, if I did, I'd wonder how we ended up with, with 54 guys and six women. I'm not sure is it because of the technology, the telecoms technology that, is that why most of the applicants would be male. I don't know. But no, I wouldn't, it would certainly, it depends on the role obviously, but you know, most of the technical roles, and especially the customer operations roles, women do not seem to want to travel that much. So most of the applicants would be male.

That's a very good point, you say that women don't want to travel that much...
Well, to the places that we would need you to go. I mean, in the beginning, we needed people to go to Jakarta and Guatemala and South America, some places in South America, and you know, they'd be hot enough spots, you know. Oh yeah, of course the Middle East, women don't ...

**The first place you mentioned, Jakarta?**

Jakarta, yeah. Then the Middle East, we find difficult, you know, places like the Ivory Coast then, you know, it's just, it's not, I don't think it would be safe to send a girl there. So I suppose some of the roles really wouldn't suit women.

**And briefly, of the 60 people, how many are in administration, sales, and technical?**

There are two in, well, there are two, and I suppose, the managing director is, or CEO is sort of administration, I suppose, but so there'd be three of us then. There are about, is it ten in sales, ten in customer operations, the rest would be development.

**Heading towards the end of our conversation - society, transformations and improvement. Thinking about the Celtic Tiger years, like 1990s when Ireland grew a lot, there was a lot of transformations and high-tech development here. How do you see this? You mentioned to me that you came from a rural background and you studied business and finance. How do you see the main transformations in Ireland, or, what strikes you as the strongest transformations?**

In terms of the affluence, is it? Or in terms of what we need?

**Society in general, the way we live.**

Well I think that, you know, the instant, sort of the instant gratifications, the instant messages, the instant response, the need for, you know, an immediate, immediate information or, I think that really has changed. I mean, now if I make an arrangement to meet somebody, they'll say, oh sure, I'll phone you, you know, there's no sort of thing, I'll meet you on Wednesday at 2 o'clock and stick to it. No, I'll meet you on Wednesday, and sure, I'll phone you, see what time or see when, everything, you know, everything is moveable and changeable and, you know, it seems people suit themselves a bit more and, you know, if it suits me, I'll do it or if it doesn't, I won't. Whereas before, I think people, you know, sort of made more of an effort, made a decision and stuck by it, you know.

**So, are you are somehow complaining about this, or are you thinking ...**

Well, no, obviously there, yeah, no, I'm not complaining about it. I mean, I do it myself, you know, so. But I'm not sure sort of from a, yeah, no I'm not complaining about it, it's just, it is just the way it's changed. And I suppose, you know, communications has had, and technology has facilitated that really.

**In terms of gender transformations, you were talking to me about places that are not suitable for women and, or women value family more than males, perhaps.**

Well, it's a role, it's not a value. It's just a role. Women adopt the role of being the sort of, the responsible person or the person who's going to take the day, take the leave day, or not travel with work, whatever.

**Has it changed in Ireland over the years, ten, twenty, thirty years?**

It's very slowly changing. I mean, you know, women in Ireland were always responsible for the family, were the main sort of organisers of the family, and sort of, mostly, still is.
With regard to the family, I think women decide and the guys just go along with it, that's what I see, you know. Then, you know, the man has his role as provider still, you know, I mean, as basic and archaic as that may seem, but that, it still seems to be that way, that the, although I do know one couple who, where the guy stays at home and the women goes out to work. But it's mostly the other way around, so if there is somebody to think, if there's a need or if there's somebody thinking of quitting the job, it's usually the woman I think.

**And why is that?**

For a few reasons. I think women like to be at home and, you know, they like to have the family, to be with the family. Sometimes they mightn't admit it because they don't feel it's PC or whatever, you know. But that and in a lot of the families I would know, the men are, have better payed jobs.

**For the same type of work?**

Yes, especially in the medical field, I find that the families, you know, the guys sort of set up their own business and the women work in the help or they work as employees rather than entrepreneurs if you like.

**Yeah. Back to the gender in the high-tech thing, like why do you think that women are not in the engineering, scientific, technical positions in high-tech companies? They usually do the administrative work, right?**

Yeah, that's right, yeah.

**Why is that?**

I actually, I actually wondered about that because, you know, you hear about the leaving, what are they, the leaving cert results and you hear how well that girls do in maths and in the sciences and that, and somewhere between that and the work life, it seems to, you know, it doesn't translate into technical, telecoms technical roles, anyway, I'm not sure about other technical roles, it certainly hasn't, not in this industry. I'm not sure why is it, that it's career choices or what, I don't know.

**And in terms of improvement, in relation to the company being located in the technology park. How does this help? How relevant it is?**

It's not so important, but I suppose in terms of a customer, you know, a customer perception, you know, if a customer hears you're in the technology park and near university, I think that they automatically presume then that you're sort of, you know, innovative and, you know, you, for no particular reason, it's just that they, it's kind of a general perception. Now it suits us. We looked at other places for a building and not all in the technology park, and we found this one that was more suitable, you know.

**OK. In terms of networking or exchanges with the university or other companies here, does this happen?**

All the employees here are graduates of a university, not all of UL. Everybody has, I think everybody has a basic degree, at least a basic degree, a good few masters and a few PhDs. So from the recruitment point of view, I suppose, you know, being located next to a university would help. But we have found it very difficult to collaborate with universities on projects. I think the scope and the time that it takes the university to, or the people involved, to develop, develop a product is too long. You know, if we want, if we, if a customer wants, we develop basically to customer requirements. And if a customer wants, you know, a singing, all-dancing doll, you know, we need to start working on it fairly immediately and we’re not going to wait three years while somebody uses it to do a PhD, you know.

**Exactly. I've heard this issue some times, actually.**
So, yeah, I mean, we do have a project on-going with UL at the moment and we have one with UCG as well. It's the first, these are the first two projects we're doing so we'll see how it goes.

With students or faculty of these places?

Students, I think.

So in terms of improvement, what types of improvement you would like to see happening, either at a national level, or in Limerick area, technology park, or specifically your work, daily work?

Well, I suppose, support, I mean, when companies, when we were starting up this company, I felt we didn't get a whole lot of support from the government agency or from the banks in particular, or you know, from, I'm not sure if what, if any, support the universities could give, but the government agencies and the banks could certainly be a bit more helpful to start-up companies and growing companies, providing, you know, all sorts, in terms of sales advice and, you know, management structures and finance, these are things that every company needs, you know, everybody, every, you know, and most companies, you know, when you're starting off, you don't know how you're going to structure the company, you don't know how you're going to do sort of finances and everything like that, so I think that such help to industries would be easily developed, you know. I know the IDA and Enterprise Ireland are trying now with all of these new schemes to help, but it's a bit, you know, it's sort of a bit late, you know, I think. I think they should get in a bit earlier on the scene, you know.

It's late in a sense because the company now it's developing well by itself without ...

Yeah, yeah, I mean, at the very beginning, you know, we certainly could have, could have done with the help and you know, you know, if we had gotten more help, you know, we could have been maybe at a further stage now, you know.

If you could request any improvement from Shannon Development, what would you ask? If they could somehow make your life easier, what would you ask?

Well, market information and financial support obviously are always helps, you know. Obviously as well, at the very beginning, you know, advice about structures of the company, that kind of thing is always very useful as well, legal advice, you know, that kind of thing.

All right. And in terms of your daily work, at the beginning you mentioned that you were trying to cut back on hours that you spent in the office. Is there pressure on you to work long hours, is this something that you're trying to, is this something that bothers you?

Well it doesn't, well it doesn't bother me too much, obviously, you know, if it did, if it was, if it was a huge problem, you know, I'm at a stage now where, you know, I'd actually do something about, I'd do something more drastic about it. You know, I just, it just seems to, just the day seems to creep along, you know, and next thing you look up and say, oh God, it's 7 o'clock again, you know. But no it's not, it's not really. I just, I just think sometimes that I should just, you know, I should be more structured about my work.

OK. I think we covered all the questions. This is very useful and interesting. Do you have any questions about this or any concerns?

Now, what are you using the information for?

OK, well it's an academic study. We're going to use this information to write articles, to enlighten ourselves, you know, at UL. As I said, it's confidential.
Conference papers and that kind of thing, is it?

Yeah, conference papers, articles. This interview will be transcribed. I can mail you the file of this interview if you want.

No, that's OK. No, thank you.

And also, I mean, we don't, I don't think I asked anything secret, but if you feel uncomfortable with any of the things that I asked, you know, we can …

No, it's fine.

We're going to, you know, try to erase names …

Oh right, that's fine, sorry, I did mention a few names, did I? I'm sorry. I didn't even think.

No problem. So as I said, this information may eventually go to some policy makers, so they can think about it and make decisions...
If you could please tell me about yourself, like your current life, your current life, what you do, I mean role. I saw the website, that you're a managing director of your company, right, if you could explain, describe ...

Yeah, I founded the company, [IT network start-up], in 2006, so I'm the managing director and I have one co-director who, he owns half the company. But basically I'm the boss really in terms of running the company (inaudible) so I have lots of responsibility for developing business and looking after everything, administrative side. I don't do an awful lot of day to day kind of design work, maybe half my time on that. But at least half my time is spent managing the business and growing business and dealing with customers and that's what I'm interested in as well. Yeah, I'm 27, nearly 28 now and I was 24 when I started the company after I finished a master's programme.

In?

In interactive media. I had worked, I had done a degree in UL and I was, came out of school in business studies and French. And that was an economics and finance I did my master, or my major. And after that I worked in, for about two or three years, in finance. I worked in France Telecom and in AIB for that time. And I decided I wanted to start my own business and I wanted to, I had an interest in interactive media and in digital media, so I decided to go back and do the master's and then open business probably the last week. When we finished the course, we set up the company and then that's three years ago now. So that's a general overview of my work life.

Yeah, I saw your company is four managers and then there is a long list of associates.

Yeah, we have kind of, we had that idea. At the start, we set up an extended network of people that we use. Now it probably needs some updating, but I suppose we do use lots of freelance people. But at the moment we've actually gotten a, started a big project then of taking on some extra developers so basically there's, I'm the managing director, Dennis is my partner, business partner, Oisin is a creative director, and then we have a guy who came on with us, we made him the technical director. So we have three actual directors, but two owners. And then, so we make kind of strategic decisions between us. But now we have another three staff working for us, two programmers and one interface design guy. So we just had to take them on the last few weeks, so it's kind of changed the business. But I'm operating really as a project manager now at the moment, and as a coordinator, so it's really making sure everybody has what they need to work and that things happen on time and just, we're trying to implement agile project management, which is what we're trying to use for all our projects.

Agile, is this a methodology?

Yeah, it's a methodology for, a framework for how you complete a project from start or beginning. It's just an approach that we're using and we use a software tool that goes with it and basically it's a very flexible way of dividing up large complex projects into simple, meaningful tasks with short deadlines so people don't lose track or don't get bogged down in big, long meetings. It's just very, very human friendly. So that's something I'm very interested in at the moment.

Yeah, I know Prince, Prince 2 methodology, which is a British government. It's not related to software, ICT, it's general, yeah.
Yeah, so that's, I'm wandering a bit, but that's what I do now so, or will be doing for the next while, is really more strategic and more project managing rather than using, doing, dealing with day to day or small technical problems. I leave that to the other guys. So my role is changing a little, but I prefer what I'm doing now, when I can have more control, I can focus on what we're doing from a higher level because sometimes we get tied up in very small day to day problems, and you lose sight of what you're trying to achieve with the business.

And also, specifically, just out of curiosity, how did you start up your company like in terms of financial and legal support?

Just, what did we do? I got, I got about 10, 10 to 15 thousand euros from my, one of my family members as a kind of a angel investment is what you call it, or long-term loan that I can pay back whenever I, just to get buy some equipment and before we had any sales or customers. And after that, we just set up the company as a limited company, which it only cost a few hundred euros.

I mean, UL or Shannon Development or Enterprise Ireland, you were not involved with them?

Not at the start, no. But I did in, within the first, let's say, within seven or eight months, I, we went to the county enterprise board in Limerick, and they gave us some support, they gave us about 20,000 euros in 2000 and, we had our first, in our first or second year, we got some support. And then after that we were put onto a different programme with Enterprise Ireland. It's called an incubation programme for small business.

Was that a loan or a capital investment? They became co-owners of your company?

No, no. It's just they, the county enterprise board just give you what's called an employment grant, so for each person you employ, they give you 6,000 euros, so it's just to get more people in, working, in employment, to encourage companies to employ more people. So you get, it's a once-off payment, there's no, all you have to do is show transparent records that you've paid your taxes and so on. There's no actual catch. So, but we went on then to an incubation programme and we got another, we got some support which is directly paid to me as the participant in the programme, which came to about 10 or 15 thousand euros. And that kind of brings us up to now. We've been talking to Enterprise Ireland again now about if they can support our research and development activity that we're involved in at the moment.

And in terms of your choice to be located in the technology park, how did it happen, like why not downtown, city centre, why the technology park? Can you please elaborate on that.

I'm just trying to remember now. I got in touch with, I suppose because myself and when we started the company, we lived here in the, in Castletroy area, but we just got in touch with somebody in Enterprise Ireland and they gave us the number of a, or the contact of a local leased office and we went down and spoke to them, and it was brand new office and it was very good rate. We just moved in there and we did, because it was, things like parking was an issue, like if you move into the city centre, you have higher costs, the rent is higher for one, it could be twice the price maybe. Then you have traffic everyday going to work, we're not selling high street, we're not expecting people to walk in off the street and buy our services, so it didn't make, if you were selling shoes or something, you'd have to locate, but we're not in retail business and it made no difference really, I felt, if we were in city centre or out beside, it's actually good to be out beside the University of Limerick in a lot of ways, because it's a good association for the, when you tell people, they assume that you're connected to the university, or they just, it sounds good I think, that and technology park, it gives you more credibility.

Yeah in several interviews, people tell me that it's a good branding strategy to connect your company to the technology park.

And as well, the benefits that we were, from a personal level, that we were near our own, very near our own dwelling or where we lived like. So it was a very short commute to work, you could nip home any time you want.
And like I said, the office was a good, we're still up in that building, and it's very well maintained and good security and very good, very, very good connectivity with, they have a dedicated hundred megabyte Internet connection.

**But besides image and besides connectivity, the physical proximity to UL help you at all, to make connections?**

Yeah, yeah.

*Is this important in a business, to make, to talk to faculty, to talk to students, to talk to other business people in a park, or you don’t connect...*

Well we do, I suppose, we, because we came from, we set up the business when we were still actually part of the computer science programme in interactive media, so effectively we were still students when we started the business of UL. So we told, we knew everybody in say the interactive design centre, from Day One everybody knew that we were setting up this company. So we kind of established a connection right from Day One that we were going, part of the university, we're setting up this company, and we kept all our links there, and we've kept in communication, we've done a quite a bit or work, we've got quite a bit of contract work with the university as well.

Yeah, I saw you created the website of IDC, right? I saw that today.

Yeah, it's a computer science department, yeah.

I saw another website you guys created, it's for this rugby video game.

Oh that's right, yeah, yeah. That's back, that was our first project actually. Yeah, yeah, so, it was good to get a start and it put something in our portfolio. It was an interesting ...

*Does that type of game connect with the, Football Manager, which is the biggest, best seller in PC games in Europe.*

Yeah, it was a local company who were making it and they contracted us to help them with the interface design and the graphics. So it was nice, nice job to start with. And I suppose like we were, we kind of still see ourselves, we're so near to the university, we've never really left like, you know, because we're just literally beside the sports field of the university. So you just walk through there and you're on the campus. So like we feel, still feel part of it, if you know what I mean.

**Near the golf course, the mini golf?**

The UniGolf, yeah, that's where we are, yeah, so. We've never, we feel we've never left, like we still feel part of the university kind of extended family.

Yeah, you're talking about that family. Can you tell me a bit about yourself as a person, where you're from, where you grew up, your family or your parents, your ...

My parents, they're primary school teachers, both of them. And my mother is from Dublin and my father is from, it's a town in, about an hour away from here called Thurles in County Tipperary, so I grew up in Thurles. And my mother met my father through teaching, I think, they got married and they moved, they lived there. So that's where I grew up and I went to school there, and pretty normal, in a rural kind of area, I guess. But I did have, I suppose, family, so half my family's from Dublin, so I spent a lot of time up there when I was younger as well. But yeah, I just went to school there and did my leaving cert in a CBS school, Christian Brothers School, in Thurles. I was always into, interested in sport when I was younger, so.
You're still very young.

Yeah, when I was 17, ten years ago. But I'm still young, yeah. But I was very interested in sport. I wasn't, I was pretty good at school but I wasn't maybe as academic as I should have been. You know how it is when you're a teenage boy, you just, you're more interested in girls and sport and having a good time than, you mightn't be as focused. But I just, later in life I realised I could have done more with, you know, that your leaving cert has a massive impact on your, in Ireland, on your career.

Your leaving certificate is your examination, it has a huge bearing on your, especially your career in your early 20s. It really determines where you end up, unless you go back maybe like do further education, like a master's or PhD or whatever. But basically people are, it has a massive impact on your life, what choices you make or how you perform in your school exams. I'm not sure if you know the system here, do you?

Yeah, people tell me about it sometimes.

Yeah, so it's very, very scientific. You get a score, points for each subject, and whoever gets the highest score gets to pick the course that they want basically. So it's, there's no, they don't, well they started now this year, but they don't interview people or anything like that. They just, if you got the points, you get this. And it's just done very arbitrarily like that, or very straight down the middle, I suppose, black and white, where you're either in or you're out. So it does really have a massive, I think from an anthropology point of view, it has a massive impact on Irish society because you find people from maybe certain backgrounds would have, be more likely to get higher points and then it's, you know, it's a self, it creates a gap in society, I think, when you judge people just on their points. But I was fine, I got enough points and I got into my course in the University of Limerick, yeah, so I did business studies and French.

Could you have chosen to go to Dublin or Cork?

Yeah, I could have.

What led you, what led you to UL?

I'm not sure, I think I might have put down, I don't think it was my first choice on the list. I think it might have been my second or third. I think I had, it's a while ago, I had Cork down as my first choice. I think my brother was actually at university there. But the course that I applied for, I didn't get enough points for it. So I got the one in the University of Limerick then. But I kind of knew myself that I'd probably end up getting this one, you know what I mean. So I suppose the impact as well was that because the maths, University of Limerick was the only college in Ireland giving extra points for honours maths, for high level maths, so I actually got bonus points in my, for University of Limerick, which didn't apply to Cork or anywhere else. If Cork had had bonus points, I probably would have got that course. So that, the UL policy of rewarding the, what's called honours maths or high level maths had a direct impact on me coming to UL.

So it tends to attract, to bring students who have a more mathematical ...

No, it's because, no, you wouldn't get the points, you see. Under normal circumstances, I wouldn't have got into the course in UL, but because I got, because I decided to do high level mathematics in school, I got I think twenty extra points, and that shoved me up into the course. So it was the only, it's the only one in Ireland that do that. But it's a good idea because honours maths is, or high level maths in school is the yard stick for kind of intellectual ability like. It's, especially to do an engineering subject and things like that.

And in terms of your siblings, your brothers and sisters, what are they doing now?
I have one older brother and he's just a year older than me, and he did a similar course, he did a, called commerce in UCC, in Cork, it's kind of like business studies. And just went straight through that and then he went working in, just went straight into working in a bank called EBS Building Society, and he's never left that. So he stayed there, so he took kind of a straight approach. He just stuck to what he was doing. Well, he actually did a, he did, I skipped a bit, he did a master's in political science in UCC first and then, so he did four years in his commerce degree, one year in master's and then straight into, he's been working in the bank for the last five or six years or whatever.

So, I have a younger, two younger sisters. One of them is, the youngest one is in second year, she's doing digital media engineering in DCU, in Dublin. And she, that's kind of very similar to the industry that I'm in. But she's, she's getting on well there. And my older sister, well, she's younger than me, the second sister is, she's actually in UL at the moment, she just started doing the same programme that I did in interactive media. But she had been working for my company, in [IT network start-up], for the last two years. She had done a degree in DCU as well, in communications, which is kind of to do with advertising. And then once she finished that, she worked for [IT network start-up] for two years, and now she started this master's programme here in UL.

Yeah, before I ask you questions about travelling and mobility, like I got very curious to know like why did you and your siblings went into high-tech courses and studies?

Well, I did, like originally, I went into a business course and my brother as well went into a business course. So, but I, when I went in it was like 1998 or 9 when I made my choices and there was no such thing as interactive media in 1999, really. The Internet was only just starting really, in '96 or 7, there was no courses in interactive media is what I mean. So I hadn't got the choice really. You could just do straight computer science or information technology, which was very much towards physics and engineering, which at the time, I didn't, I was more interested in creative media and design was my interest.

So yeah, I don't know why. I suppose I probably influenced my younger sisters in, I'd imagine, when you consider one of them ended up working in my company for two years, and now she's doing the same master's programme I did. And the other sister, the younger one, I kind of advised or helped, you know, gave her advice that that would be a good course for her. Now she started off, she did a year in UCC in astrophysics, which was looking at the planets and all that stuff, but she didn't really like it so she changed to DCU to digital media engineering. But I probably had a role in, because my company was up and running and she could see what we were doing and she probably got an interest. I'd imagine it had an impact because my parents wouldn't have any ICT skills or knowledge at all like so. I remember when I was, I think when I was in my leaving cert, I got, when I was about 18, I got my parents to buy a computer for our house. And I suppose I had a curiosity or an interest in it. There was nothing at all, like I had no influences other than that, only, I'm not sure why I got an, it's just my personality that I got interested in computers. And I got them to buy a computer and we got on the Internet. And from there really, I kind of got interested in digital media and, so.

OK, why the name [IT network start-up]?]

[IT network start-up], yeah. There's several reasons. There was three people actually who set up the company originally. But, so that was the tri, but I think we just felt it was, if you take a brand like Apple computers or, I suppose Microsoft have Windows, but it's just an object that's easy to identify as a brand, and it's easy to spell or type, and it kind of travel, it crosses borders well and languages. I mean, most people would be able to recognise the word tricycle, whereas if you had chose a word in your own language, just say, we were looking at names in Gaelic, and if you're, just say you're from Brazil or wherever, if you just pick a name in Portuguese or whatever, it doesn't go as well in different countries. So we just thought we would, if we'd gone international, the word tricycle would travel well, a very simple, short word. We weren't able to get, we were looking at domain names as well because that was very important, to buy our website address. But the word [IT network start-up].com was gone for years to, there's a big Buddhist website, which they weren't going to, I mean, they have a big community on it that they weren't going to give that. But we got the [IT network start-up]Interactive.com website, and we got
[IT network start-up].ie, so that was a big influence as well, what's available in terms, especially when you're a development company, your website has to be very ...

Yeah, well we had to be commercially focused as well as everything else because we were, you know, I said we were taking out names like in Irish, in Gaelic like that, that wouldn't just, nobody would be able to spell them or even to talk about your company. I think it's very easy for people to talk about our company in terms of the language because ...

**So you visualised in choosing the word in English, not in Gaelic, you visualise becoming international.**

Yes, yeah.

**In terms of travel, back to your daily life or weekly, monthly, do you travel, how is mobility for you? Do you travel, do you commute, how's that?**

Yeah, just from normal, in normal way, I just travel to, from my house to my office and from my office to meet customers and attend events, things like that. But just recently, in the last six months, we have a couple of customers now in the UK, so I've been over and back, I'd say five times this year, I've been over to the UK. And, in terms of international travel. But we have attended, we went to, last year we went to an expo in Amsterdam to do with digital signage and displays. And I'd like to get to some more of those type of events, but they cost, they're expensive I guess. Especially, a lot of them happen in California, the ones that we'd be interested in, in terms of digital media expos and conferences and things, the big ones. But I mean, there's things happening down here as well, but just, you know, if we're just going for a business trip.

But meeting customers would be the main cause of travel, I suppose, for me. So just around the, most of our, at the moment, it's mostly around this region here. We do have one customer or two in Dublin all right, and generally I get the train when I'm going there, and I use, I don't know if you want to get into this yet, but I'm just, I use a data connection (inaudible) on the trains so I can bring my laptop and work on the way up and the way down. So I find I only lose maybe an hour, maybe two hours in a day if I take a train to Dublin, because it's just, say, I can work for two hours on the way up and two hours on the way down. Whereas if I drive up, it's three hours up and three hours down, so I lose six hours if I drive. And I'm just driving like, which I don't get paid for. So if I take the train, so normally, if I go into Dublin to meetings, I take the train for that reason. And I try and make use of my day a bit better. Unless I really have to drive because I just feel it's an awful, it's a lot of time, it's practically a whole day just to, if you're just going to a meeting for one hour in Dublin, you lose six hours of your day just for one hour. So you can get back four hours of that on the train. So that's just one example, that only happens maybe on average, once a month or something like that.

**You already have clients in the UK. Do you go there often?**

I've, just in the last six months, we've had, we've started going over and back, so I said, I've probably gone over four or five times since January, or since February. And I have a visit, I'll be going back there once every couple of months at least.

**Yeah, based on these examples and also that you work using your laptop on the train, can you elaborate a little bit more about these relations between technology and mobility, how do you see those interacting?**

Well, that example is a more exceptional case. Like my normal day-to-day routine, my mobility is, works in a different way. But I use, since I got the iPhone device, I set that up, we've quite good systems for email and calendar and productivity. So I have a good, I have a good synchronisation set up with my iPhone and my email and all that. So I find that, even when I'm moving around, I'm always getting my emails and I'm checking them and I'm always kind of, I'm never, I'm always connected to what's going on like with the iPhone, and I can respond to them. It's just very user friendly I suppose. I've tried a few different phones, like I had, I had a Windows mobile
first, which was OK, but the interface was very bad. Then I had a Nokia, which has a very small screen and it's, you
know, it's kind of basic. But the iPhone is good, because you get proper size screen and you have your connectivity,
so you're always connected. Is that OK?

So the big difference is that, it's to do with the data plans and so on that the network give you, but it's your, it's
like, you know how they work, they're part of a kind of cloud like so it's always checking to see what's going on.
You don't have to manually check your emails or anything. They just arrive in, and then, like I said, it hooks up
nicely with my calendar as well, with reminders for events and meetings and I just find it has made a massive
difference to my mobility.

I got your meeting request in my Gmail account, but I hardly used that account, and I thus was very curious to
know how you're able to find out that email.

Oh, I don't know about that.

You sent me a meeting request, this meeting request.

I just sent it to your address that you, Google must have worked that one out. Google must know that you have a
Gmail connected to your UL address or something, I don't know. But, no, I think I just sent it to your, whichever
address that you contacted me on.

I used the UL email for that.

Yeah, and we use Google apps for our email and for our calendar. So that's another big factor in mobility as well
because we don't use Outlook or Lotus or anything like that. So we use, we use Google apps as, so we can use
Gmail as our mail client, if you want to put it that way. And so it's much better synchronisation and mobility than
normal people who use Outlook who keep all their stuff on a computer somewhere in a location. Whereas ours is
all in a cloud. And I can go on here and go search on my iPhone and it can search my 35,000 emails from the last
three years, and I'll have it in five seconds. Whereas people who use Outlook can, and old fashioned methods,
they're like, oh I have to go back to the office or I have to go back to my desk and, so.

But are all these emails on your iPhone as well?

No, no, they're on the server. Yeah, so that's why the data connection, it's, it makes a massive difference with the
way O2, the network that have the iPhone here, that they give you this one gigabyte of data connection. So you
don't, remember when dial up came out on the computers, like when I bought the first computer when I was 18
with my parents, we were on a dial up Internet connection, and the cost was a big issue, and my parents would
complain because I'd be on the Internet too much and you'd get charged per minute. It was like two pence per
minute in the evenings or something. So it was one pound, twenty an hour, but you could be on for four or five
hours. So every night it could be costing you fifty pounds a week, which would be like a hundred euros a week
now, which is a lot of money like, just for a very slow Internet connection. So I think the big difference now with
the iPhone with that plan is previously you were getting charged, every time you wanted to check your emails,
you were getting charged a lot of money, whereas now you just, it all works within a plan and you pay your fixed
amount. And that makes a big difference to the way that you approach mobile email, I think.

You know, there's the structural factor of it. If I was getting, paying three euros every time to check my emails, I
don't think I'd check them very often, or I wouldn't have this kind of set up. And that would really impact my
mobility like.

And in terms of work relations, you're talking about these technologies right. You have three employees and
then you have a network of associates.
Well, now we have six employees.

**Six employees, and the subcontractors, I mean, the network of associates that you can work with, how do you work with them?**

With technology?

**You don't go to meet them?**

Oh we do, yeah, yeah.

**Where are most of these associates located?**

Well, for example, at the moment, we have a guy who's doing some work for us in Galway. He's a student and he just connects to us with instant messenger. He's also a connected kind of person because he's on his, I think he has a Blackberry and he has instant messenger running 24/7 basically. So he's constantly online, so we can chat, it could be a Palm or, I can't remember is it a Palm or a Blackberry he's running with. So then the guys, the new guys we took on, we, I suppose as well, we should do a lot on Google apps that we share out, are you familiar with Google apps?

No.

Yeah, you know, you can share out documents and spreadsheets. Have you used that feature?

**I use Shareware, I use all their Shareware services, but never Google.**

Well we're very Google oriented, so we signed up for Google apps, so basically we can share ...

**Why are you so Google oriented?**

Because of performance, I suppose, that they give, and they don't charge you as well. Like it's free like. But it's, they've been the leaders really in the kind of amount of storage and amount of options and things you have, features. So basically we set people up, we get them shared into our documents and things like that. Google have like spreadsheets and Word documents online and you can actually work together on them at the same time, and you can see the other person. It's like live collaboration. That's very handy.

Yeah, I worked, I worked in the past with that, with Microsoft, Microsoft Web Share. I think the difference is that Google offer that for free to hurt Microsoft.

For free, yeah. I tried Microsoft Web Share last week.

**Did you like it?**

No. Well, I love Microsoft Office 2007, I think it's a great programme. But it's just, they haven't done a very good job on the, you have to install a plug in, you have to download it, and then, I wasn't impressed with it now. It didn't do what I, it wasn't as good as I had hoped like. It looks a bit like a beta version or something or a bit rough around the edges.

Yeah, I use Microsoft Outlook 2007 when I am on campus. But in Chicago, I cannot use it, but go to Outlook website online, which is not as good as the software.
Yeah, it's not. I suppose with that, technology does affect us a lot. There's another few programmes, systems we've started using, kind of collaborative. I suppose the instant messenger's another one. Then we use this agile software, web software, which is called Goshedo, which is, a Limerick company have made this web application, which lets you run, manage your products on their website and you can add your, so what we're doing is we're adding our distributed team who are in different locations onto this system. So we can allocate can tasks to them, you know, remotely or whatever, and they can just log in there and check it. And we're also using, we started using this, for this project, a big project, we started using this thing called Mind Maestro, which is mind maps online and you just draw them on the website and share them. And again, it's kind of live collaboration thing. So we're using those shared collaborative tools online to keep our team connected to the projects that they're working on.

Is that all free as well?

No, we're paying for that, yeah. You pay, well it's in beta release, but we're just paying the company a small fee just to, when it's gone full release, we'll probably have to pay some more maybe.

This is very interesting, like you work in a Google environment called collaborative type of setting, and in terms of work style with you and your six employees, in terms of location, do they all come to the office, 9 to 5 everyday?

At the moment, there's six of them are coming in kind of yeah, more or less, to the office everyday. But like I said there's one or two other guys who aren't coming in. But that's slightly different to what we would have been doing, we'd always have one or two people who are outside the organisation who aren't coming in. They might come in once or twice a month just to, for a meeting or something.

Yeah, how do you explain, I'm being thought-provoking here as I'm trying to understand, that you have all these, you know, cutting edge work style of using Google online collaboration tools which allow remote sharing, remote working. And then you have a physical office where people come on a daily basis. How do you see this relationship between these two opposite, almost opposite styles of work? Inside and remote, online, virtual work and face-to-face interaction?

OK, right. Well, I would say that it's not a case of one or the other that like you have to do both. So we would have, sometimes, for example, one of our programmers, he would decide to work from, he's from Cork, and he'd decide to work from Cork for a week, so he doesn't, he just happens, seamlessly, because we have all our systems in place, you know what I mean, he can just do that. It's not like that, you know, you have to be either a company that comes in everyday to the office or else you're a company that works everyone distributed like. It's very much a mixture.

But I think that in terms of productivity, if you want, I mean, it's probably, the ideal situation is to have people coming in to the office most of the time, if you're trying to get a project done, you know, because you can talk to them and less mistakes, I guess, and less misunderstandings if somebody's sitting beside you. You can just go up to their screen and say, oh no, that's not what I meant, I wanted to do this instead. Or sometimes with remote working, you can find, I'm sure you've lots of knowledge of this, when people outsource things to offshore development, that misinterpretation of requirements and so on, that you get a lot more of that. So it's much more effective to have people in the office most of the time. But to have, I think to have the option then, like sometimes, like I said, when I'd go on my trips or go travelling or whatever, I'm still connected. I'm not completely off line or missing like, I'm still 75 per cent contributing what I would have done if I was in the office. That's the problem I think if you're not mobile and connected that you, like I said earlier, you're losing so much time, the cost, you can't justify the cost like. I don't mean ...

Exactly.
You know, that's what I'm saying about people with their Outlook, they say, oh I have to go back to my desk and, like I would, I often think that somebody like me, my productivity would be massively higher than people who maybe aren't as skilled at IT, or haven't good systems set up, because they're constantly going around, like I said, looking for either a sheet of paper with something on it, or, you know, they're not digitally, like I feel that we're, we're digitally kind of enhanced in our workplace because everything can be kind of searched and we've a very nice set up with our server, with all, we keep nice, neat folders with our projects all broken down, and we can access the server then remotely through a VNC connection, and I can always get at the files I need, even if I'm here or if I'm in London or New York, whatever, I'll still, it's not that much different. Whereas, I feel a lot of people who are working in kind of the old mode, they're still physically tied down by ...

But on the other hand, you're saying that even from London or Dublin, you can still be connected to your office.

Yeah.

Right, but then you just said before that you prefer to have people face-to-face interacting because there is less risks of misunderstanding, right.

Yeah. I think it's for, like 80 per cent of the time, ideally, at least you'll be face-to-face people, but there's always going to be times when you have to go to meetings and you have to be gone out of the office. It's just human life, and people have to spend the week in Cork or whatever. For those times, it's great to have your mobile set up where you're not, like the other way, you're just completely, like the point I'm making is you completely lose, your productivity goes to 5 per cent, whereas in our case, we're just losing maybe 15, 20 per cent of our productivity when we're outside the office. Yeah, so the losses aren't as big.

I'd have many more questions about the specific topic, but moving on, another critical issue, the 24/7 thing, like how would your work end up creeping into your evening, private life, or in your leisure time, how do you relate with this situation?

That's a very good question because it's a massive phenomenon in the last, I'd say, two years, I've noticed loads of people having big problems with this. They're not able to control the, they're addicted to checking their emails. So what I do is, generally speaking on my iPhone, I just switch off the connection at a certain time. I turn off the phone completely every night at about 11 o'clock, but sometimes I just switch off the email maybe at 6 or 7, and then you're effectively disconnected from work then. It's a good habit, I think, but I know people who will be telling me, oh I was up at 2 in the morning and I got this email from, it's like people are, it's human nature, they're kind of trying to outdo each other on who sent the latest email in the middle of the night to show how dedicated they are and they're trying to push the boundaries. And the people I know that were doing, one of the people I know that was doing that like, they, I felt they were spending, or you could notice they might be spending a lot of their time during the day doing, not doing what they're supposed to be doing, and then suddenly at night getting all this, getting really busy with, you know, work stuff. It's just, it's a dangerous thing for people.

And I notice some people then who are just working very long hours as a result of their mobile connections. I think there was a good programme on RTE about, it's called Not Enough Hours, and there was a lady who runs a hotel out in Adare and her husband was having a big problem with her because she was getting these emails, or sending emails at half 11 at night or 1:30 in the morning, and every night, you know what I mean, and completely, her family life, she had forgotten about her family really, she had a child and everything, and he was just left, the husband was left looking after. So I find it's not a big problem for me, but I know, it does mean that I work extra hours, but where I am in my life, that's probably a good thing, I don't have a family or anything like that, because I need to be putting in the hours in the business. But they say it's about sixteen hours a week if you have a smart phone extra that you do, which I would probably say is about right.
Yeah, in a sense, you are working from say 8 a.m. to 11 p.m., whereas a typical employee but you are a business owner. A typical employee when it's 5 p.m., they just, you know, may well shut down their desktop computers and go home.

Yeah, so, well they're supposed, but that's, the people I'm talking about are often employees and people like kind of salespeople and that. You'd see them on their phones very late, you know. I feel it's justified as a business owner to put in some extra time. I think it's necessary like. But like I said I have got, I don't do anything at the weekends and I do, I start work at 8:30 and I finish, like in the office, I'd be in at 8:30, I'd leave at 6:30, and I generally don't do, you know, I might do another hour of work maybe 9 to 10 some nights, but I keep my time, I try and manage my off time because I find that you burn out if you do long hours over three or four weeks, and then you get sick of work and you end up avoiding work like if you over do it. So you have to be disciplined and keep your weekends, most weekends I wouldn't do any work really, maybe an hour, but not much like. Because you just get sick of it, you get stale like, yeah.

And how do you feel in relation to your current workload and being business owner, do you feel OK, or ...

Yeah, I do, it's tricky, but I got, I had to get a knee operation back in May and that kind of, I couldn't drive for three or four weeks, drive a car, and I was kind of dependent on my girlfriend to look after me for a bit. But I found the big drawback for having your own business is if something like that happens where you lose some time, I took about a week off work, but I wasn't really off work, I was kind of trying to work and I wasn't able. But there was a big back log when I finally came back to work, I was under severe pressure for about two months because I hadn't, you know, I hadn't been, you know, for two or three weeks of, you know, time where I wasn't completely doing my normal work, it just builds up very quickly. It's like a traffic jam on the motor way or whatever. If you get off for a second, it just, so like I'm back on top of things now again, but it's not like a normal person where they can just say, oh I'm going away like for three weeks to Spain or whatever. I can't really, I can't really do that as such. Well I can, but I know when I come back, I'm going to be behind, I'm going to have people, customers complaining and that's kind of, small business is like that. And I'll be disorganised and the cash flow could be an issue, you know, things like that. So it is difficult that way.

But at the moment, I'm quite organised and I'm more or less on top of things. I'm, let's say, I'm a couple of days behind myself, but sometimes you could be a couple of weeks behind yourself. But, so but there is, yeah, you pay a heavy price for any time you lose. So being sick isn't really an option like. Like I wasn't feeling great this morning now, but I got over it. If I was in a job, I wouldn't have gone into work, I'd say.

But would you define, I mean, would you see your work more as a source of pressure or of pleasure?

Yeah, excitement, yeah. Well, it depends what you're doing, but at the moment it's very exciting because we have, like I said we just started a big project and we're doing the, some more research and development work on another product, and we have some investment and things are going well and we're doing the type of work we want to be doing. But sometimes you're doing work like chasing payments and trying to, you know, like cash flow problems, things like that, that's not enjoyable like, I mean, but it has to be done. When you have enough, generally when you have enough cash coming in and you're able to do the work you want to do like, it's very enjoyable, you know what I mean, because it's so much more rewarding than maybe working as an employee, you're kind of master of your own destiny, you know what I mean, and you're, you're building your own path in life. I suppose, you're making decisions, you know.

OK, there are two more topics that I would like to cover, I mean, we would have only more ten minutes.

Yeah, you can work away, yeah.

OK, so issues about gender, like with men and women, like how do you see like gender issues in relation to working in a high-tech company?
Yeah, yeah. Well we don’t have any women working in our company now. My sister was the only, there was four of us, we’ll just say, and my sister was there. So we had 25 per cent staff was female, but now it’s zero per cent, and six guys so. I don’t know. It’s a difficult one. It would be nice to have, it there was more girls, or females in the industry, but.

Your clients, I suppose they’re also male predominated.

No, not really, no, not as much. Some of our clients are, say well, take for example, the University of Limerick, where we’re dealing with a woman there. We’re doing work for Limerick Institute of Technology, we’re dealing with a woman there. I’d say when you’re dealing with private companies, you’re more likely to be dealing with a man and with public, you’re more likely to be dealing with a woman. I would factor that there’s far more women working in the public sector in positions of responsibility.

When I saw your website, I found it very interesting because it’s a hybrid in a sense of it could be almost a advertising agency where the production, graphic part of an advertising agency where you could deliver work for an advertising agency, but then you also have these ICT software engineering part which is, so in terms of gender, like the, there is more feminine presence in advertising agency than in the cold ICT engineering side of things.

I get you, yeah, I understand. That’s a good question all right. No I would be more, we’re trying to be more technology focused actually at the moment, which would be more male gender type, but finding that, I don’t know, maybe it’s our own disposition, but that, going down that software route, which would be the more advertising, marketing aspect, is less appealing to us than going down the creating software, we’re very interested in interface design and coming up with new types of interfaces for software, which would be very front end kind of orientated, and making everything look really good. So we’re not an out and out engineering company, but we would like to be known as interface designers who build good software as opposed to a branding, marketing company. That’s not where we want to be at all. But our, probably our website is a bit ambiguous in that sense, but that’s only a recent development I guess. At the start, we probably had more ambitions to do more, even ideas of doing advertising, you know, video advertisements and things like that, but I don’t see us going down that route now, I don’t, I suppose one of the original founders of the company who I haven’t mentioned, she was a woman and she would have had an influence on being more toward that side of things, towards the, what I would call the software aspect where it’s harder to define the value, if you know what I mean.

Yeah, because I see, I just made this comment because I see advertising agencies moving heavily into interactive marketing and digital media, so yeah, when I saw your website, I saw this resonance of how marketing, advertising is moving into online.

Yeah, I guess we see it as more value. It’s easier, it’s all about, I suppose, the competitors and you tend to find that the more interactive and the more sophisticated we can develop our services and products that the fewer competitors we’ll have. Whereas if you’re just designing a logo or a straight piece of graphics, two-dimensional, non-interactive graphic, there’s a lot of, it’s quite easy to compete with people. There’s a lot of people who just decide to, you know, set up work maybe as freelancers or whatever and under, kind of undercut prices and things. So when you go more into the interactive side, you kind of cut off those people, if you know what I mean, because they can’t, like if you ask us, we can do, we’re doing web based software now and also desktop software, we just got into that kind of really and there’s not many people who, there’s not nearly as many people who will be competing with us, whereas if we were just doing like I said graphics for printed brochures and things like that, you’ll find there’s a huge number of competitors and they’re all trying to cut each other on price. And it’s not where we want to be.

But back to the male, female thing. When you did your master’s, how was the ratio there, and your sisters as well? Was it predominantly male? Was it shared?
Yeah, it's, I think last year's course, which I went to see their show, was 11 females, no males did it last year. But when I did it, it was about, it was about 50-50 I'd say.

And so why is that that we don't see more women working in high-tech firms in your field for example? Would you have any theories about that?

I would, yeah. It could be controversial, though. But if we take for example last year's interactive media course, which was 11 female participants, basically if you were to look at it from taking the point of view there was only two people who, two girls who could actually write computer programme code from the 11 and one of those was Chinese and the other was German. So none of the Irish girls on it could write their own code. So if you're trying to develop interactive media and you can't write your own code, you kind of have a problem. So there's, that's the nub of the issue, is that there's very few girls who are able to write computer programmes. Whether they're not interested in it or they haven't gone, they don't find it attractive, I'm sure if they learned to do it, they'd be, it's not that they're not able, capable of doing it, it's just they haven't acquired that skill. It's quite a difficult skill. I'm not able to really write computer programmes myself. I have an understanding of code, but like my, from what I've been talking to other programmers is that it takes about a year and a half of intensive kind of taught programming before you can, and then you kind of learn the rest yourself over a period of two or three years, but it's not something you just pick up over night like. So I think that's a big, like when we were hiring our people for this project, we hired three new people and two of them are programmers. But the chances of finding a girl that would have those skills in, around here, was just very, I'd say for every one girl, they'd need 20 guys, 20 men for every one woman in programmers, at least like. It could be 50, I don't know.

So this falls back on education issues, right? The courses that you choose, you know.

Yeah, the girls, women tend to avoid the technical courses, that's undisputed in Ireland. I don't know what it's like, I find the Chinese are different though, because we had two or three Chinese girls in our class, and there seems to be an awful lot more Chinese girls who come here have, are hard-core computer programmers who are writing in Linux and who know everything about technology, you know, they have a different, I think Chinese have less gender distinction than maybe Europeans anyway.

I just find you're more likely to find, if you look for women programmers in Ireland, I bet you half them that you find won't be Irish, you know what I mean. Because as far as I can see there seems to be very big numbers of women in China doing computer programming. But that is the big issue really, like I mean, and the other thing that we do is 3D, Oisin does 3D Studio Max, which is 3D animation, which is a, it's not a programme, but it's very technical, it takes years to learn it. And like the chances of finding like say a woman who does that would be less, I don't, it would probably be ten to one as opposed to 20 to one, but there'd be far less, for whatever reason, I don't know. I mean, that's the big question. But for sure, you, women tend to avoid the technical, the really technical. That's just, and men, you know yourself, men, you get nerds or whatever, they tend to enjoy that type of looking into the detail and you know, getting really obsessed about the subject, I don't know.

Yeah, how would you react to these other answers that I hear sometimes? One of them is that the high-tech world is a boy's club. It's very kind of excluding of or exclusive of women. How do you react to this type of claim? Do you agree with that or do you disagree?

I disagree. I think it's, the choices that women, I can only speak in Ireland because I don't know about it in other countries, but the choices women are making in their careers, and that's why, like I said I kind of influenced my own younger sister to go into, like she's now able to programme herself, she has done the two, nearly two years and she worked in Intel for her summer work, and now she's working, she's got a Women in Engineering scholarship. So I just felt that, I said to her like you'll have a great career if you can, if you can learn, if you're a woman and you can learn to computer programme, because you'd be in such, there'd be so few people, that I mean, who could do that. And I think it's a very good choice for her to make. But I don't think it's, it's not a boys'
club, it's just that women don't, decide to, they choose different subjects. Like they go into things like business, like accounting and HR, public sector work like nurses and teaching, like nearly every primary school teacher is a women like at this stage. So they avoid the conflicts difficult to kind of engineering type things.

OK, and the second type of answer is that there aren't as many women in the high tech sector because they choose to take care of their families, or they give up their careers for family or marriage or children issues. How do you react to that?

No, that's not right at all, I think. It's nothing got to do with that like. That goes across the board like. It doesn't matter if they're in the high-tech or in the pharmaceutical or financial or whatever business, it doesn't matter, the family would have the same impact. But you'll find in, a lot of women now who are not having families until, who are very career-focused, you know what I mean. They would have already decided by the age of 22 or 3 that they're not going to be in the high-tech industry. Like what I mean now, the, because you will find a lot of women in the high-tech food and biomedical industry like I think, a lot more anyway. But in terms of my industry, you'll find very few. Like the software development industry, you know yourself, there's not very many women working in it. Yeah, so, that's my opinion.

OK. Finally then, improvement. If you could request something to someone, to government, business people, what type of request would you make in order to make your work easier or your business more profitable, you know, to facilitate your business? What types of improvement would you like to see taking place?

Like it kind of comes back to what we were talking about with education, but I think the supports are very good for Irish businesses in technology, like our one. The government are doing everything in terms of direct support, I couldn't, like I couldn't say that they could do much more realistically like. We did find that, like ever recently talking to Enterprise Ireland, they tend to slow things down a lot and they're not very commercially focused. But that's the nature of the beast I suppose, but they need to, they need you to meet all their policy requirements in order to support your company. Where in the real business world, things don't really work like that. I mean, you sell a product to a customer, so I just see, a lot of people bring up that point that in order to get the high level supports from Enterprise Ireland, you have to, you have to concentrate on meeting their requirements as opposed to meeting what should be your business goals, which is getting customers and sales and making money. Whereas they want you to do a, you know, do a report on this, do a report on that, show me all the qualifications of the people involved, you know, this type of thing, when it doesn't really matter in the business world. The only thing that matters is selling their, you know, getting your products sold, making deals, getting paid. So that's a small gripe I'd have, but I think they're doing their best to change. But it's the nature of a big government body that they would become very bureaucratic. But compared to other countries, they're very good.

But just going back to the main point was just with education and what I was saying earlier about the leaving cert points for school kids, that's a massive issue for Ireland. Because, and it goes back to why women don't work in programming as well and things like that and career choices that the policies are not encouraging people to make the right choices for, like this doesn't effect my business directly, but it kind of does indirectly, that they should be encouraging kids in school to pick the right types of courses that would be beneficial to the business, to businesses like mine. So you'd get the right types of graduates coming out who have the skills, you know, that's, I just think, at the moment, the way it works is kids are picking very easy subjects in school to get points, and then they're coming out in order to get the course they want, we'll just say, when they should really be doing their maths and their physics and their chemistry.

And you know, if you, you know what I mean, if that's what the country needs, they should be doing computer programming, whatever, is what we need. And they're coming out then with loads of points, but kind of in subjects that they're never going to use. Now that, that's just, I'm not saying that everyone has to be a physicist, but there should be a reward, I think, for people who choose those difficult, unattractive types of courses. Like you know yourself, some of those are very heavy subjects, some of the, electronic engineering, things like that, but the country and the businesses need people like that. But there's no incentive in school for, it makes more
sense to pick the soft options, get your points and go try and get a job in the public sector, say a teacher for example. That what you're finding tons and tons of girls are doing for, because it's an easy option. You pick the easy subjects in school, you do an easy course, and then you get an easy job. Like I know teachers will say it's not easy, but it’s, compared to doing, if you're working in NASA or something, it is quite easy like. They're not reaching their potential as far, I think. So but they say, oh I'm going to get paid a nice wage here and I'll just do my job.

So it's bad for the economy and that's what's happening now in Ireland, is we have tons and tons of people who are working in kind of public sector jobs, men and women, it's not just women, but, who are getting paid a lot of money. They're not, the word is productive sector, do you know that expression? That like the private sector is the productive sector, which generates all the income to pay the public sector wages. But what sure happened in Ireland is that the incentives have been a bit skewed and there's been tons of people going into these unproductive sectors, and then now we're left with, the productive sector is quite weak, and the country's economy has collapsed. But it does come back to my business because the more people who do the right types of courses and we could have this knowledge economy, but you can't have a knowledge economy if everybody wants to study, you know, like we have an awful lot of solicitors now in Ireland, just say, because of the house, selling houses and things like that. So I think that's something the government could do, is encouraged kids to take up more science and maths, not just by telling them it's good, they're going to have a good career, but actually giving them more points in school. And that would mean we'd have better programmers coming to us, kids who have taken an interest from the age of 16, 17, so that's just one point.

Very interesting, yeah. In terms of a day-to-day business, you know, your business planning and operations, how could the technology park, National, NTP, facilitate your work or how could it leverage your business? Do you have any ideas, like oh, I would like to the technology park to do this?

I'm not sure, like you can't, maybe they could have, (inaudible) over in LIT they're having this trade delegation coming from the U.S. to the incubation centre in LIT, and you can go and meet them and stuff. So maybe the NTP could, but it's hard, there's such a collection of companies. But there is a lot of small technology companies in the NTP, so maybe they could bring them all to an annual event or something, a business event as opposed to just, I know they do have a summer barbecue every year, but that's just like for social. But I don't know what they can do really. It's, because some of the companies, like in the NTP you have O2, you have a bank in there, I mean what, it's not really relevant to them. People have, I think people have to, I mean, like I said, there's good support for business from the government, especially for technology business who want to export. And you can't expect them to do everything for you like. I think they do, they probably do enough as it is, you know. But we, like we're probably lucky that we have a very good Internet connection and we have very good facilities up there. So I'm not sure if everybody has the same set up, but no, I'm happy with the NTP, I've no complaints.

So the interview is basically over. I just have two quick follow up questions about things you said. You can answer them very quickly, or if you don't have any time, just …

Oh no, it's OK.

So you mentioned misunderstanding in working remotely. And sometimes programming is very straightforward, like you're just programming. I mean, how could you have a misunderstanding in a programmer’s, in a programmer working from home and then sending the coding online and a meeting once a week in person?

Well if you had a meeting once a week it mightn't be so bad. But if you never meet them at all, I suppose. It's because, maybe it arises more in offshore stuff because of the language issues and things, but people, you give someone a requirement for a particular function on a page and they have to interpret that and put it into action if they're a programmer, we'll just say. So generally speaking, just for simple reasons that you can probably explain it more fully in oral conversation. Because if you're writing an email or whatever it is, you're going to, you're not going to get as many words on a page.
Or you could use Skype or ...

Or you could use a phone, yeah. But I think people, you lose a certain, you definitely lose a certain percentage of understanding. Because if I say to you, hear now, I say, oh do you understand that X plus Y equals Z, and you'll say, yeah I do. But if I said that on the phone, sometimes people can say, oh yeah, yeah, and they mightn't have a clue what you're talking about. Whereas if you're in front of them, you'll know from their expression that they don't understand you. They'll be like, so you say, no you don't understand, and you'll take more time with them. Like people don't, the communication experience is never the same over a Skype or over a video conference or whatever. It's a ...

And you think, you think that productivity gains justify having a larger office, having to spend time with gas, petrol coming to work or driving to work? Because, you know, it's more overhead expenses that you have by having ...

No, you have to make a call on that. So it depends on the scale of the project. We'd be very reluctant to take people on full time in the office because of the costs. But when you, you just assess the project and say right, we're going to need how many, normally we just say, oh well, we'll get in, we'll get an extra guy part time freelancer to do this part of the job, and that will, that will get us there, that will get us inside our timeline. Whereas in this, this is a slightly bigger project, so we decided, yeah, we're going to need three full-time, plus two part-time, it would never get done with just people working, well I felt, we looked at getting offshore teams as well. But a company we work for had experiences with that and they were having lots of problems, to be honest. And we spoke to a lot of people and it's fraught with difficulties because, like I said, the misunderstandings and it's just, the costs are higher, but if you can get the people here in Ireland working in your office, it would be more successful, there's no doubt about that, compared to, like some people have found very good programmers in different countries at lower costs and things, virtual teams, but the kind of the word on the street is that it's hard to find the good ones.

OK, yeah. And the second quick question is like why Limerick, why didn't you go, why didn't you move to Dublin or London or New York or Australia?

Good question.

Why did you open your business here and not anywhere else?

I suppose that was for personal reasons really. We, when we set up the business, I often think about that actually with our location, does it have an impact? Of course it has an impact but if we had to set up just say in London, would we be doing bigger projects and be more successful or have bigger customers? So but we made the decision based on that we wanted to, like half the reason for setting up your own, my own business was to, so that I could have control over things like where I live, you know what I mean, or what I want to do. So we, the other option was probably to get a job, an employee job, work for a company in Dublin or London or, but I wasn't, this is where I'm from like so I wanted to stay in this region anyway.

So are you looking forward to moving in the future?

Yeah, I'd say I will, yeah. I will, I mean, it's hard to say, but that's my kind of road map, is I'd like to live in a few different countries over the next ten or fifteen years. Whether that's part of this company or not, I'm not sure. But I mean, there's always, you never know with these things. But I would like, I'd love to maybe go and like do something like you're doing is do a PhD maybe in, or a post-doc in a foreign university, and maybe work in a company either in America or in Europe somewhere, just to get that wider experience. It's just something I'd like to do anyway in my life. But it's hard to say now when I'll do it, but I definitely, I plan to live in at least one or two foreign countries.
OK, thanks.

It mightn't be part of this company, though. It's hard to know, you know what I mean?

Yeah, it's difficult. You never, we never know the future.

No, but hopefully this company will be very successful, I can sell half the company and work a few hours a week as a kind of director or something.

Like a consultant.

Yeah, exactly, keep them on track and then do the other things I want to do in my life.

Sure. Is there anything that I didn't ask you about that you would like to make a comment on, or any concerns about the interview itself?

No, I'm happy with the interview. I mean, I hope you got the type of information you need like.

Yeah.

We could talk about a hundred other things as well, but.

Very rich, and very interesting. Thank you very much!
... Your company has nine engineers? Six in research and development, and then three in customer care.

That's right, yes. Customer support, that's right.

OK. So, all right, so I have the background information, which is enough. We'll just focus more on you and your practises and habits. Could you please start telling us about yourself, your role in this company.

OK. What my role in the company is, I set up the company here about eight years ago, and I often describe it to people, is that I do everything in the company except code. OK, so the software engineers and the developers look after all the coding issues, whether it be a new product or developing, you know, developing a new product, but I would very much be the person who's interfacing with the customer in terms of finding out what their requirements are for new products. I'd be the person interfacing with them in terms of if there's issues and trying to get them resolved. So it's basically customer interfacing role, but it's also business development role. And anything in the company that's not the software development, yeah.

And so is there an official title for your position?

I'd be the managing director.

And your educational background and trajectory?

OK, my educational background, I've a science degree from UCG, chemistry is my background. But when I graduated, I went to Sligo to do a diploma in quality, and there was, this was before UL was doing co-op, so the RTC in Sligo was one of the few that had work placements. So I went to work with Analogue Devices in Limerick. And I was with them for nearly fifteen years, working in a kind of quality role and training roles, and working a lot with manufacturing. And then I left Analogue, as I said, about fifteen years, and I was working doing quality consultancy work. And then I set up [small programming firm] about seven or eight years ago with my husband Colm who's also in UL, yeah.

OK. You were saying you're doing your PhD now.

Yes, I'm doing a PhD part time as well, a PhD in the whole area of product development.

Is that engineer or is that business?

It's a bit of both. It's, there's an awful overlap between the two. The engineers don't like to think that there's a business focus, and the business focused sometimes think that the technology's easy. So it's a bit of both. Well, it's based in the maths and stats department because that's where the quality department sits. It really crosses the two. But what I'm tending to focus on is the processes and practises within companies for new products because coming from a manufacturing background, I felt that there was a lot of learning that wasn't going from manufacturing into new product development. So looking at things like, you know, the kind of metrics that you'd use, whether innovation can be a process or whether it really is all on creativity, maybe comes from my own background and coming from quality, I feel things can be a lot more controlled and creativity doesn't have to be this all-allusive area where you can, you know, give an unlimited time, unlimited budget, you know, to get a
product that is quite vague in terms of when you start out. So just taking a lot of the practises from manufacturing and bringing them to new product development, yeah.

**The fact that you're doing a PhD is very interesting, in terms of, how is it related to your work?**

Well it's not directly related and I suppose if it was directly related, I would have finished a long time ago. It's probably one of those things that I've just been doing for myself because I'm interested in the whole area of quality and new product development, so it's not directly related to work. Although, having said that, I'm using some of our customers from work as case studies, so I have access to good case studies, but it's not directly related to the work I do on a day-to-day basis.

**So are you taking classes?**

No, I'm doing it by research. Although I am considering now to see where you can also do it by publication where you, you know, where you do attend some classes all right and research methodologies and all that, and will publish journal papers rather than doing the big (inaudible) because that has been the biggest problem I've had, is the whole time management, that I've done a lot of the research, I've done a lot of the case studies, now it's writing up the thesis or dissertations and it may be easier just to do the publications. And I'll probably do it by publication.

**All right. I'm asking you about the relation between your studies and your work because I'm also thinking about how you manage your time, work, family and studies. Tell me about ...**

I suppose it could be managed a lot better in that it tends to be, if you were to ask me technically, I would tell you the priorities would be, you know, family, work, and then study. But it does vary, you know, sometimes family has to take less priority if there's something urgent at work. There are other times where you could be more flexible and you can give the time to family, so I suppose it is very much, it is very much a juggling. But I would say definitely family and work take priority over the study because the study's probably something I was doing more for myself rather than, you know, rather than it being an objective in terms of what I wanted to get done in any one year. And it's very interesting because we had some of your colleagues at, there was a new meeting on Friday trying to kick start a lot of us who had been straggling in the PhD, and I can't remember the name of the girl, was it Lindsey or Lynn, that came from the sociology department, she was saying one of the things that you have to do when you're trying to do the PhD is, you know, recognise it's OK to be selfish and just say, well, you know, I need to give this time or I need to give this priority, so I probably have to re-prioritise that to try and get that done, yeah.

**So can you tell us about your daily life.**

My daily activities, OK. Well I have two children, Neal is fourteen, he's doing his junior cert this year, and Yvonne is nine. And then Colm, my husband, works in UL. And I suppose, how do I, I manage my day, I suppose it's a difficult question in terms of, you know, during term time, we very much have a routine in terms of, you know, obviously there's, the kids have to be got to school, which tends to, I suppose, fall on me in terms of the parent doing that, the getting the kids to school, getting them home then in the evening. So what I tend to do is while they're at school, the school day kind of from 9 to 4 tends to be very much my focus here in [small programming firm].

My younger daughter went to an after-school club and my eldest son, he's now in secondary school. In the evenings, what I found was, well it's interesting because we found out two years ago that Neal, my older son, had dyslexia and he needed a lot of extra help, so I spent a lot of time researching methods in terms of helping him with his study. (Inaudible) come across new learning and the whole idea of where the brain can relearn and be retrained. So I would do a lot with software with him and the phonics and retraining and all that, so that took, actually took up a lot of the last year in terms of doing extra work for him at home. But then what we tend to do is when I would bring him home then from school around 4 o'clock, maybe from 4 to 7 I would do work on study
while he's, on the PhD work, while he's doing studies, as well as that. So we kind of, you know, juggled around that.

But every week varies in terms of if I do a lot of travel with the work here as well because we're involved in some EU research projects because what we had found was the type of people we hire here, we need to have them very good at both mathematics in terms of understanding algorithms, but also being very good at computer science. And we found with the graduates here, you don't tend to get that combination. Whereas through the EU projects, we found particularly with the Czech graduates, they're very good in both. They have a good kind of in the computer programming, but also good in the mathematics. So we work a lot with EU projects and EU research organisations in terms of trying to get, in terms of trying to get our new product development done. Now that involves travel, so then when I'm away, Colm will take over for the, you know, what happens at home with the kids. So it just takes a bit of planning and a bit of, a bit of organising.

**Just to clarify, is your husband a faculty member and he runs a business as well?**

Well he would, yeah, he would be involved in the business in terms of part time, so maybe 10, 20 per cent of his time would be here. But how it runs is because he's involved in the EU research projects as well, we tend to work in the framework set out for the benefit of SMEs, so a lot of his research work would be using us as a case study. So it all works.

**So you work full time.**

I work full time, yeah, yeah.

**How is your daily routine? Do come to office everyday?**

Everyday, yeah. Yeah, that's the, that's the plan, is to come from, to come from 9 to 4. The days I'm based here in Limerick, now obviously when I'm travelling, I'm not here. And what I do find is that say for example, also then that block between 4 and 7 while it's normally PhD, it can tend to drift into work as well if there's any overspill from the day. But I try to physically base myself here between 9 and 4. And then kind of that block 4 to 7 is flexible whether it's PhD work or work from here.

**And can you describe your typical work day, when you arrive here at 9, what do you do from 9 to 4?**

A typical day, I suppose a lot of it would be prioritised in terms of if any customer issues have come up in terms of me trying to deal with customers so that can be very, that can be very variable. Now, it was a lot more variable in the earlier days when the products were less established and you were kind of sometimes doing a lot of troubleshooting, OK, and any situation, you wouldn't be, but that has settled a lot more. So typically, you know, if there are no customer issues, a lot of time then would be probably first thing in the morning doing an ops meeting with the developers in terms of where we are at in the new products, any issues that have come up, you know, what are the next steps, and then giving feedback from anything I would have had from previous customer visits. One or two days a week then I would be out actually on customer sites with existing customers or new customers. So those days then are different in terms of they're off site.

**I have several questions about the things you're saying. The other nine employees, are they located here in the technology park? In this building?**

They are, yeah, they're located ... They are, yeah, they're in here, yeah. Oh sorry, and two of them are working remote. Martin, one of our developers works from Naas and one of the other guys is actually in transition of moving to Galway, he's going to work over from Galway. So they're based here.

**These two work from home?**
Yes, yes.

**OK, I'll go back to this, the remote working in a moment.**

Yeah, OK.

**The employees based in this building, I suppose you meet them face to face, right?**

Face to face, yes, yeah.

**OK, now moving to technology, because technology will connect us to mobility issues. You mentioned travelling quite a few times. What types of technological devices do you use to communicate with your employees, with your clients?**

Primarily email would be the main, would be the main communication. Now we did find, particularly with the EU projects, we do use web conferencing and that. But what I do find is that, primarily when you're in new product development and particularly at the earlier stage, would you find they're, you do need face to face in terms of your building up of relationships with people. And I find once you've gone over that initial area where you've built up relationships, then the web conferencing and all that is very good.

But I find particularly when you're, when you're dealing with different cultures and you're dealing with different people, maybe it's just my work style, but I do find that if I've established a relationship first, then I can use the technology much easier. But I think the technology can be very sterile and very, you can pick up things incorrectly if you don't have that relationship. Now it's fine on the very, you know, technical issues, if you're giving, you know, prescription in terms of, you know, we want this feature and we want it done in this particular language, and we want this particular functionality, and you can give very descriptive type information. But sometimes when you're, particularly with the kind of products we're in, we're looking as much trying to get ideas from people in terms of trying to get their input, and sometimes people, if you're giving them direction, they will give you exactly what you want, and you're trying to explain to people, well sometimes what I'm saying or what I've written, I am open to ideas and I'm open to things changing, and you, and I find you get a lot better innovation if you've developed that relationship first. People know where you're coming from, they know the bigger picture, and they know where you're going in general. So I find that the, actually spending time, particularly at the start up project phase is worthwhile. And then we would use the teleconferencing and emailing and that afterwards, and Skype, you know.

**Do you think the risk of miscommunication is related to language, I mean, is the same with English speakers or is it more difficult if you're dealing with non-English speakers, for example, your EU partners?**

Yeah, well what I find is that most of the EU partners we're dealing with, their English is so good, you run a danger of assuming because they speak very good technical English that there's a complete understanding. And sometimes I feel that it's worth, the face to face you can tease out and you can, you can get a lot better communication particularly at, as I said, the earlier phases. Once you know the people and you know where they're coming from, then I find the technology, you know, you can use the technology better. And maybe it's just because I'm not used to using the technology or I suppose, you know, when I think of, when I first started working, we had no email, OK, we had no word processors. And it's hard to believe, you know, in twenty, twenty-five years, how much the technology has changed so much. And sometimes maybe the work practises that you had when you first started working, you'd tend to go back into those, I suppose, those comfortable patterns of where you're used to travelling, you're used to meeting face to face, but I find it's, it's a method that works, works for me, yeah.

**So what equipment do you use to do emailing and communication?**
Primarily my laptop.

**Laptop. Do you use a Blackberry and iPhones?**

No, no. I just use the laptop and mobile phone. A laptop with a wireless and a mobile phone.

**And teleconferencing, is that Skype?**

Skype, yeah.

**OK, how often do you use Skype?**

I would probably use Skype maybe three or four times a day. Yeah, yeah. Now primarily, again, I tend to use just the voice and not the video. If there are new partners and we want to do some presentations in the background, we would use the video as well. But I find Skype, maybe, it varies, but typically, typically my Skype is on most of the time and I’m, particularly with the EU partners, I would use Skype more often than phone, yeah.

**And what about your employees and your clients?**

Because a lot of the clients at the moment tend to be in Ireland and they tend to be small companies, we would use email very much if there’s a request, but I tend to find that particularly working with the Irish small companies, I do need to make the phone call, particularly in areas of customer services, that, maybe they are a lot less likely to complain or to look for, I suppose to look for better standards, so with each of our customers, I would try and call them at least once a week just to touch base and say, how are things going, particularly those using prototypes, how’s the product going. Because they tend to only email you when they've got to a situation of where it's near critical, you know. Whereas, if you phone them, you can get a lot more, I suppose, it's easy just to touch base and see how they're going.

**It’s a preventive ...**

Preventative, it is, yeah, yeah. But I find the SMEs, they don't tend to use the email as much and you can't rely on if you sent an email that they'll read it. So you usually send an email and if necessary then, leave a voicemail or leave a text and say, look, I sent you an email, read it at your convenience and get back to me. But you could send an email and it could be a week before they might have read it. So if it's urgent, you do find you need to either, and I find the text and the SMSs are best, so you just text them to say, look, I sent you an email, check your email.

**And your employees? How’s your communication practices with your employees?**

A lot of it, because we're here probably would be face to face. But with the two that are working remotely, we would have a Skype call daily. Also email, and we would use a web page, well it's kind of new, where we keep a common calendar, task lists, and all that kind of thing. Let's see if I have one here. Yeah, so here we would have, so for common, for everybody, we would have a shared documents, you know, the calendar of events, the, any of the key tasks coming up, so today for example, we know Trevor's going to be out, Emanuel is coming up on holidays. Let's see, tasks, it should be here, it says, you know, the key things and who's working and whether it's in progress and the due date.

**So that's the intranet?**

That's the intranet, yeah. And I can also then look at that remotely. So if we have, so if I'm off site, I would just keep track on that, you know.

**And then, why are these two remote, and the others are local?**
I suppose it, it hasn’t been by any plan as in the person who’s working from Naas, we acquired to the company that he had worked for previously, and sometimes when you acquire a company, you’re acquiring the people and the IP as much as the technology. He moved down here, he’s from Naas, he moved down to Limerick with his family, probably, I suppose it’s now maybe five years. So initially he came down for about six months. But his wife didn’t settle here in Limerick. A lot of her friends and all that were based in Naas, and she had, she’d come from a background where her father had worked in IT, and the family moved every six or twelve months, and she didn’t want that for her family. Now I was saying, you know, we were established here, we’re going to be in Limerick, but yet her connections were back in Naas. So it really was a case of that we needed this particular person, so it was accommodating. It wouldn’t have been my first preference at the time, but we really needed to accommodate this particular employee because a lot of the IP was with him rather than any documents.

So initially we worked that he came down here two days a week, but then once we’d established, you know, some work practises and work procedures, we found that it was as easy for him to be in Naas, and then to use the technology, to use the conference calls, you know, use our intranet and all that for communication. So it really, when somebody’s in Naas, it doesn’t really matter whether he’s in the office here or the office downstairs, as long as the communication is there. With the person who’s moving back now to Galway, again, it’s more for family reasons, as in his parents work on a farm, he’s, they’re getting to the stage where I suppose in rural Ireland, they want more security around the farm, particularly at night time. So he’s going to move back and obviously work during the day, but just have a physical, have a physical presence with them for evening and night time.

So it seems that, at least theoretically, your business could dispense with face to face interactions and everybody could work remotely, or am I wrong?

Wrong, I think, to a certain extent. I think, it depends on the phase, phase we’re in in development, you know, that, I often think of it that when I was first working in quality, there was the idea for problem solving of this WV diagram where you were going through seven steps. And when you are problem solving, there are places where it’s very, the work is very directional, you can give instruction, people are following instructions and they’re following the group path. But there are parts, particularly in a new product development phase where you’re trying to get innovation, you’re trying to get ideas going, you’re trying to get sparks off one another. And I don’t think people working in isolation give that amount of new ideas back to the company. But there’s a definitely a find when they’re all sitting there together, you can have fantastic sessions where the, you know, ideas are just flowing, and it mightn’t be relevant to what you’re doing today, but it’s definitely things that white board and you might, you know, be thinking of for six, seven, eight weeks time. Whereas I think if people were working very much on their tasks, and they’re task focused, there is a world where you can do that, but for the ongoing, particularly for us and the business we’re in and where you’re constantly looking for new products and new ideas, you do need, or where you’re sparking off on another, and that doesn’t tend to happen as much when people are on the phone. You know, you can get a certain amount of it, but when people pick up the phone or where they’re on Skype, the conversations tend to be very task focused, as in, you know, they’re ringing somebody because they, they have a particular idea or they want to go through something or you, or we’re going through, like here on our intranet, we’re going through our task list or we’re going through our calendar, or you’re going through very much operational issues. But then if you’re trying to get into where you’re trying to create ideas and you’re trying to look at new ways of doing things, you really do need to bounce ideas off one another.

In many situations, you could work remotely, from home, or on the move, right?

Yeah, yeah.

Can you describe, can you elaborate on that? How often it happens and ...

Yeah, well I suppose it depends on, it is very flexible, and I would agree with that in that this summer I wanted to take my son to Spain because, I mentioned earlier that he has dyslexia and he finds language and the acquisition
of languages very difficult. So here in Ireland, students often at that age, fourteen, would go to the Gaeltacht to learn Irish, so over the summer months, they might go away for a month. So I thought, well, it would be a good idea for him to spend some time in Europe where he could pick up a foreign language, but at the same time I felt he was too young to go off on his own. So I moved to Spain for five weeks over the summer, and it was all the technology ...

I was in Malaga, so just outside Malaga. So our day was pretty much the same as it would have been here, as in the school had very good wireless connections. So when he was in class from 8 to 12, I would have done my day's work but done it in half a day. And then in the afternoon, he would have been off with activities with his friends, and then my nine-year-old daughter, my mother-in-law and extended family came out for different periods, so we kind of had our holiday then in the afternoon. And that worked well, there was a, you know, it made no difference whether I was physically here or whether I was in Spain.

But what I did tend to get was I tended to miss that customer interface and that tended to slip over that while because as I mentioned, particularly the Irish companies that we're dealing with, they don't tend to use email as much. They're not using Skype as much either, so you're relying on a physical phone call. Here, and maybe if I'd set it up better before I went, and if I was going again, it's something I would think of, is that if you're doing a phone call here and somebody isn't available, you'll ring, you know, in three or four, three or four hour's time, or you might ring in half an hour's time, maybe because of the cost of mobile communications, you were a lot more, certainly you were more conscious of the cost of a call. You, I didn't tend to do that follow-up call if they weren't there. And I felt it just lapsed, you know, the customer interface side lapsed over those few weeks. But it was the time where a lot of those were on holidays and all that anyway, so it wasn't that, that critical. But it definitely, it worked, yeah, that I was gone for the five weeks.

Yeah, so you make a distinction between a Skype call and a mobile call. Because you can call land phones, you can call mobiles from Skype and it's cheaper.

It is, yeah, yeah. And it was probably maybe because of the way I was set up in that the apartment we were staying in didn't have the wireless because it was, well I said it was Malaga, it was a very, it was a village outside Malaga, so a lot of the apartments and all that didn't have wireless. So my day tended to be when I was in the school, I was working on, you know, so definitely, if I got them on Skype or whatever, but in the afternoon, if I was relying on a mobile call, it just didn't tend to happen. So if I didn't get them at that portion between 9 and 1, it didn't tend to happen until the next day.

OK. You mentioned before that a couple of times a week you go to see clients on site. Where abouts?

Yes, yes. They tend to be mainly in Ireland, so it can be Karlow, Dublin, some of them even just out of Tipperary, so it tends to be, it tends to be very local.

So that I can locate myself, where do you live?

I live in, just behind the Schuman building, in College Court.

Oh right, so you walk?

I walk, yeah, I walk here, yeah.

And yeah, and then you're travelling to, say, do you go to Dublin a lot?

Yeah, I go, yeah, I go to Dublin, yeah, if I'm going to Dublin, I tend to go by train.

Yeah, and what do you do on the train?
Usually have the laptop with me.

Do work.

Yeah, yeah. But I find, it is, one of the ideas, what we have found is we were living in college court where there are a lot of students, so you often find the noise effect and that at night time can be quite disturbing and we have looked at, you know, maybe moving. But what I found is that if you move outside the Castletroy area, you're looking at a commute in the morning of, you know, forty minutes plus, whereas I look that that's forty minutes in the morning, forty minutes in the evening, and it adds an hour and a half to your day. So you have that time, so it's, so being so close to work actually works very well.

Is that an important factor in your deciding where to live?

Yeah, it is, yeah. So it's close to work, and also it's close to the schools and it's close to where my children are located. So, you know, my, particularly my younger daughter tends to get involved in a lot of different after-school activities and she's at the age where, you know, if it's a match, they like the mum to go and see or they like the concerts, you know, so when they're close, it's very easy to pop out for that half an hour, forty minutes or whatever when they're doing their activities between 3 and 5 in the evening. And because, I said, my day is quite flexible, I can, if anything is urgent then I can catch up that night or that, you know, catch up that time again. So, being physically close to where the work is and the schools is and what we do is quite important.

And how often do you travel for your EU projects?

It's probably once a month, sometimes it can be twice, but if you were to average in a year, it's probably, you know, twelve times a year. But it tends to be less during the academic terms when the, when the universities are off.

And for how many days are you away?

It can be anything. I, sometimes, it's just a day, but what I find with, particularly with the commuting from Shannon is that when you don't have the commutes to, oh sorry, if you don't have the connections to a lot of the European cities, it's as easy to do them back to back. So while there might be three or four meetings a months, I would try to make that one trip, so if I'm gone, I'm gone for three or four days. And then I wouldn't be gone, you know, over the next three weeks, so it tends to be consolidated. I might be gone from a Tuesday to a Friday and try to get them, you know, try to organise that when I'm gone, I'm gone for a block.

About your employees, do they travel as well?

No, they don't tend to need to as much now. For some of the technical, very, very technical meetings, I would bring, I would bring them, but as I said, for their role, which is very much a very technical role, they would often link in by video conference or by Skype conference to the meetings. So I would be there face to face, and then if necessary, if there's any very technical issues that we need to discuss, they would link in through conference call.

Do they go to see the clients?

No, I tend to do that, yeah, yeah. Again, sometimes I might bring them with me if it's a very technical issue, but what I have found, and I shouldn't be making broad, sweeping statements, but I found the people who we are, who are very good technical programmers, you can't leave near a client as in they don't have the good skills in terms of dealing with the client. In that, say for example, an issue comes up, I found the programmers tend to very much, sometimes they can be very defensive of some things they have written, which may be technically correct, but I would take the view that if the customer can't use it, it's as much a fault in the design or the delivery,
particularly for the type of customers that we're dealing with. And sometimes I find particularly with the customers we're dealing with that wouldn't have a lot of technology within their company, they can become very intimidated by a lot of technical language, and sometimes the technical people will revert into, if they're defensive, they'll get into very much technical language, and it's a case of well if you don't understand what I'm saying, it's your problem, not mine. So I find within the company that we're working and the environment that we have, I tend to do a lot of that, the customer facing, whether it's getting new product ideas or whether it's dealing with customer issues.

Yeah, to finish this section of the interview about technology and mobility, do you think technology makes you travel more, or less, you know, how do you see these two elements?

I found, I'm definitely, if I look at the span of my career over the twenty years, I'm probably travelling a lot more now than I would have previously. And you would think with all the technology that you could actually do that less, but I think customers, you know, particularly customer demands and the pace of change, and maybe it's because I'm the main person in the company doing the travel that I have a lot more to do. But I have looked at, you know, maybe trying to reduce it. But every time I come back, I say, look, was there anything here I really could have achieved using technology. And there rarely is. You usually find that it's, and probably because of the type of meetings I'm involved with, it's more the socialisation content around it. You know, you can look at some of the outcomes from the meeting and say, oh yeah, you could have done that with a conference call, but some of the extra things you come back with in terms of, you know, forming new consortium or new groups or new ideas, I do find, I do find it's worth it.

But having said that, what do I find is now with the technology available, people expect you to be more accessible. So in my earlier days, if I was gone and I would have travelled a lot when I worked with Analogue in the first few years because I was working a lot with suppliers, if I was in, you know, if I had gone to Boston or if I'd gone to the Philippines, or if I'd gone anywhere, it was accepted that Anne was out of the office, you know, for three days. And, you know, it was quite acceptable that when you'd come back you could say, you have catchup on, well we didn't have very much email in those days, but you would catch up with what would have happened in the four or five days when you were away. There's an expectation now, particularly from, maybe from our customers, although you don't tend to use email, but definitely from the research partners that we're working with, that you have your laptop and you have your wireless, your Skype, that you will keep up-to-date with what you would have been doing on a daily basis as well, and that can be very, that can be very intrusive and very demanding.

And also because you will have used things like mobile or Skype in the evening if I'm on the computer at home, and I may have left Skype on because I want to call family, I want to call whatever, if another researcher is working late, you know, they'll often leave a message, is it OK to talk on X, Y or Z. Sometimes you have to, you have to be quite blunt and say, well, no actually I'm doing something with my family now or you have to say no, I can't take a call. And people take that very personal, but you have to say, well look, you know, there is a divide, I don't have to be available 24/7, and I don't think there is the, I suppose, the same protocol is the wrong, I suppose it's the wrong word, definitely I find kind of with Skype that because people can see you're available, they expect that you will be available. And they, there's that demand there that wasn't there with a phone, you know. If a phone was ringing, you would tend to just let it ring if you didn't want to take it, or you would use caller ID. I do find that Skype can be a lot more intrusive, particularly if you're using the same thing for both, with family and work. Now, probably what I'll have to do, maybe it's because I'm now used to it, just have a different Skype ID, you know, one for personal and one for family and start separating it out. But I do find definitely technologies where you're using the two, for both home and work, you know, that we'll have to separate them, and particularly, yeah?

You don't use the status option on Skype, like to turn it to busy? If you right-click on the green light, you can change it to red, to become busy ...
I'm leaving it open, because I, like my brother's in Australia, so I would use it, you know, a lot for that. When you're using it for both, it's difficult to say, well I'm busy for work calls, but I'm not busy for, you know, for personal. And a lot of it is probably, like I say, like a new technology, getting used to using it or whatever.

So in terms of intrusion, other than clients, you have Internet. Do you work at night? How intrusive your work is itself, not the clients, eventually become?

I find what I have to do at home is I have to say that there's one particular room that's work only. So it's kind of like an office. And when I close that door, it has to be a bit like closing the door here, because the danger is, is sometimes you will just, you know, you might be doing, you know, something family, and you say, OK, I'll just go in for ten minutes and I'll check email. Now ten minutes becomes an hour and an hour can become, you know, you can get dragged into it. And maybe we're at the stage now where the company's more established and I don't have to let it become that intrusive, definitely in the earlier (inaudible) where there was a lot of things happening, but you just have to be disciplined in separating, you know, the urgent from the important. Everything can seem urgent, but it's dealing with what's important, particularly when I'm at home. And I would probably be more disciplined at home than I would be in here.

In terms of division of tasks, how do you see that in relation to your husband, in terms of house chores, work, family, research?

I would say definitely I would probably do 90 per cent of the home, but that's by, that's by choice and by agreement, it's not that it has come to default that, what I find is that there's certain stages where he would probably be more involved in the, you know, the in technical side of the product actualisation, so when he's doing that work, it's outside his normally, his academic work, which he's gone from 9 to 5, so if he's doing some of that in the evening, that would be the time where I would have done the kind of domestic chores or things like that, you know, so it's kind of by agreement that it's, and it's not that we have to say that what you do work and research is any more important than what you would, you know, is, you know, it's difficult to explain, but we had the conversation, that just because you're doing (inaudible) just because you're doing domestic or that kind of work that it's any less important, you know to the overall context of, you know, some of the research work.

What is the gender ratio among your employees?

They're actually all men, yeah, yeah. And this hasn't been by choice or hasn't been by nobody saying going, oh you know, we're only going to employ males or we're not going to employ females. What we found is that it, the people with the skills in those areas tend to have been, tend to have been male. I don't think we've had any female applicants.

How it is for a woman to work in a high-tech environment that's quantitatively male predominant? How is it to work in environments like this?

I suppose, I've never given it much thought. I don't think there's any differentiation. I suppose, the one thing I do find though compared to working, when I worked in Analogue where there was a lot more females in the, I suppose in the technology area, your socialisation at tea breaks and coffee breaks, you'd tend to have that female company that sometimes you don't have here, you know, so and, you know, there would be different interests, you know, if you're talking about what you watched on TV or something like that last night. I do miss that side of it, you know, that you don't have the female companionship within the day. But then I suppose because my work day is shorter because it's 9, I'm trying to fit a lot into 9 to 4, I don't have to, I don't spend as much time socialising within work as I think I would have when I was working 9 to 5. But I don't think the guys view me any differently or I view them any differently.
In terms of clients or potential clients, would they expect you to be a man or would you find any issues in that area?

I don’t, and sometimes I suppose they would know, you know, that there’s a wider team here as well, but I don’t think they look at me any differently. Sometimes what I do find is though that the clients, I mentioned earlier about how I tend to do a lot of the customer work because I tend to speak less technical with them and it tends to suit them. I think sometimes they, they’ll accept that from a woman, whereas they expect sometimes the man to be more, you know, technical speak. And sometimes I think they feel more comfortable if they’re, if they’re not as up to speed on the technology as some of the guys in the company here would be.

And again, in terms of a family life, can you elaborate a little bit about the pleasures and displeasures of having this type of division of tasks with you and your husband? Things that you’d like to be different, or are you content as it is?

I’d be content. I suppose in the earlier days, I would have been very much, tell him, oh you know, I would like more help with, you know, with some of the chores or some of the gardening or some things like that, and when I discussed it with my husband and with the children at the time, but sometimes I think, particularly mothers, we can be berating our children for, you know, tidy room and doing things like that, but I’d say well look, really, if I’m the only one that’s bothered about the room being untidy, really I suppose that’s my problem and not theirs in the terms that if, you know, if my fourteen-year-old wants his room to be untidy, he has to live in that space and that’s his space and that becomes his responsibility. You know what I mean, that it shouldn’t be bothering me just because it’s untidy. Now maybe I would be a more organised person and I would like things more organised, as long as the common space is and everybody contribute to having the common space tidy, what people do in their own spaces is, I suppose, is their own responsibility, and once you, once you realised that you’d be putting yourself under a lot of pressure to have things perfect in the house, you know, the key thing is well, you know, if the people living there are happy and if I’m happy, you know, that’s the important thing.

And I would often have, particularly I find, you know, maybe my family, they put a lot of pressure on and they say, look, why are you still living in an area that’s, you know, predominantly students, that’s, you know, wouldn’t you get a bigger house, a bigger, you know, live in a bigger area, you know, you hear this expression, you owe it to yourself. And I feel well, you know, OK, like I do that but to me a bigger house is more work, it’s more maintenance, it’s more travel, you know, and if you want that, you’re putting yourself under a lot of pressure. Whereas I think if you, you know, if you’re happy, it’s a case of being, I won’t say being happy with less, but understanding what brings the happiness, you know, you could spend two hours vacuuming, cleaning, whatever in the evening, or you can spend two hours with your kids, going for a walk, doing something with them, and it really is a matter of choice and priorities, and at the end of the day, you know, what do you think is more important. And as long as, you know, they’re in some place that’s hygienic, they’re fed and they’re happy, it doesn’t really matter that it mightn’t be the cleanest house or it mightn’t be the most up-to-date in terms of décor, you know, so it’s, it’s about choices and those choices you make for yourself.

And you know, and even in, I was reading a brief article in the Times on Friday about how women are less happier now, in 2007, than they were in ’77, it was one of these reports, obviously coming from the states where they measure happiness indexes, and they’re saying that, you know, women, although you supposedly have it all now, you know, you have, you know, you can go out to work, you have choices, people are actually less happier, but the reason, this article was saying, or their summary of why the things thought were, women were less happy was they wanted more, so it’s a case of balancing, you know, that just because more is available to you, do you really need all, you know, all those extra choices. And I suppose with choices comes expectations, you know, so it’s managing, managing those expectations and managing those choices.

And now when you interact with your female friends and your female relatives, do you see that, more expectations?
I do, particularly, I suppose what I do find is that my friends outside of work tend to be people who are not working in technology companies, so they would have different, they would have, you know, totally different lifestyles, but I feel a lot more comfortable with that because once you’re, you know, once you’re outside work, I find it, I tend to, I suppose, gravitate towards people that don’t have, that you know that they don’t want the big car, that they don’t want the three holidays a year, they don’t want that, all that people have come to expect associated with a, you know, a person who owns their own business has, you know, supposedly all this money coming in.

I do think it’s about making that balance and making that, you know, people can put themselves under a lot of pressure, and I find particularly now, even people that I would have gone to college with and have so called had it all, you know, they’ve gone back and they’ve dramatically changed their careers in that people that have gone back, and one girl I know, and it’s not to say that teaching is any less difficult, she’s given up, she would have been a product designer in an electronic company and she’s gone back to work as a primary school teacher, and another’s gone back working in Montessori, and another has gone and is working doing alternative, alternative therapies like massage and that, and they’ve decided that really what, you know, the, what they’ve, sorry, the life that they had in terms of what was expected of them in terms of work and family, that it was just too, they found it too demanding. And I would have the discussion with them, well, you know, you don’t have to change your career to change your lifestyle, as in, you know, it can be just as demanding working as a primary school teacher from 9 to 4 as it can be working in a technology company from 9 to 4, it’s what you do outside that and what you want for yourself outside those hours puts the pressure on you.

And just because you have a so-called high-flying career doesn’t mean that your expectations outside work has to be any different. I suppose I haven’t explained that very well, but I do feel that people think that because they’re working in a technology or they’re working in particularly multinational companies, they can put a lot of demands on themselves outside work in terms of they have to have, they have to have the big car, they have to have the big house, they have to have the latest in fashion. And I think it’s that, wants outside of work is what puts pressure on people, not what they’re doing from 9 to 5 or 9 to 4 or whatever their workday is.

But in terms of organisational culture and practices like a promotion, wages, do you think it’s any different for a woman to be in the high-tech sector than in other sectors of the economy?

I suppose definitely they probably have more financial resources available to them, but people often, I think it’s this balance between your income and what you want to do with that income and what that avails you to do. And sometimes people see that extra income and that extra status as it puts more demands on, so if you look at the overall delta, sometimes you could be better off on a lower income but doing what you want to do and not being forced into this, I suppose, this pressure. And pressure can often come from the men and women within that environment rather than what people put on themselves. But I think it is much easier, definitely, in a smaller company because you’re not influenced as much by the culture outside, you know, but definitely I see some of my colleagues working in multinationals is that they do feel a pressure on them to be exhibiting that status externally, and that can put a lot of pressure on people.

Female colleagues, sorry?

Yeah, female colleagues, yeah, yeah, you know, that they feel they have to, you know, exhibit this status. Whereas when you work in a small company, people often, you know, I wouldn’t be, it’s so naïve as to feel that everybody would understand what [small programming firm] does or what we do, so it takes, it actually takes a lot of pressure externally outside work in terms of that there’s no expectation on you to be living this, you know, extravagant lifestyle that can put a lot of pressures, and not only financial, but you know, pressures on you in terms of what you do with that time and how you spend the time.

Yes, in terms of work responsibility, I find it very interesting that you compare small companies with a large multinational. How different is it for a woman, when comparing working in a small company and working in a
multinational, not only in terms of lifestyle, status and showing-off things, but also within the work and organisational culture itself. Have you seen any differences?

Yeah, I suppose what I’ve found was one of the things was, that I loved working in Analogue was that, because it was kind of a semiconductor plant, it was very much, once you went in, you know, you had to strip off the makeup, you had to strip off all the externalities that would go with, you know, maybe working in other companies. So you were in your bunny suit, and you were, everybody was the same and it was very, you know, whether you were a man, whether you were a woman, whether, you know, you couldn’t wear the jewellery, you couldn’t, so you were stripping off all these symbols so it was actually an ideal place to work in terms of there was no pressures, internal pressures within the organisation.

And then when I worked in other companies when I was doing consultancy with them, and I would even see colleagues who I know working in other companies, is that the expectation, and maybe it’s women put it on themselves, but comparing, some women would have to spend a half an hour in the morning doing their makeup, doing their hair, doing their clothes, and that’s, you know, that’s a lot of time in terms of if you’re spending, you know, if it takes an hour to get the family organised and everybody out. If you’re spending an extra half an hour on these external visualities that make no difference to the work you’re doing on a day-to-day basis, it is a lot of pressure on people to be doing that, not only on the routine maintenance, you know, as in the half an hour every day, but the, you know, what goes behind that in terms of, you know, making sure you were shopping and you were, you know, the latest fashion and all that.

And I would say that particularly from observing some of my friends and some of my female colleagues within family is that there is an awful lot of pressure, and I would say it’s self-imposed on them by women and not by men, because definitely, you know, I talk to some of the male colleagues I work with and they wouldn’t know whether a woman was wearing makeup or not, OK they might look at the overall presentation, but a woman will and will start making those comments and start making those judgements. And you feel like saying to people, look, you know, stop blaming men and stop blaming society and stop blaming everybody for why women are so-called not getting on. We put an awful lot of pressure on ourselves on things, the trivialities, you know, like the makeup, the making sure you look well. Now there are times, and I’m not saying that I wouldn’t do it, you know, I find particularly if I’m travelling or if I’m going to meetings where you have to put in the effort and people do judge you by how you look, so you would spend the half an hour putting on the makeup and you would make sure that, you know, you’re dressed well and you’re, you know, that you’ve done that. But that should be the exception and not the day in terms of what you’re doing on a day-to-day basis.

OK. Now moving towards the final part of our interview, we’ve been here already for over an hour, and I don’t want to take too much of your time, and I appreciate your time and attention to this. So just a follow-up question, your family background, your parents, who were they, what they did... and where did you grow up?

I grew up, I’m an only girl, I have four brothers, and people say that that can often be an advantage and maybe that’s where a lot of my views came from in that I definitely see my younger daughter, although she’s an only girl, has a lot more interest in the visualities, you know, in that she’s only nine now, but you know, she likes to make sure she has her lip gloss, she has her hair done, she has, you know, I often say that she's definitely not getting that from home, but maybe it’s definitely getting it from the peers. But I suppose growing up there was never any pressure on, you know, for the externalities like that, and it was always considered that I would be, whatever the boys could do, I could do, you know, there was no differentiation between me and my brothers. So I suppose I grew up in an environment where you weren’t thought, well, any less is being asked of you because you’re a girl or anything more is expected of you because you’re a girl. We were all pretty much treated the same.

What did your parents do for a living?

My parents did, my father was a salesman and my mother was a teacher. But at the time of the marriage ban, she had to give up teaching when she was married.
In terms of transformations - you mentioned many transformations over the years. Like in the high-tech sector, what would strike you most in terms of main transformations in Irish society, in the high-tech, or work in the high-tech sector?

Yeah, definitely, I suppose, the influence of technology, that I think it has put more pressure on people to be available outside of their 9 to 5 than previously. For instance, when I started, you came in and you worked your shift, and it's not to say that you worked any less hard, but if you had to stay on at work, you stayed on at work. But the division between work and home became very, it was a lot more defined, as in if you needed to stay on to do extra work, you stayed back till 7 o’clock, 8 o’clock, whatever. And I had found particularly towards the latter time in Analogue because you were now finding that the technology was available at home, and it was expected that you had a computer at home while that mightn't have been provided by the company, and I don't think there was any, I don't think there was any budgetary things saying, you know, it was just expected that, you know, when you're at home, you have a computer, you have, whatever, that you were expected to be a lot more accessible outside your 9 to 5 job. So I think that technology has put a lot of pressure on people, extra pressures that way, and as I said, particularly when you're travelling now because you have access to the office and various things, it does, it does put pressure on. And I suppose if you had to look at it in balance, while it has made things a lot more easy working from home, it also has, it has also put a lot more demands on as well, yeah.

Why are you guys located inside the technology park? For example, why not Limerick centre, Cork or Dublin? Why the technology park?

There was two reasons. The first one it was close to where we worked, so we had looked to take in offices inside town and looked at various things, but when you looked at the commute, and you were going to lose, regards, you were going to lose an hour and a half a day if you were outside this immediate area, so I suppose because we were here. The second thing was being a start-up company and particularly if you’re trying to deal with universities and research institutions in Europe, having, being established in a technology park, it definitely gave you a lot more credibility than if you were either working from home or if you had a street that was a high-street address. Definitively I think the innovation centres and the incubation units, because they’re now pretty standard across Europe, it does definitely give a, it gives credibility to when you're trying to access organisations, that you can, I suppose, you can punch above your weight in terms of that. And then the third thing is that it's close to, it's close to the university. So if we do need access to, I suppose as well at the time, you didn’t have the road access to the library, things like that, but you do have access to research resources if you need it. But that wouldn't have been the primary. The primary would have been, I suppose, the credibility you would have given to a small company.

Final question, in terms of improvements, this is a very open question: what types of improvements would you like to see being taking place, either at the national level, the technology park, or your specific work practices?

Well I suppose the one that immediately impacts us here is access, the air access to Europe, that if it wasn't for RyanAir, you know, we would have, we would have no access. And I think that at a government level, if they are interested in developing the regions, they have to understand that, you know, we have to be within a network within Europe. And, you know, an example of the meeting I was at last week in Belgium, I had to allow, the meeting was only going to be over one day, and I had a choice, I could either spend three hours on the road here driving to Dublin airport, because if you look at the train times and you look at the connection, going to Dublin airport by public transport is just not feasible. So I had the choice, I could either spend three hours driving to Dublin, three hours getting through Dublin airport, so you know, you have six hours before you even got on a plane, and that would have to be done the night before to go to the meeting. So what you end up doing is you'll say, well I'll take a roundabout route from Shannon and I will try and fit another meeting in in that extra day. So that's what I said earlier about clustering meetings. But once you got onto mainland Europe, you know, you have no problems travelling. Whereas the other people who were going to that meeting in Belgium, they were coming from Paris and they were coming from Milan, they were able to get on a train and be in one of the fast trains, the
TGVs or whatever, they were in Brussels within an hour and a half. And you know, when I think of what I could do in an hour and a half here in, sorry, in Limerick, I can get half way to Dublin, you know, because you'd have to drive.

That we have to think of making us more accessible, particularly to Europe. Or we could talk about the technology, we could talk about all the other things that you can do, but there is a need for business access and face to face meetings as well, you know. They found it very hard, particularly the people at the meeting, to understand why the best use of my time was to make it a two-day meeting where I could meet other people beforehand, rather than just, well, why can't you leave Shannon and be in Brussels for 10 o'clock, you know, we deliberately had a late start, a 10 o'clock meeting so that people could, (inaudible) by 10 o'clock, I could only get to Dublin, you know, I couldn't, couldn't get further. So we joke particularly among the European partners is that they, they'll never ever now feel bad about all the structural funds that Ireland got from Europe because, you know, they realise that how much, how much we do need the structural funds. But the one thing I would like to change, I would like to see more, more access from Shannon.

OK. Is there any question that I didn't ask that I could have asked, or any topic that you'd like to briefly talk about from all those questions I asked, or things that I didn't ask, something that you forgot to say that you would like to elaborate a bit?

No, I think you've covered everything. Got around a lot of things. That's interesting.

Do you have any concern about the issues that we talked about? Like if you want, I can send you a link of this interview so you can listen to it again if you want.

Yeah.

And if you want me to delete any part, I can do that as well, it's part of the confidentiality agreement.

No, no, it's fine. I'm interested in maybe just coming from a research point of view is what people, what they say first is probably, because it's not thought out, you wonder is it the, is it the actual, I'm going to explain this badly, you know, it's a bit like they have this expression where somebody's drunk and they're waffling. Are they telling the truth or is it something they wouldn't say when they're sober? So is that the real truth or is that something that they wouldn't say on reflection. So but I tend to think is that what you say and comes out first is probably the best. So if I was to listen through that, I'd say, God, did I really say that, or I shouldn't say that. So I'd say go with it, go with what's there.

Thank you very much for your time.

Yeah, you're very welcome and I hope you get ...
If you could please tell us about your position, job title, what you do here in the company.

OK, I have a, I have the title of Director of Engineering, OK. So how I got that I suppose is that there was four of us who founded the company, all right, OK. And we had previously worked together in another company for six years. Then we left that company, we set up a mid-size telecom software firm ten years ago. So at that stage then, the four of us had very different roles assigned to us, you know what I mean, and they were very obvious in the start, I suppose, what roles we were actually going to get, or what roles that each of us fulfilled. So out of that role then, out of that, I got this title of Engineering Director, and I suppose that's how, and I've been in that role for the last ten years.

And what are your main responsibilities and functions here?

I am responsible then for the development organisation, OK, all the developers, the, any piece of development work that is going through the house I would be responsible for that, OK. I would be responsible for the hiring of the people, the hiring of the engineers, the design of the projects, the running of the projects, getting the projects delivered, getting them out to sight, making sure they're running OK on site, the full life cycle of the project. I'm not involved at all say in the sale side of things or anything like that, OK, it's purely on the technical side. Associated with that, you also have, so you have a technical side to the role, and then you also have, because you're dealing with people, you have kind of a HR type side as well, OK. So it's everything to do with those people that are in the development, that's my responsibility. And be it whether they're complaining about the air conditioning or the need for new hardware or the need for new PCs or the need for new software, anything like that, it all lands on my desk.

So you're the head of R&D.

Yes.

Yeah, and you direct the projects, management like the ...

Correct, yes. I would have a number of project managers and team leads, OK, and then the team leads would have a number of developers that would be reporting to them. So we would do all of the scheduling of those, you know, in combination with the team leads and the project managers. We would do all the scheduling, do all the design, we would do all the, you know, making sure that augmentation was correct, the full circle.

And can you tell about your past, your trajectory, what did you study and what is your family background, and where you grew up.

Well, I'm from Limerick, OK, I'm from Limerick. One of five children, I have four brothers, OK. I would have been the middle child, the only girl.

The only girl.

Yes, I have four brothers, yeah, I have four brothers. I have, I went to an all-girls school from primary all the way through secondary. I was sent to a convent school, OK, then I went from there to UL where I studied electronics, OK, for four years. I did the engineering degree there. From UL I then went to work for two years for a small Irish
owned, family-run business in Shannon called PCL, and I wrote software there, it was printer drivers, it was basically I wrote it in assembly, assembly language. I then moved from there and I was, I moved to Motorola in Cork, OK, which was a big multinational, completely different to the small family run business, OK.

The family, this family-run business that I was in, it was basically two brothers that owned it, OK, and there was sons in the business, there was first cousins, there was, you know, a mix of things, it was really a family business, OK. So, I mean, I learned loads from that, I learned how to run, how a small business was run, I learned everything, from how you run business all the way through, OK. But I also learned the lesson that in a family run business you aren't actually ever going to be promoted, OK, because it was a family business. So I suppose as a result of that I then moved to a multinational which was the complete opposite. But again, there was fine lessons to be learned there.

I moved from Motorola in Cork, then I was there, I was with them for just over two years as well, OK. And this was my, and I suppose, my way in to see how a multinational was run, I mean you couldn't get much bigger than Motorola at the time, there was bases everywhere worldwide, people were zipping all over the world, there was, you had to worry about development teams being local, being remote, you know, I saw how big business was run, I suppose, big development projects were run with multiple inputs from multiple places, you know what I mean. It was a very different type of development environment. They had every tool possible that you could you want, you only had to sneeze it and say, oh I might like this, and you got it. Whereas in the small-run businesses, you had to really justify everything, you know, because the money was tighter and you had to justify everything that was required. So this was a complete culture shock and everything was very planned and laid out, it was very, you know, everything was scheduled, you know, everything was scheduled. There was nothing like, oh we need a meeting now because there's been a crisis, no, no, no, we'll schedule that. Everything was scheduled so this was a very, very different environment.

**What did you do at Motorola?**

I actually went in as a test engineer, OK, and I was in the test engineering department for one year and then I moved from that to a development role at that stage. OK, so it was one year in the test and one year in development. OK, but I would have been, I wasn't in a management role or anything, I was just purely a developer at that stage.

**Were you coding?**

Oh I was coding, yes, yes, development, yes, I was in a development role, yeah. And I left there then and I joined, after two years, I joined a company called Technomen in Shannon. And I went in there as a software developer as well, OK, writing code. And I stayed there then for six years and I would have had various roles there, OK. I would have gone in as a developer and then I went from a developer into a kind of a team lead role, and I would have built up that team then to, I don't know, maybe, I don't know, before I left, was there about twelve or thirteen engineers in that development team, OK. And yeah, that would have been my first time I suppose leading a team and leading a project and leading a team of engineers and getting a project. And I had my own project there and it was great, I loved that. And I spent six years there and after Technomen then I left, we set up the company that we're currently in. OK, that was a very speedy run through.

**No, that was a very good summary. I have some follow-up questions about this. Your parents, what did they do for a living?**

My parents, my parents both had left primary, have only got primary education, OK, they don't have a secondary education. My mother was a cook, you know, before she got married, and once she got married, she stayed at home then, she didn't work after that. My father has a primary education only again and he was a, working as an airport operator in Shannon Airport, OK, he was with a company called Esso, you know, he was involved in the refuelling of the aircraft when they landed in Shannon.
Something you said that struck me that several of the ladies I’m interviewing are single girls in a group of brothers.

I’m not surprised.

This is something that I’d like to pay more attention to. Would you have an opinion about that?

Oh we definitely, you are, I’d say if I was brought up in a house full of girls, I would be very different because, I suppose my, the boys are just different, you know, and you end up playing with their stuff, you know what I mean, and it’s like, I remember, I was always fascinated, one of my brothers, well all of my brothers actually were big into cars, OK. And there was always cars, car magazines around the house, you know what I mean. Now my father would have been very technical even though he had no formal training, he was very technical, very good with his hands and, you know, but there was always, always car magazines around the house, and I remember, you know, because they’re around you end up reading them, right, not that I was particularly interested in cars, but because the discussion was always on cars, well you had to be able to discuss them as well, OK.

And one of my brothers was, had these particular car magazines, and I remember sitting down reading them, you know. And I was absolutely fascinated by, there was one article one time and it was describing how to use, you know, the back door (inaudible) on a car? You know, the back wheels, and how the back wheels cope with the power being transmitted to them and how they cope with like going around a corner and how it handles that one wheel has to travel more than the other wheel, you know, and I thought this was just fantastic. And it explained all of this, you know what I mean, with all the diagrams and whatever, and I thought this is just great, can you just imagine being able to sit down and design one of these things. You know, because like I was just fascinated by this, you know. Now I didn’t go into mechanical engineering or anything, but I suppose that would have been, you know, realising that this is really good, someone can actually sit down and design one of these things. And it was only a car magazine thrown around the house, but I suppose that would have been, not that I got about it and said, right I am going to be an engineer. But you know the way, it was like, oh God, I really like that stuff, yeah, yeah.

We’ll get back to this topic of gender later on in the interview. But, my other follow-up question is, before I miss it, what years were you in Motorola?

I came out of college in ‘88. I worked from ’88, for two years, in PCL. Then from ’90 to ’92, well it was, you know 1993 actually, between 1990 and 1993, I was in Motorola. From ’93, then I was six years in Technomen, then from, we’re ten years here in Technomen, we’re ten years in [mid-size telecom software firm] now at the moment, so that was ten year ago then when I started here, yeah.

So back to the present moment, can you describe your typical work day here?

OK, I’m currently, I just work part time, OK. I work from 9 to 2, come in in the morning, all the gory details, like?

That’s very important actually.

OK. Come in the morning, power up the PC, I bring the PC home with me right, so I power up the PC in the morning when I come in. First things, I scan my mail, I see what’s going on from the mail, I see what happened in the afternoon if I hadn’t read them at home. I see the, scan out the mail, read them all, answer anything that has to be answered there and then, right. So that typically then is my first hour. OK, now I can be interrupted there by the project manager or the development manager coming to me with, you know, whatever crisis has arisen or whatever and you have to deal with that, OK. Then typically then meetings then would start from, I typically try to organise my next hour then is to do the work that I need to get done, whatever my task list is right. I typically
would write down in my little booklet what I need to get done during the day or a yellow sticky or it's in my diary, today is four or five different items that must be attend to.

Then I would have, typically meetings would start at 11, I would have a meeting most days from 11 to 12, I tend to try to keep them for an hour, OK, then if they fall up, if they run over, it's OK, you know. Then I would have, say for example, I would have a, I would have meetings Wednesday, Tuesday, Wednesdays and Thursdays, they would be the three meetings, you know, you'd have meetings with the project manager and the manager over customer operations because I need to keep an eye on that as well, OK, because customer operations is the group that would take the development software and actually deploy it out on site, so I need to get feedback from them as to what are the problems they're seeing on site, you know, what software they need from us so we can make sure we do the planning properly, you know. So say Tuesdays I would have meetings with those guys, we would go through it, we would discuss all the customer sites, we would discuss all their issues, both from development of customer operations and they would all have to be actioned then, whatever would all have to be done and I would have to take care of whatever would fall out of those meetings. Maybe Wednesdays then would be typically design meetings with some of the developers on whatever projects would actually be going on. And again, you would have white board sessions here behind us, you know. And the developers would say, right, we're on this project, this is our form design, you look at the design and we would have a discussion about it, you know, and I would give them my input and my feedback as to whether it was going the right way or whatever.

Then after those meetings you would, typically, back again, check the mail, see was there anything that had come in, you deal with anything, there would be issues now from development, there could be issues from customer operations, from site, there could be bugs from site, they would all need to be assessed quickly to see whether they were something that was service affecting on site, therefore it needed to be actioned straight away, or whether it was, oh yeah, that's a bug, it's OK, we'll just schedule it later on, you know what I mean. So it's just a, it's a call, it's a priority call on all of those kind of things. Then I would go to lunch at 1 o'clock until half past. I'd go over here to the Innovation Centre.

The canteen?

The canteen over here in the Innovation Centre. And I don't go with anybody in particular, OK. I go to the canteen and whoever is at a table, I will sit down with them, OK, so I don't have a set person that I go to lunch with every day. That just means then that I, in the week I typically then meet a wider selection of the staff, OK. Come back then say at half past 1, I walk straight back, OK, I don't go for a walk around the block or anything like that. Now the others do, but I don't, OK, because I have to much to get done. Back then for a half an hour and then I finish up whatever I need to get finished up. OK, be it documents or mails or replies or reports that have to be written, they would all be done in that time frame.

Then I would leave here anytime between 2 and 20 past 2. I then have to drive, OK, to home which is a place called Kilmurry up beyond Sixmilebridge, which is about 18 miles away. And I pick up, at the moment, I'm picking up my childminder's children from school at 3 o'clock. I then take them back to my childminder, I drop off her kids and I pick up my child, OK. I have a 5-year-old girl that's being minded by this particular childminder, OK, she's in senior infants at the moment. So I pick her up at my childminder, and then I go home. We then do her homework, OK, I sit with her, we do the homework, and then once her homework is done, I start the dinner, OK. Then I have another girl who just started secondary school, she's 12, and she comes in at 5 o'clock from the bus. She's in secondary school in Ennis. So we sit down then at 5 o'clock and we have our dinner. So it would be myself and my two kids then at that stage.

That's early dinner, isn't it?

It's an early dinner, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, so at the moment, that's early and that's only this year, right, that I started the 5 o'clock dinner. OK, so then we have our dinner and we chat and, you know, we find out what went on for the day and whatever and that's fine. And then my old girl goes off and she does her homework, OK. And I
tidy up after the dinner, then my husband comes in any time from, between 6 and 7. And again then, I would sit down with him and we would have, you know, he would have some food, now if he's already, would have had his dinner, so it's more like a light snack or something. So I would typically just have a cup of tea while he's eating and we would sit together and we would chat and whatever. And then we tidy up after that. Then I go and I check my older girl's homework, I would sit with her and I would ask her her whatever, that she needs to be asked, you know, the way she has things to be learned or if there's something she wants me to check or if we wants me to explain to her, we would go through her homework and make sure that that was OK. Then it's into the routine of getting the younger child to bed, story, then it's the old child to bed, and then it's my time then at that stage. So at that stage then, depending, it could be housework or it could be work, something that I have left over that I feel that I want to attend to, or it could be just sitting, reading, or catching up on the newspapers or watching television or watching a movie or sitting, chatting to my husband, or, OK?

All right. So, are these the things that you do for fun, like reading, TV?... What else would you do for fun?

They would be on a, yes, reading, reading is a big hobby, right, OK. The other one would be, I go dancing as well, OK, all right, OK I typically, now during the summer it's not on, but during the winter time, I would go dancing on a Wednesday night.

What type of dance?

It's Irish, it's Irish type dancing.

Does your husband come with you?

No, no. I go by myself. It's typically just neighbours, typically it's, there's only about one or two men that go to the set dancing, it's typically neighbours, mothers that go to the set dancing. So it's a lovely way to go, we do it in the pub right, in the room that's in the back of the pub. Because it's dancing, you don't really, you get very hot right. We're not actually drinking alcohol, so it's, you go to the pub and you're ordering like two bottles of Ballygowen, you know, you go in then and you go dancing. But we have great fun right because it's exercise, you're having the craic, you're interacting with other people, it's completely unrelated to work, so you typically are just talking about the neighbourhood, what's going on, people are talking about their kids. It's the mammy type of site, you know. And it's lovely. It's really lovely and nice. Then we, I would also then some evenings try and get some, a walk in. If my husband comes home and it was still bright out, I would go for a half an hour walk just up the country lanes and back down again, OK. Or I would, then at weekends, we have a place in Kerry, we have a house in Kerry, so we would typically go to the beach and we would go for walks or we would go for cycles there. That's our kind of family time where we just do those kind of pleasurable things, you know, swimming, walking, cycling, yeah, they would be the main activities.

Reading - you read online or books, paper?

Oh books, books, books, books. Books, newspapers, no I don't read online, no I don't read a lot of, I wouldn't read books now online, if that's what you mean.

Or the news or ...

Yeah, I would, I would read, I would catch up on the, just the Irish Times, you know the headlines, you can just read that one online, yeah, I would read that everyday, I would, yeah.

Do you do Facebook or other social networking websites?

No, I have a LinkedIn all right, but that's all I would use.
Do you use LinkedIn a lot?

Not really, no. Only if I was, if I was interviewing someone, I would check them, yeah.

And what does your husband do for a living?

He's an engineer as well, he's a production engineer.

Does he work in a high-tech firm like you?

Oh no, it's completely different, no, he's in aircraft maintenance, OK. So he's based in Shannon in Shannon Aerospace and they're doing maintenance on aircraft, you know, the big Boeings and the big Airbuses.

Do you two talk about engineering?

I wouldn't think so. But it helps because, I met him in university, right, so it definitely helps that he understands, he understands to a certain degree my role, yes, and the actual work I do because, you know, he's obviously familiar with computers and software and all that stuff and mobile phones and, you know. So yes, he has an appreciation, yes, of course. But no, I wouldn't go home and discuss the latest design that I've come up with and aren't I so smart, look what I have just done today, you know, I would just get this blank look, no, no. But I mean, yes, I would, from my point of view, I would quiz him a lot because I'm dying to know about mechanical inclined things, I just like those. But that would be more as a hobby more than, it wasn't really, you know...

Curiosity.

It's curiosity, yes, I would be interested. And I would also be interested in how larger companies deal with different issues, you know, so he's in a big, they're a part, excuse me (inaudible) so of course, they would have the big corporate type of infrastructure and, you know, the corporate type of responses to certain things. So yes, I would quiz him about those type of things as well, because that's not the type of environment that we are here. So it's good to find out, you know, this is just a small Irish company, to find out what corporate, you know, the way corporates are currently thinking. I have a tap in there, which is very good.

Is he Irish?

Yes, he's Irish. He's from Limerick as well.

OK. And if I may ask you, why do you work part time?

Because I felt it was important to give time to my children, OK. I felt that the, I have seen how, my parents were always believers, right, in that education was key, you know what I mean, without an education, you were very restricted, OK. And I suppose I have that inbuilt in me then as a result, OK, in that I saw that education has enabled me to have, to have what I want, let's put it that way, OK. Therefore I have recognised that education is important and it is important that I am there to help my kids with their homework if they need help, OK. I felt that if I was coming home, if I was leaving work here at 6 o'clock, I was home at half past 6, say. Starting homework, we'll just say, at 7, I just felt that was too late and kids were too tired to start homework at that time.

Yeah, so I have worked part time since my second child was born, so I've been part time since, for the last five years. But it wasn't because my child, the younger baby, I wasn't worried about her, it was my older girl at that stage, you know, say their volume of homework was increasing a small bit and I felt I needed to be there to do the homework with them, and also then for doing, for taking them to the extra activities that they do in the evening time, OK. I didn't feel it was right for me to be asking childminders, oh, could you drop my kid to music and drop
them to dancing, and drop them to speech and drama, I'll pick them up afterwards, that wasn't practical, OK. So, and I felt it was, it was good, she's, my older child is a particularly shy child, OK. So it was, I felt it was important that she was involved in those activities to, for her own, for her own sake, OK. So I needed to put some time and bring her to those activities and make sure that she was, she was OK. So that was my main motivating factor for going on part time, OK.

**OK. how does it impact your career, versus working full time?**

That's a hard one to answer, I suppose, because, OK, I suppose, you know, I'm limited to say, officially, five hours in a day, right. Now five hours in a day is quite short, OK, to pack all the stuff in, OK. So it meant that I had to become very good at delegating, OK, much, much better at delegating. Say, when I was working full time, I was a devil, right, I would take on the world, right. All the jobs, anything that came through, it was mine, it was my responsibility, I would, you know, I would take it on. I mean, I could have been here 7, 8 o'clock some nights. I was atrocious, OK. But obviously I cannot do that volume of work in five hours, OK. So therefore you have, I restructured the group a little more, I hired a development manager, and I delegate an awful lot of that responsibility to him, but still keeping an eye on it. But I only keep an eye on it as opposed to doing it, OK. So it has made me, I suppose, a better, it has actually made me a better manager, right, because you have to delegate more and you jump between the topics, is this OK, is this OK, is this OK, as opposed to doing it all, you know. That was very difficult at the start, right, OK, to delegate all the stuff because you, you have to build up trust with the people you delegate to to make sure that it's done the way you want it done, you know what I mean. And for the start, it's extremely frustrating because the stuff comes back not the way you want it done, and you have to go back again and say, no, no, I'd like it this way, and you, you have to force it to be done, or encourage that it's done in the way that you want it done, you know. So there was a lot of, I suppose, teething problems there, right, on my side, you know. But once we got over that now, it's fine, everything is running smoothly, OK.

In terms of will it limit me? I suppose I'm in the nice position in that being a co-founder, that can never be taken away from me, all right. But it does mean that, you know, sometimes you will have to, you would have to dip in at night time once you've gone home, right, OK. Now I wouldn't, I tend not to dip into work once the kids are up and around, OK, because you just can't concentrate on the, you don't have the time, you know what I mean, they're interrupting you, or there's, you know, read me a story, mammy, whatever, you know, you just can't. So it's only after, we'll say, it's only after 9 o'clock, once they've gone to bed, at that stage then that you go and maybe you'd go online or you'd write up that report or you'd finish the report that you were working on or whatever. In terms of limiting my career, limiting my progress, you should, you probably need to ask someone else about that. I don't know. I don't think it has, I don't think it has, no, I don't think it has.

**And in terms of aspirations or ambitions professionally?**

No, I don't think so, no, no. You know, because say for example on the days that, say if my husband was off on holidays or whatever, then he would pick up the children or whatever, OK, and yes, then at that stage, I would stay till 5, you know what I mean, there's always more to be done, always, always more to be done, you know. And it is good that I have to leave because I have to pick up the children, you know what I mean, because you cannot leave them at the school gate, otherwise I would work till 6 o'clock or I would work till 7 o'clock, you know. Because, because I love what I'm doing, you know what I mean, it's great like.

**And this connects with what you mentioned before about negotiating tasks (home choirs) with husband. How do you deal with that with your husband?**

OK, we have a very, we have very clear divisions, right, and that's the only way it works, in that anything outside, the garden, he does all that, OK, and I take care of the house, except for, except for, he does, I get the kids up in the morning, right, dress them, get them ready for school, all that kind of stuff, OK, making sure that all their gear is ready and if it's PE day, that the, you know, all the bags are packed, all that kind of stuff. And his responsibility in the morning is to make the lunches, OK. OK, so he does the lunches, OK, so when I get up in the morning, feed the
kids, you know, he’ll have been down in the kitchen before I am because he’s making the lunches. I’m down then with the kids and we have the breakfast together and then he drops one to the bus and I drop the other to the childminder’s. Then I go to work, I pick them up and I would do, I would do most of the housework. I have somebody, all right, that comes in and does ironing and all that kind of stuff, OK. But I would do most of the housework.

Do you think that you do more than what he does, in combining household and professional responsibilities? How do you feel about it?

No, I mean, I try and get, while I’m cooking the dinner to get the housework done, you know, around that stage, like putting on the washing and all those kind of things, a quick hoover around, cleaning up and whatever. So, you know, but I mean, he’s at work at that stage, so that’s OK with me, you know what I mean, that’s OK, because you know, it’s not like, if he came in in the evening times, he’s then, you know, he would go to the garden and he would cut the grass, you know, those kind of jobs, right, but I’m, during while he’s cutting the grass, I might be changing the bed sheets or something, you know, so we’re both doing jobs associated with the house. It’s not like he’s sitting inside, I don’t know, drinking beer, watching television or something, you know. So then it’s OK, you know what I mean, because, yeah, I mean it’s not like he’s not contributing anything, he does contribute.

So, I’m teasing you a little bit with these questions. Imagine a scenario: would you be able to say to him, “I would like to work full time or I need to work full time, can you work part time instead”?

Oh absolutely, oh yes, that was a joint decision, that I would go part time. No, I was happy with that decision and he was happy with that as well. That didn’t, you know, but if the, if things changed, you know what I mean, in terms of say, if I went back full time and he took part time work, that would be fine, too. He’s a very, I’d say he’s not a typical, he’s not a typical husband, do you know what I mean? He would be very accommodating, OK. He would have come from a background where they were all professionals in his family, you know what I mean, both male and female. And I think that has, that has been very good for me, if you know what I mean, right, because he was used to an environment where women went to work and, you know, I think that has, that has been advantageous to me, that he has come from that environment, you know, that he wasn’t looking for a stay-at-home wife or something like that, you know, or that he wasn’t, but if I wanted to do that again, he’d be fine with that, you know.

So maybe I missed that, what propelled that it was you who would go part time, not him?

That would have been my decision. I would have said, I would have suggested that I would have seen, maybe just I would have seen myself as in the mother role, you know, yeah, it was more my decision that I would have, yeah, I would have said I think this is what I should do, you know. And that I, yeah, I would have seen it as a duty.

Because some couples in a situation similar to yours would decide based on maximising income, like whoever earns more would …

Oh yeah, no, no, no.

Work more and the other would work at home.

Yeah, no that wasn’t, yeah, no that wouldn't have been, no the income thing wouldn't have come into it at all, all right, OK, because it probably would have been financially better for us if I had stayed full time and he had worked part time, you know, but no, that wasn’t seen as, that wasn’t the motivating factor, that wasn’t, we didn’t sit down and do the figures and go, no, oh no, that wasn’t, that wasn't, that wouldn't have been, no.

All right. Now, back to your work. I know that your company has offices in Malaysia and Mexico. Do you have to work with the people in these places?
Yeah.

So would these offices have R&D functions?

No. No, the remote offices, all the R&D is here, in house, OK. The remote offices have only got customer operations, support, field engineers and sales people, OK. So yes, where I would be talking to the field engineers, OK, daily, OK, either by Skype or on email or, you know, we’d phone them, OK, I don’t have a remote development team.

So how often do you talk to them? On a daily basis, you said?

Oh yes, some of them could be on a daily basis, depending on what particular project we’re working, you know, I mean if there’s a piece of software that is going, we’ll just say, to Indonesia, then I would be onto the Malaysian office daily, absolutely, they would be reporting back on what’s going on, what’s not going on, I would be getting the status, you know, or if there was negotiations going on with new feature sets or when new features would be arriving on site, when would they be developed, the scheduling of all of those, that would be going back and forth because they would be talking directly to the customer or they would go to customer meetings, face-to-face meetings where I would be providing them with the information, saying, look, excuse me, you can have combination A, B and C and you can have it on, we’ll just say, in December, or if you go with E, F and A, then you can have that in January, or you can have, you know what I mean, you’d be giving them all those combinations and permutations so that they could then go and meet the customer and they would then come back to you and say, right, they’ve chosen this and this.

In terms of the means of communication, what do you use to communicate with them? Telephone, Skype?

Telephone, Skype, email, text messaging, doesn't matter, any, any, yeah.

How do you deal with time zones? Do you work at night, in the middle of the night, do you have to get up to answer a call?

No, no, no. We have, in terms of support, if there was a crisis, we have a 24/7 support phone that is manned all the time, OK, by a member of staff. We have an operator rota for that, OK. But no, they, unless there was a crisis, an absolute crisis, right, they wouldn't ring me. But I mean, they can, I mean, they all have my number and everything, right, I mean, they could, but that has never happened. But I mean, if the customers had problems, people would ring the support lines, then there would be the field engineers or the support staff, either based here or based wherever, who’d answer that call and deal with that. And if there was a crisis there that they needed to pull someone out of bed, they would pull them out of bed.

So I suppose you talk to the Mexico team when it's about 2 o'clock here and it's 8 a.m. there.

Yes, so in the morning, you’d have all the, in the, when you come in in the morning, Indonesia is on first, right, OK, OK, and you’d chat to those because at dinner time, they're going home. And then in the afternoon, it’s Mexicans are coming on. So I have a very small window to check out what's going on in Mexico, but I mean, you can tap in from home at 9 o'clock and see what was going on.

And you said that you avoid working when your children are awake.

Yes.

But you, otherwise do you work at home, when they go to sleep?
Sometimes I might, but it's not every night. Yeah, sometimes I go to, you know, if there was, you know, if there was a report to be written or if there was deadlines that I needed particular reports to be in by, OK, and I hadn't gotten them done during the day, yes I would, yeah, because missing a deadline isn't so good because then you'd be behind always, you know.

Do you travel a lot?

No. Since I've come here, I have never travelled.

In your career, did you travel a lot?

Oh yeah I did, a huge amount of travel. When I was working for the multinational, when I was working for the small Irish company, I did a lot of travelling with them as well. OK, at that stage, we were, we would be developing, and after you developed the project, you would actually be going to the site to install it. OK, so you would go to site then, you would install it and you tested on site, and you'd run training courses with the customer and then you would get a, you know, signed documentation to say, yes I did the install, everything is working, we've run the test ban, we've done the training, everything is completed, and then I would fly back. So I did an amount of travelling there with both of those two companies.

Sorry, was this regional or international travel, and how often?

International travel. Oh it could have been monthly, monthly, yeah, yeah.

And what was your experience in travelling back then and not travelling nowadays?

Are you asking me why I didn't travel now or ... Oh, the travel was good, the travel was good, I enjoy the travelling, you know. There was a side of you that loved travel because you were going to all these new places, right, you'd never go to these places on holidays because they were typically cities or, you know, I mean, I would tend to be more of a person who would go to either historical places or the beaches for holidays, OK, so, you would be going to the big cities installing equipment, OK. And you know, it was another new place, it was fantastic, you know, I mean it was great. Someone's paying for you to go and visit these places, you know. I mean, OK, you had to work, but that was OK, I mean, you'd typically be there on site for maybe two weeks, OK.

So you would work, and because some of the equipment was cellcoms equipment you'd have to work at night, actually, OK, you'd have to install it at night time, during the quiet period, OK, because it would have to work, it would have to work during the day, OK, which meant that you couldn't really do much during, you know, I mean, your week was completely occupied between working at night and sleeping during the day, which was a bit disruptive because, you know, hotels don't understand do not disturb signs hanging on the door. But it meant then that you had the weekends, you know what I mean, if the project was going well, then you had the weekend in order to go and play the tourist, you know. This was great, I mean, that was great, yeah, that was really good. You know, the downside of that was that you had to be very prepared to go on site, you had to be, you had to know your stuff, you had to be on the ball, you had to be alert, you had to be, you know, you had to be, you had to be good to get your stuff done, you know, yeah.

Would you consider international relocation for a short period or as a one-off relocation? Like if you had to Malaysia for example, would you go for a month or for a year?

If you had caught me before I had kids, I would go, OK, now that I have children, no, I wouldn't see that as a, as really viable now, right, unless it T'd up with school holidays or something, you know what I mean. If I wanted to go to Malaysia or something for three months and it happened to coincide with my kids' holidays from school? Yeah, I'd be gone, I would go because I think it would be fantastic for them as well. But I wouldn't be in favour of it in the middle of a school, of a school term or something like that.
What if your husband had an offer to go or move to Germany, would you consider that?

Yes, I mean, we would sit down and consider it, yes, OK, but I mean we would have to look at it seriously in terms of, you know, what it would mean for me if I had to drop my role and I would be, we would have to look at that. Because I, I mean, I love my job. I mean, I love my family and everything, but I think it would be, it would be a huge change for me, what would I do all day? You know, you know, where going to a foreign country would be great, the experience would be fantastic. I’m sure after three months of that, you kind of go, you know, I’d be kind of itching for a bit of work again, I’m sure I would be, you know.

And OK, in terms of remote working, working from home, would there be technological capabilities that would allow you to coordinate all these staff from home? Would you be able to work from home if you could or if you wanted?

If I wanted, I could. I mean, you could, right, but still you need the, you need the interaction, OK. Yes, if you looked at it coldly on paper, there is no reason for me to drive into work everyday and drive in again, OK. Yes, anything that I do here, right, I could do at home, you know, in terms of answering emails, you know, making the decisions, absolutely, I could do that at home right. But the thing that you can't see that is needed is you need the meeting, you need the face-to-face meetings, you know. Stuff is easier to explain, I mean, if I'm here at a technical meeting, I can hop up and I can start drawing on that board, and instantly they know what I'm talking about, or likewise, they, they can draw on the board and I instantly know whether they understand the problem or have a grasp of the issue from what they draw, you know. And you can't do that, you can't do that on the phone, you can't do that, you know, I find that very difficult, you know.

There's an awful lot of time wasted if people don't cop to something or they don't understand something. There's a lot of time wasted with emails back and forth or Skype back and forth, where you'd know if you sat down with them, you’d have it all sorted out in half an hour because we had a, we had sub contractor work that we did, we gave to a group in Romania, OK, and there was, a lot of that was, it was good, right, it was a very good project, they were highly technical, they knew exactly what I wanted, but at times you get a little bit frustrated because you knew that if you sat across the table from me, I'd have this sorted out in an hour, you know. But this went on for maybe three or four days, you know, back and forth and back and forth and back and forth, whereas if you had the face-to-face meeting, it would have been sorted out, you know. Some technical issues, you just need to be beside someone, you need, you know the way you know by looking at someone whether their light has gone on in their head or not. You need that, you don't know that they fully understand until, you know the way you know.

With the Skype, would the video help?

I've never tried that, but maybe it would, but I don't know. You know the way it's still a bit, I don't know, it's a bit clunky or something.

Yeah, yeah, so how do you react to these new technologies, new Internet devices? Do you welcome and embrace them?

Yeah, I would say we would be OK, yeah, we, I mean, they're just tools to get the job done, you know what I mean. We're never anti trying out a new tool, yeah, any, you know the way there's loads of software tools up there or whatever, and I mean, I would be, we would be open to trying out all of those, yeah. I mean, I can log in from home and everything, I mean, I can log in from home and see all the networks and see everything I want to see, you know what I mean, I mean, we can remote log into all of our customer sites as well. So I can do all of that from home, but I still feel the need to come in and be a bit more, you have to meet people, there's a social aspect to it that you need to, you know, I wouldn't talk to all the engineers every day on a technical level, you know what I mean, but you would try to make sure that you met them in the canteen (inaudible) have a cup of coffee or, you know, even you’re passing in the corridor, you, you know, you ask them how the kid is or how the wife is or how
their soccer match went, you know, that type of stuff where you'd never send somebody a mail to say how did your soccer match go? But if you passed them in the corridor, you'd ask them how it went, yeah. So that's, you need that kind of, I don't know, touch that you don't get through, you know, using telecoms, yeah.

What about the more basic tasks like coding, technical stuff, could it be done on the move, from home? Not by you, but with your technicians, your engineers.

Oh yeah, I mean, there is some of them work from home one or two days a week. Oh yeah, I have that, that's fine.

OK. What do you think about this concept of the ‘nomadic worker’? Like the programmer or the engineer who's always working on the move, on the train and programming from hotel rooms. Is this a myth?

Well, I mean, we have sales people, right, they're always on the move. They are always on the go, you know what I mean, it's like they don't get to sit at their desk here. You know, I mean, I should be hot swapping their desks because they don't use them, you know. But I mean the sales guy that's sitting in his office, you know, you pay a sales guy to be on the road, be out meeting customers, having meetings, you know, try and sell the product and whatever. So they are constantly on the go and they are working on the go. So they are definitely writing up emails, sending out stages reports, sending us reports of that meeting or minutes of the meetings, they do that on the go all the time.

So there are nomadic workers if that's what you're asking, absolutely, yeah, I would, yeah, I mean when we were, when we'll say I was travelling, there would have been, OK, where it wasn't as convenient, you didn't have the mobile broadband, you didn't have, you know what I mean at that stage, right. So working on a PC on a train or in the airport or stuff, you were kind of limited in what you could actually do, you know. But that has all changed, you know. I mean say if we were going, if I was going, I mean, I don't travel, but I do go to Dublin and stuff for meetings, you know what I mean, but sure you'd bring the PC and you'd be on the train like, and yes you can, it's like I was sitting at my desk, I mean, you're still working away, you know what I mean. So that, that's fine, but that's not the type of travel you're talking about I don't think, is it? You're talking about more international travel, or are you talking about developers as such?

The concept of mobility is very wide. You can think of international location, but you can talk about local commuting as well or regional travel where, or if you think about the paperless office or the office on the move. There is a TV commercial about an office on the bus, and the guy is faxing and printing inside a bus and all that. So I'm trying to explore the reality of this concept of nomadity or nomadic worker. Would that work as well from an R&D point of view (besides sales)?

Sales are always on the go. Field engineers are always on the go because they're going from one particular site to another, and they're always on the go. Developing software, writing code on the go, I don't think so. That would be my own personal opinion, OK. I wouldn't think so. Because when I was sitting down writing code, I personally liked a quiet environment, you know, because you had to sit down and you had to think and you had your blank sheet of paper in front of you and you drew your little diagrams or you designed whatever you needed to design, you know, and you broke it up into the little blocks or whatever. And then you had to say, right, and this, you know, you'd work it out in your head how you're going to do it and then you'd start off right. So you've done your plans and you, so you needed a very, I personally would like a quiet environment for doing that because you have to think, you know, there's an awful lot of thinking going on, OK. And you know, constant noise and interruption and, you know, people walking around me, that would distract me personally.

Yeah, I mean, what about freelance programmers, young people who work for you or your managers for a few months? Don't you hire them on a contract basis, and then they do ...

Yeah.
So they work for multiple companies in a short period of time, like in one year, two years, three years, they're working for different companies right, and then they have to travel to meet the temporary employers, so how pervasive is this type of flexible mobile work?

We have, we have contractors. I mean, we would use contractors, yes. And we would get them, I mean, we would typically have them here for about six months, but I would like them here. OK, it wouldn't be a case of that I would give them a contract and see them maybe once a week, OK. I wouldn't operate that scheme, OK. My contractors, I typically, yeah, they were here, I would base them here and that would be the contract that I would draw up for them, yeah, so that they would be based here and that I would meet them and we'd get a feel for their work and, you know, the level of their work and the quality of their work, OK.

Now having said that, I do have remote developers, OK. I have a developer in Galway and I have a developer in the UK, OK. Now the developer in the UK, we might meet her only three times a year, OK, but she did work here, OK, and she was, you know, very good, very dedicated, good engineer. Likewise the developer I have in Galway, very good, no question about ability, no question about the quality or anything like that, OK. And again, it's a trust thing right, completely trust those two developers to work away, and I have no problems with them. We send them the work, the stuff, you know, everything is checked in remotely, we never see them, right, and if there's a problem, they'll send us an email or they'll ring us, whatever, I have no problems with those at all. So they are working remotely, they are developers who work remotely, but, and we would rarely see them, OK.

But it, again, it's the particular, it comes down to the individual, they are very low touch engineers, even when they were here, you know what I mean, very intelligent engineers, you could explain the problem to them, they'd have a few questions back and forth, that would be it. They'd say, right, that will be done by, we'll just say Friday, you know what I mean, with everything done, all the boxes checked, you know, everything ticked off, you know, just lovely work like, you know. So it's a trust thing, if you have, if you have good engineers, you don't need to see them like, you know. But contractors I wouldn't because I don't know them. I wouldn't have any experience, I wouldn't have a level of trust built up, like what they said they were doing, that I was going to get and you know, maybe I'm a very untrusting person. But that would be the, but yeah, I wouldn't, contractors would be here. I don't know if that answers your question.

Yes. So is coding or development sensitive to talent? Like, would you have brilliant programmers?

Yes, and not so good ones? Oh my God, it's hugely sensitive to talent, oh yeah. And even within that there are personalities, you know. You can tell who wrote a piece of code by reading it, even though we're all writing the same language. You can tell, oh that was developer A or that was developer B that wrote that piece of code. Say if you were, if there was a bug in a piece of code and you had to go back and review it, and you were reading it, you'd know, you'd know who wrote it, OK. You would also then have, so yes, you'd have star engineers and you'd have, you know, even though they would all have the same basic qualification, OK, there would be very good guys, medium guys and not-so-good guys, you know.

And even within that, you would have personalities to a type of engineering that you would put them on, OK. So you would know that this particular guy would love that particular type of work, right. I would call it protocols, we'll just say protocols, right, in terms of there would be a particular protocol for this computer to talk to this computer, right. Or they might be HDTV or they might be IP or it might be whatever type of protocol that would be used in order for those to, some engineers, fantastic. You put them on a protocol, you give them specifications, they'll sit down, they'll eat it right, and they'll write you all the code. Another guy, if you gave him that, he would die, just would hate that kind of code, it just wouldn't suit them at all. They would much prefer, we'll just say, to write screens, you know what I mean, and design screens in the user interaction type of thing. Or they would much prefer to write a piece of code that would, we'll just say, collect statistics and output the results into a file and graph them for you and whatever. Other engineers then would love very intricate, very detailed, very abstract type of work. So there's a range of both ability and personalities, right, and you need to have a mix of all of them,
right, because we have a wide range of code that needs to be written, you know what I mean, so there would have to be a mix of personalities, yeah.

And is development sensitive to gender?

I would love more female engineers. I have, at the moment, I have one female engineer, which is shocking, yeah.

So you don't get CVs, when you open positions, you don't get ...

No, no. I have a pile of CVs out there, you know, you get them all the time like, and the number of females coming through the door is, you can count them on one hand, yeah, very bad, yeah.

And throughout your career, I mean, I know you don't do coding anymore, but when you did in the past, how was your experience working as a woman in a predominantly male environment?

It was great. I have absolutely no complaints whatsoever. I think it is a wonderful environment for females to work in. I mean, look at it, it's so neat, it's clean, it's lovely. It's a lovely environment, you know what I mean? There are, and there's lovely people, you know what I mean, really nice people, and it is entirely flexible, it is lovely for part time work, you know what I mean, it ticks all the boxes for females. I really do think it does, you know what I mean, drive in in the morning, walk up the stairs, have a nice little desk out there, you know, it's open plan offices, you know, but it's a nice environment to work in, you know. You can go and have your coffee whenever you want, you know what I mean. If you need to step out to go to the bank or whatever, you know what I mean, this type of development environment, that's all OK, you know what I mean. You know, you can leave early, you can leave late, there's flexible working hours, it has everything going for it, you know. I don't know why there isn't more females in it, I really don't, you know.

And comparing your trajectory with your other female colleagues who work in similar positions as you, do you, do they have any complaints or negative experiences that they may have told you? What were their perceptions as well?

They would all like it as well, you know, I mean I have, you know, say my own friends that would have been in UL with me who are in very different roles that I'm in, but are also very successful in their careers, but in very different types of companies, you know, there's one in Microsoft, there's one in Lucin, there's one in Navan, very different companies, they're all very successful, they're all, you know, near the top of their careers, you know what I mean, they're really, really doing well, but they all love their jobs as well, you know. And again it is great to have those in those companies because you meet them socially and you say, oh how you getting on there and what are they doing with that, you know, the amount of information that's transferred there is fantastic. And I would get, I suppose, more information from them because maybe we're better at this, you know, the chatting, you know, than your male colleagues in other companies, you know what I mean. They would be, you know, you would have a more frank discussion with them, they would probably tell you more, warts and all, you know what I mean. You know, for example, like you know, my other friend, say, who's in a management role as well, right, she'll say, oh I had an employee in the other day, doing their review, and they started crying in the middle of their review, you know, and I was saying, oh how did you handle that, you know what I mean, and it's oh, this, so that type of information, right, which is wonderful, right, would only be exchanged between female managers, I think. You know, I don't think, I don't think a male manager would sit down and say how he'd cope with somebody crying at a review with, you know, or I haven't found that they would, they'd spill the beans on that, you know, but a female one would, not that they would tell me about the person themselves, just how they coped with handling that situation, or you know, similar type things like that, yeah.

Yeah, but now you are in a directive position, but when you were climbing the ladder, did you feel you were treated differently in some ways?
No. The only time that I felt that it was a disadvantage was when I was in the family run business, I knew then that I was getting nowhere, right, because, but that was nothing to do with I being female, it was I was not family, OK. Motorola, it was absolutely, it was clear across the board, likewise in, when I was with Technomen, that was a finish company, they were very open to, it didn't matter what you were, you know. You were either a good engineer or a bad engineer, you know, no.

**So what do you think about, I read this in scientific papers about gender and high-tech work that female engineers and developers, they feel excluded from networking settings in a company, that it's a boys' club.**

No, no. Maybe I was just brought up being in a group of guys always, I mean, having four brothers, I never felt, oh I'm a female here. I never had that feeling, you know. Maybe that's to do with (inaudible). I mean, I never felt you're the only girl in this room, be conscious, be embarrassed, no that never bothered me.

**Overall in the industry, do you think that in terms of promotion and wages that female engineers are at the same level as male engineers?**

Oh yeah, yeah. I mean, OK, from my own, from my own experience, right, if you were good enough, you got the pay. If you were a good engineer, you got the pay, it didn't matter, whether you were male or female, no, you know. So I, that never, you know, when I was in the first company, it was based on ability, your increased, say, your salary increases were. And in Motorola it was a much more structured type of pay rises, you know. There was the grass and, you know, we just say 7 percent in the group and everybody got 7 percent or if somebody got 8 percent, somebody got 6, you know, that type of way, you know, so that was, ability was somehow rewarded but not really, you know what I mean, because it meant that if the team lead, he had 7 percent to give to the group, you know what I mean. So he could give everybody 7 percent or he had to adjust and give somebody 8 instead, you know, or 8 and somebody got 6, so he had to split the group itself. So most of them just went 7, so it didn't matter how hard you worked there, you were going to get 7 percent, you know what I mean. So again, being male or female did not come into it, no. And when I was in Technomen, it was purely on ability you were paid. There were no scales as such, you know, there wasn't these salary scales that you had to hit, it was ability. If you were good, you got a pay raise, if you weren't good, you were told that as well, you know. So no, definitely, I wasn't treated, I was treated fairly all the way. I couldn't say anything other than that.

**In terms of society - are heading towards the end of the interview. We have been here for over one hour now.**

That's OK.

**Thank you. What would be the key transformations that you've seen occur in Ireland, or in relation to your career?**

Sorry, could you repeat that question? I'm not too sure.

**If you think about changes in society, what are the most striking things that you've seen in terms of transformation?**

In the last ten years, what I've seen as being the huge change, money. Money, and people's disrespect for money. Yeah, yea, disrespect, just flash, people have become so flash, you know, and success was, you represented your success in your flashy car and your flashy this and your number of holidays and, you know, that kind of, it became so greedy and flash and, you know, that's what I'd say is how society has changed, which is awful. I just don't like that, you know. I'm not that type of flash type, you know. You know, OK, I have a nice house and I live in the countryside and it's, you know, it's great, but I've had that house for sixteen years, you know. But I mean, I wouldn't be a flash, flash type, you know, I wouldn't go around with the latest of everything. And I saw the, you know, being, because the role that I'm in, right, I know what everybody's paid in the development team, you know what I mean, and sometimes I go, what? You know, how can you afford that lifestyle? You know what I mean,
from the position that I'm in, I know, say, what they're earning, and I'm going, this is nuts, like, how can you afford four holidays a year, you know what I mean. So yeah, and I suppose it's people's waste, maybe, waste, they waste an awful lot of stuff, you know. But that's their choices, I mean, I can't, you know.

**Within the high-tech sector? So is this also reflected in the high-tech sector?**

Oh yeah, sure they became greedy and flashy, you know. Is that what, I don't know what, is that what you're asking me? People got so greedy and disrespect, you know, they didn't, they don't know the value of money anymore, you know, and they became extremely greedy and, you know, you meet people socially and conversation other than, you know, conversation would invariably fall back into shares and how much profit and money and money and money this and money that and you're kind of going, I didn't come out socially to talk about money, you know, you came out to talk about other things, or I prefer a conversation about other things, you know, rather than somebody telling me, oh, they have so many shares in the company and it's worth this amount, and you're kind of going, OK, all right, but that was a serious switch off as far as I was concerned. I just wasn't interested in that, you know.

**Comparing that with this picture, with the Wednesday evening you go. Do you see that happening among that set of people as well?**

No, that set, that Wednesday night group is a very different grouping, you know what I mean, that's just people and they're talking about their kids and their talking about their homework and they're talking about, you know, it's a very local, it's a rural community, do you know what I mean? They're talking about local things and they're talking about, you know, next Friday there's a coffee morning on for the Cancer Society, and next Thursday there's a fundraiser for the local GAA club, you know what I mean, it's a very much a local, local community where people talk about local things and, you know.

I'm a bit confused because you're talking about this materialism, but then there are pockets ...

Yeah, it depends what, it depends what group I'm in. It depends what crowd I socialise in. You socialise with, say, what I call my neighbours, right. That would be a very local type setting and, where people, you know, are I suppose that mother section there, I call it, right, everyone's just talking about their kids and what they did, you know, how great their kids are. And that's a lovely, lovely discussion and money never comes into that in terms of, oh my house is worth, you know, or I have this car, or I have, you know, that's not the type of discussion. It's the discussion on, we see we have to give 10euros now for the school or, you know, it's a very different type of, if I go out with say other professionals or say other workers that are in similar industries, right, OK, you meet in the pub or you meet inside in Limerick or you meet in Ennis or whatever. Then invariably that discussion will be on, somehow, at the end of the night, turn out to be about money and shares and their wealth and how much they've made or how much they've lost now like, you know what I mean. That's a very different type of discussion, yeah.

**When you, in terms of location of the company here in the park, and you also mentioned that you go have lunch in the canteen, how much networking happens here? When you go to the canteen do you network with people from other companies? Is that professionally relevant? You know, why is the company located within the park and not at the city centre or Dublin or Cork?**

Well, we initially actually, we were all based, say the four of us were based in Shannon, OK, that's where the original ... The Shannon free zone, yes, that's where we were originally. That's where Technomen was and that was where we had planned originally to set [mid-size telecom software firm], OK. But when we started up, we set, we started here in the Innovation Centre, OK, because that's an incubation centre for new startups or whatever, so that would be the natural location for us to go to, that's where you can get, you know, office space at reduced rates and all that kind of stuff, OK, so that's where we went. And you were meant to be there for a maximum of three years, OK. We stayed seven, OK. At that stage, then, the company was well established here in the park, OK.
I personally would have preferred if we had moved back to Shannon, my commute would have been less, etcetera, etcetera, right. But we had so many engineers here who were based locally and this was where the company was based. We had been here for seven years. To move it to Shannon, right, was an advantage for me and maybe one other person, you know. But I couldn't be greedy enough and say I want to move there, you know what I mean, the company was based here, OK. So then we took the huge leap from over here to here, you know.

So this, from a company point of view, it's a good location, it's got a good address, if you know what I mean. I mean, stating that you're in the National Technology Park is a good address, as opposed to saying you're in Limerick City Centre, that means nothing, you know what I mean. If you're an international customer and you look and you say, well this crowd are based in a National Technology Park, it looks better, it's got a better address. Shannon Free Zone means nothing like, you know. It also then, I mean, in terms of, it's easier for people to get here, the location is better, you know what I mean. If people are based in Limerick, it's an easy place to get to. Everybody knows where the university is, it's, you know, there's more restaurants and stuff around, people can run out to the shop and get their shopping or whatever, at lunch time they can go to the dentist, the doctor, you know, there's more facilities here. In Shannon, there's very, it's very restricted. I mean, I worked there, I've worked in Shannon for eight years in total. In Shannon you drove in and you drove out, that was all. Where here, you're in, you know, there's more going on. It's just a better environment.

**Is there competition or cooperation between the companies in terms of like sharing information or poaching workers?**

Well when we were in the Innovation Centre, all right, I mean you would be aware of the other companies, and just because you were in the college and, you know, you would know other people in there. I mean, I know people that are in there that were in the same class that I was below in UL, or you'd know them through friends of friends or whatever, and you would know what those companies are doing. And it was always fantastic to know what other companies are doing, you know, because you just take the interest. Yes, we did poach engineers from other companies over there, right, because you'd hear on the grapevine that, you know, they were a bit shaky or, you know, those companies weren't going so good or whatever, and you know. Word somehow gets around, you know, who the good guys and who are not the good guys, right. So you poach the good guys. But that's what you do like, yeah.

So, you know, if you ask me, walking down the street, was there any networking being done over there, I'd say no, no, no, right. But if you sat down and you actually think about it, yes, it is done in a very informal kind of way and, you know, there's just a oh, hi, how are you, and the fact that you're over in the canteen, right, you meet the others, or even if you don't meet them, you see who's the new company that have come in, you know what I mean. And someone will tell you, oh they're company X, and they do X, Y and Z. So there is a, information does flow, you know, the canteen is always a good place. But I mean having said that, I wouldn't, if there was a group, a new group was sitting down in their new table of, from a new company, I mean, I wouldn't be the one who would go over and say, hello, I'm from, you know, that wouldn't be my staff.

**All right, so there is some flows of information within the Innovation Centre, but not out here in the park.**

No, no, not so much, no. I couldn't tell you who's out in the park. Well, I mean, I know because I've driven around, but I wouldn't know anybody in those unless I have previously met them, you know, you wouldn't really meet them.

**Unless they go to the canteen.**

Unless they go to the canteen, yeah, yeah.

**That's very interesting, very interesting. And so why is it that, in the Innovation Centre, there are flows of information?**
Because there's two very chatty people in the canteen.

**Not because the offices are smaller and separated by walls?**

No. It's, you know, you meet the people in the reception area or you meet them in the canteen, you know. And just because you, you're in the queue with somebody else, behind them, you know, for three weeks, you know, and you see them everyday, eventually you will say hello to them, you know, and you will eventually talk to them. You wouldn't go knock on their door and go into their office. That wouldn't be what the, you know, or someone would go to the canteen and just have a cup of tea by themselves, you know, and if you walked in and they were the only other person there, if they looked up, you'd kind of say hello, you know, or they'd say hello. So the canteen facilitates a meeting, if you know what I mean. Where you would never walk down the corridor and knock on someone's office and say, hello, can I borrow your printer? Like that wouldn't really be the type of, you know, that's not the type of discussion.

**Connecting with UL, how do you see that? Do you connect with UL professionally, informally for any type of exchanges?**

Yeah, there's, one of our ex-employees went back to UL to do a doctorate, well we have had a few that have gone back to do doctorates, and one of them then have joined another company called, a space down there called Lero, which are involved in the, yeah, yeah, so we're involved with Lero on kind of a, some projects, yeah. So we would have ties to UL, and we would also have another, another tie to UCG as well, so we would be, you know, we'd have taps into say two of the universities, yeah.

**So the proximity to the university is also a plus for you guys here?**

It is, yeah, I mean some of the guys here, I mean, they would live locally as well, some of the developers, right, and some of the engineers, being close to UL helps them because they go and they join the gym or they join the swimming or they, you know what I mean, the facilities they use, these are big tick marks for those guys as well, yeah.

**Would you see that the Arena is a network hub for high-tech professionals?**

Yeah, they would meet other guys down there, oh yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, if you were, now I don't particularly, but if guys were, you know, interested in shaking and moving and that kind of stuff, yeah, they would, yeah, they would go there, yeah, you know. You know, and I mean, there's one or two, you know, there would be one or two engineers that we would have or who would be interested in progressing their career, right, say on a management route as opposed to an engineering route, OK. And you would always, you know, if they were asking you something, you'd say, oh you need to go and network in these places, yeah, you know, if it was a junior guy who was there and they kind of, they're new to this game and they don't know how, you know, you'd say, oh go try there and you'd meet other, other professionals or whatever, yeah, yeah.

**So final question - key word is improvement. If you could request any type of improvement either at a national level or regional, Shannon Development, or technology park, what types of improvements would you like to see taking place to make your work easier, your company more efficient, or society more efficient and better? What types of things would you like to see improved?**

Oh my God, what a question. Oh what I'd like to see improved?

**Or, a bottleneck that you'd like to see solved.**
In the whole of society? Wow, that's such an open question, OK. I suppose I'd start with, I think there's improvements that we could make in the school, in the schooling systems, OK. I think there's definite improvements that could be made there, all the way up, right, in primary school and in secondary school, I think there's some improvements there, you know. Infrastructure definitely in the country, I think there can be improvements there, OK. And I think the, in the universities, there can be improvements made as well, right, in that the engineers, the type of engineers that are coming out now, right, OK, and I don't know why it is, there's a huge lack of what I would call common sense, OK. It's the one thing that I have seen deteriorating in engineers over the last twenty years, right. Now how you put common sense back into people, I don't know, OK. But I would like for common sense to return. You know what I mean by common sense? It's not so common, believe me.

Sensible solutions to the technical problems that you have?

But not even that, about everything. It's not just, it's not just technically, just common sense, you know.

The social skills, are you talking about that as well?

No, no, no, not even social skills because, you know, engineers typically don't have great social skills, so that hasn't improved or disimproved, that's just the same, right. You know, you have some guys who cannot have a conversation with you, right, are unable to hold a conversation with you because they don't have, you know, they're socially just not good, OK. But that's OK, there have always been engineers like that, and that's fine, you know, and there's some odd engineers, and that's fine too, you know, and we have them all, we have them all. I'm not even, no, I'm not even talking about lack of social skills, it's common sense, common sense has almost disappeared.

Can you give an example? Things that surprise you.

OK, we'll take for example this whole swine flu thing, right, OK. I mean swine flu is there and we have to take precautions and all the rest of it. But you know, and obviously if you feel sick, right, I would take it as being automatic that if you felt sick, you would stay at home. I would think that would be a common sense thing to do. So I find it amazing that I would have to make a statement to say if you feel sick, please stay at home, yeah. I would take that as being common sense, yeah. You would treat that as a common sense type, yeah, so I would think that would be, it's almost incomprehensible for me that I would have to make that statement to staff, to say if you're feeling sick, please stay at home.

So you think that the engineers are becoming more and more eccentric and autistic and doing their own thing?

It's not just engineers, it's all people, it's just, I think all of the, well, we only employ graduates really, do you know what I mean, from the type of environment that we're in, but I mean, the lack of common sense is absolutely unbelievable, you know. Say if you're travelling, right, and we're sending a guy to a site, OK, and obviously they have to get accommodation, they have to get, you know, visas may be required or whatever, OK. But again, I would term it common sense that they would understand that they had to get themselves to the airport on time for the airplane, you know what I mean, right. But there are some of them that you would nearly have to ask them, you know, that you'd be worried about them going, that it might be their first trip or whatever, and you'd say to them, did you book a taxi now for 7 o'clock in the morning to take you to the airport? No, I forgot to do it. You know what I mean by common sense? So they're, now, they may be extreme examples, right. But you put that then into, into a work environment and if they don't have that common sense in terms of those type of things, right, common sense in terms of applying it to a solution, gone completely. So I don't know where common sense has gone, I don't know whether it's through the schooling, has taken it out of them, or lack of parenting skills has taken it out of kids. But this is, I think lack of common sense is becoming a huge, huge problem. So I would wish that that comes back into society, Irish society. I don't know how you solve that problem, all right.

More specifically, in terms of gender, I suppose you'd like to see more female engineers, more female ...
Female engineers are the best engineers you could get, right, and they're the best test engineers you could get because females are nicky picky at the best of times, right. We like things neat and tidy and clean and organised, and they're wonderful multi-taskers, OK, really are. And where are they?

Do you have any suggestions to produce more female engineers and programmers and technicians and scientists?

There’s a... I don’t know where they pick up the vibe that they can't do maths and they can't do anything technical, you know. I don’t know where they get this, that concept from, right, but we have to remove that from primary school. From primary school, it's too late, secondary school is too late because they have it, I can't do maths, I'm not good at it. They have it at primary school, so it's at primary school we've got to get that negative thing out of their head like. But who puts it in there, I don't know, I don't know. Because girls are just as good at maths as anybody else, you know what I mean. Maybe it's been taught wrong, I don't know. I mean, I have no idea. Because the maths books are beautiful. I mean, my kids' maths books are absolutely beautiful. They're colourful and interesting and, you know, they're lovely books. And then, I mean, we had just books that were, you know, white pages, black sums all over them, you know what I mean. But these are lovely colourful and friendly and, you know what I mean, they're just lovely books, you know. I don't know whether it's the way maths are, maths are being taught, I don't know. But I think that is the, that is a big, big problem, you know. But I mean, when I was in school, the, I was in the first class that my school, I was in an all-girls school, right, it was the first year that honours maths was done for the leaving cert, first year, you know, so if I had been a year earlier in school, I wouldn't be an engineer. So that's how, you know, yeah.

Yeah, so I mean if that wasn't offered in that school, right, and I mean the school took a risk, right, because they only had four of us, there was only four girls that did honours maths for the leaving cert. Now we all did well, you know, of course it was like private tuition, you know, it was fantastic. But, you know, but of that, right, one is a doctor and three are engineers. So it does pay off, you know what I mean. So, yeah.

Are they engineers here in the park? Do they work here?

No, no, no. No, they're away, they're away, yeah.

So within the umbrella of improvements, like how could a technology park improve your company's performance and needs?

OK, from my own point of view, right, from an engineering background, OK, I had no business qualification or education at all, OK. And I think that is seriously lacking, well it was lacking when I went through UL anyway, right, OK. We had to do, they tried to improve things when we were going through, right, our four years and you had to take a humanities module, so I did Russian or something, it was Russian history, it was absolutely beautiful, fascinating subject right, but sure, that's, you know, I mean they would be far better teaching me how to do accounts.

That would be, you know, and the one big problem I have always, and I, is on the sales side. OK, I mean, I'm not a sales person, you know, I'm an engineer and that's what I do, so going out meeting, trying to sell things, I wouldn't even know how to do that, right, that wouldn't be my area of expertise. But when you're running a company, you have to hire sales people, OK. Now sales people by their nature have to be chatters, they have to be able to sell things and sell themselves and upsell themselves all the time. So when you're interviewing them, I have a serious problem, OK. I do not know. They obviously have to, you know, upsell themselves and upsell everything, you know what I mean. So it's to cut out all that. So if they're not doing that, they're not good, right. But because they're doing that, it's hard to kind of weed out the salesmen side from whether they actually are good or not. I find that a huge, huge problem. And I have no knowledge of how to get to the root of that or how you're meant to, a technical person is easy to interview. They either know so much, you know, they know so much and so much
they don't know, and that's fine. You can assess their ability to solve problems or whatever. I'm lost when it comes to interviewing sales people, how to get sales people, what to look for, what, you know.

And I would love the Innovation Centre or Shannon Development or Enterprise Ireland or somebody to run a course on this is how to get a good salesman or this is how to get a good sales person or how to interview sales people, you know what I mean. I can interview technical people, I have no problem with those. You know what I mean, I can interview field engineers, I have no problem with those. I can interview, you know, and I can interview sales people, but at the end of it I don't know.

Would you consider an MBA at Kemmy Business School? Would that be helpful or interesting to you?

I have no idea. Well at the moment, I wouldn't have the, I wouldn't see myself as having the time to do that in the evenings at the moment, OK. I think my life is busy enough, OK. My husband is doing courses all right, he's doing an accountancy course by night, so he's gone one night a week, you know what I mean. So if I was gone on another night, I don't know where I'd get the time to like study for that, you know, because say my study time might be after 9 o'clock when the kids are gone to bed, but I'm using that maybe on doing this kind of stuff, my own stuff, so I don't think I would have the time to do, to dedicate to a two-year course or something like that, you know. And if I was going to do it, I would dedicate the time to it, you know. I wouldn't half do it, you know. So I would feel that was, I wouldn't start it knowing that I wouldn't have the time to do it, yeah. And at the moment I feel that I wouldn't have the time to give, the time that it would require to complete it properly, you know. I mean there's no point starting it and failing it, because that would be, you know, that would just be a waste of everybody's time. But I mean if there was a course on for a shorter period of time that would give you these skills, I'd be interested in that. But I wouldn't, I couldn't at this stage say that I could sign up for a two-year course, no I couldn't.

And would you see demand for these short term classes for other directors and other managers in the park or your colleagues? Or is this just you think that you are the only person?

Oh no, no I'm sure I'm not the only person with this lack of skills, no, no. I mean, we all know our own areas, you know what I mean. And you know if somebody has done a technical course and they've come out the other end, you know that they are technically OK. But sales people are never trained, there isn't a sales course, you know what I mean. You can't say, oh yes, I have a degree in sales because there is no course for them, you know what I mean. Every other, every other field there is a course, or there is a way to get to that qualification, you know what I mean, be it in sociology or be it in engineering, be it in, you know, whatever, it doesn't matter. But there isn't for sales. What is sales? Sales is a very, it's a gift of the gab type thing, I don't know, you know. So you can't say whether this is a good person or a bad person. You have to go on your gut instinct and sometimes that's fine, you know what I mean.

What if you see the numbers, you can see how much they sold, one million Euro, three million Euro.

No, no, no, no, because they're telling you that, they're telling you that's how much they sold, but that might not be the truth. It might have been a team sold that much and they're claiming it, but they actually didn't do the sale, you know what I mean. Or it might have been, you know, I don't want to say that they're lying to you, but you know what I mean, they're upselling that, OK. That might have been, rather than it being a new sale, that might have been repeat businesses, where you're interested in somebody making a new sale.

So you're saying that, you know, you would like some organisation park or UL to provide you resources to make better decisions on how to manage and how to direct all these different functions.

Yes, in the company right, I mean, technically, we are very good, we have good products, whatever. Our weakness I think has always been on the sales side, OK. And because it was four engineers that set up the place, engineering, we don't have a shortfall there, but we have a shortfall in the sales side, OK. And so you have engineers trying to
hire sales people and they're very different personalities. You know, there's different personalities in engineers, but that's OK, I can cope with those right. But there's different personalities in sales as well. Sales are more chatty, outgoing, you know, extraverted, you know. So if you put me into a group, into a room with a group of people, OK, you naturally tend towards, you tend towards the people that are somewhat similar to yourself, I believe, yeah. Well I wouldn't be with the sales people, you know what I mean, because that wouldn't be where I tend, you know, yeah. So then I actually don't know a lot of sales people, because they wouldn't be my friends, if you know what I mean, because you wouldn't have geared towards them, yeah, yeah. So then my networking of sales people is zero. Therefore I don't, I've probably (inaudible).

OK, so given all these topics that we covered and all the questions I've asked, is there anything that I didn't ask that you would like to answer? I mean any piece of information that you thought about, a thought that I interrupted, or anything that I didn't ask at all?

I think it's great, I would love for a few more females to be joined, to be in that, you know. I think engineering and software engineering in particular or telecommunications engineering, I think it's a great career for women, I really do, you know. And I would love to encourage other people, other girls in that, to go that route, you know. Because when I was coming through school, you know, the, you were channelled, you know, into various streams, you know, depending on your abilities, and if you were, you know, if you were deemed to be, you know, smart, OK, you were channelled towards becoming a teacher or a nurse or a doctor or something like that, you know. When you said you wanted to do engineering, they were kind of going, what, what, what, you know. They were completely negative towards that, you know, and I mean I wasn't dramatically, you know, I wasn't fighting the cause, you know, and I'm, you know, I'm a relatively quiet person and, you know, but you know the way you'd know, you know, teaching's not for me or nursing is not for me, you know. But they weren't prepared for taking or even gearing you towards a technical side of the courses or anything like that.

And nowadays?

Nowadays, I think it has got better. I mean, I looked at the secondary schools, say, my oldest girl has gone to secondary school, I mean I have two girls, you know, so they have a far wider range of technical subjects available now in the school, which is good, you know. Now my older girl is not technical at all, right, OK, but that's fine, right. But I think they have a wider range of technical subjects in the schools, which is good, you know, which is much, much better, you know. Because I mean, when, you know, they offer all those, you know, technical drawing, technology, they offer all of those one now, which is great. I mean, I didn't even know what they were, you know. And I suppose if I had even been to a mixed school, I would have been aware of, you know, technical drawing and metal work and all of those, which were there when I was going through secondary school. But I mean, I didn't even know what they were when we got to university, you know.

I mean, the year we went to university, there was four from my school went to UL, right, and that was their first ever students that went to UL, isn't that shocking. And I mean we were inside in Limerick City. It wasn't like I was out in the sticks of the countryside or some place, yeah, you know. So maybe it just it took them a while to kind of realise that the university was on their doorstep and they should be using it or something like that, I don't know. But they were very much geared towards sending you in the more traditional roles, the traditional female roles, let's put it that way, or female jobs, yeah, you know. But I think that has somewhat changed, but I hope so, yeah, I hope so, yeah. But I would encourage anyone to do this role, it's great.

Thank you so much.

And I love it. OK.

Yeah, I hope it was an interesting conversation.
Yeah, I'm dying to know what your report will be at the end. I'm dying to know what your, and are you, are you finding very different answers to different, from different people?

Yeah, one of the scientific things is to see what repeats and ...

Oh right, and what have you found so far? I'm dying, I love this kind of stuff.
Can you please tell us what's your job, what's your current job title, what you currently do professionally.

Right, my job title, I have no problem revealing the name of the company, I don't think my managing director would mind either, I'm, my title is marketing manager, and I work with [alternative energy firm]. Yeah, exactly, yeah. So my role, I guess you could split it into two, marketing communications and research. [alternative energy firm] is a new company. It was established in 2006, but in the last year they are putting out a lot in terms of development, we want to bring in a lot of clients. At the moment we have one client and we install wind turbines on the site of industrial users, so that they can...

I saw the video.

Right, yeah. So it's a step towards becoming more energy independent, but also, we would, our company would build and finance the turbines on a client site and we will sell the electricity to them on a discount to what they can currently get on the market, but it's still at a profit to us. So the long term benefit for the company is that they get a certain amount of energy security and at a lower price than what they can get on the market. So my role at the moment is pretty evenly split between, you know, things like web communications, PR, all that kind of stuff, and research. I'm doing a lot of research at the moment, one on the terms of energy prices and where they're going, because it's in our, when we're able to show a client that, OK, oil prices right now are quite low, 2008, they were really high, but when you look at factors that when the global economy turns back on again, oil prices will go back up. So we try to get clients to see the long-term view because some of them just see the fact that today, prices are low, and today, electricity is cheap. But that won't be the case in 2015 and onwards. So I do that kind of research, and I'm also doing research on, we're looking at expanding into the UK market. And I'm also looking at, you know, what, what are the issues say for example connecting to the grid, you know, planning, how big will the market be, what are the competitors in the UK, so that's a second piece of work I'm doing now at the moment. So that would very much describe my job now at the moment.

Do you do marketing, sales or both?

Mostly marketing. We'll at some point be brought out on the say, I sit in on some of the sales meetings and my manager has expressed the desire that I would also go out and do the sales, but for the moment, I, I guess I'm there, how many months, five months now. And these activities have just consumed all my time. There are two other people dedicated to sales. So I think if we go into the UK market, I'll probably get involved in sales as well, but for the moment, they probably, A, don't need another person on sales, and B, I'm better off doing this work because they want to, after they've done the Irish market, they want to move into the UK market, so I'm better employed doing the research at the moment.

What's your educational background?

I have a degree in international commerce and German in UCD and I took that between '93 and '97. Graduated from there, and then I began working with an e-learning company, and I was working in marketing and marketing communications, but also a little bit in sales. And I worked there for just over three years. And I wanted to take a break and do some travelling. So myself and a friend went to New Zealand and we worked, we lived in New Zealand for about four months. And we had working holiday visas, so we were able to work in New Zealand as well, which was great, it's great insight into the culture of people.
But in the meantime I had applied to come back and do a masters in Dublin again, so I came back, started my masters in September 2001, it was full-time, a year, and that was a masters in strategic management and planning, because I wanted to move more into kind of a strategy role. So I finished up the masters in '02, but, I mean, there was kind of a small recession going on back then, nothing as big as now, and companies like management consultancies and so on and so on just were not recruiting, so the kind of, the typical career path that people got out of that masters kind of vanished for that particular year or two. So then I started to look at plan B, and I was interested in, you know, when you're doing marketing, I also think like you need to know a lot about finance, you need to be able to price and you need to be able to understand financials. So I thought I would, I was very interested in the environmental, renewable energy sector, and I came across a company based in Dublin that were very involved in both recycling and renewables and they were offering a training programme in CIMA, which is a chartered management accountancy. So I applied for that and got in.

CIMA, it stands for the Chartered Institute for Management Accounts, Management Accountancy, so it’s one of the accounting bodies. But it’s, I chose that one, there are two, no there are three or four actual different accounting bodies you can train under, and they all train you slightly differently. But under the management accounting one, you do do the accounts, but you’re doing strategy and you’re doing IT and you’re doing, it’s much more holistic than just doing numbers, you know. So that’s why I chose CIMA, I thought it would be a good string to my bow and it would open up a few more opportunities. So I was, I worked in their finance department, part of the training programme was that you had to do the exams, but you also had to get a certain amount of work experience, so I did that for two years and I didn’t really like it, hated being in, it was like, you know, month-end stuff and posting journals, and it was, you know, I mean if you want to build a career long-term in accounting, you just have to do that. It was a good insight into how things worked in the financial side, which is what I wanted to get access to.

But when an opportunity came in the company to transfer to their corporate strategy department, I got it. I applied for it and I, so I still stayed in the same company, XXX [Company name occluded per interviewee’s request], but went out of finance and up to head office and worked in their strategy department. And that was really, like that’s kind of eventually where I had wanted to get, it was just a longer route around. I thought, you know, when I did my masters, it would have been ideal to jump into a position like that, but I had to kind of go along like that. But anyway, that was, that was fine. And that was really, I worked there, we were a small team, like it was just a team of two, myself and my manager, Sarah, and that role, it was very varied.

Our company at the time was going through a lot of transition. It was moving out of one industry, it was involved in toll roads, that’s where it had initially started up, and then they were involved in recycling. And they were looking at expanding their recycling business into the U.S., and they were also getting involved in different types of renewables. They got involved in wind and in biofuels, and so Sarah and I would get involved in doing some research studies on those new markets. And we, that information would be presented to the group executive team. So that was kind of one aspect of our role, of my role. Another one was to keep abreast of developments, I know it’s kind of a big area, but the renewable energy area or, you know, if something, if a new initiative was launched in Ireland or new targets were launched, it was my, part of my role to, I suppose analyse that information and be able to just distil it out and present it, so that was another aspect of my role. And then there was a marketing side to it as well, which was like the corporate website, a lot of corporate communications, you know, producing the annual report, going to conferences, making, producing presentations, that type of thing. So it was quite a varied role.

So I stayed with XXX, from the start to finish would have been ’03 to just 2008. I took some time out then, last year, and then I got this, I took a voluntary redundancy from XXX because they were downsizing the business in Ireland quite significantly. They were moving off, they had closed some of the businesses in Europe and were focusing more on the U.S. And I could have stayed on in the head office, but it looked like, when I discussed long term where my role could go with my manager, he felt like I could stay there and keep doing the same thing, but there wasn’t much opportunity to grow. And at the time, there wasn’t much opportunity to go to the U.S. because they were looking for IT skills and engineering skills. So I could have stayed in my role, but this was post, oh sorry,
not post, pre-recession, probably wouldn't have made that decision if it had happened a little bit later. So I left XXX in May 2008, took some time out to travel and that, and then started back on the job market, and it took longer than I thought, but I'm very glad now. I still wanted to stay in the renewable sector, and I saw that a job opportunity came up with [alternative energy firm] and it was for a marketing role, so I applied for that and got it, and that's what brought me to Limerick.

**OK. So, you wanted to stay in the green business.**

Yeah, I did, yeah.

**This company in Dublin, was it an Irish or a foreign company?**

Irish, yeah.

**How many employees total did it have?**

Overall, globally, it would have about 4,000 actually, yeah. It's quite big. Yeah, in Dublin, in the head office, probably only about thirty to forty. They bought, they have a recycle business in Ireland called Green Star and they expanded into the UK and then they, they recognised that in the U.S., depending on, I know some states are better than others, but there tends to be a pretty low level of recycling, so the opportunity to get in and get involved in dry recyclables appeared quite big, and so they, the way they expanded into that market was through acquisitions. So they bought a good few companies out there and they bought one that was really big, and that's why their numbers shot up, you know, in one particular acquisition I think they about 900, they increased the staff by 900 employees. So, yeah, but it is, so their head office is still Irish, it's pretty much, well it was family-owned. The original family now have about 25 percent, I think, of the company. And they have markets in Ireland, the UK, the U.S., that's probably primarily it, yeah.

**And the current company has how many employees?**

Ten.

**From 4,000 to ten. How different is it to work in them? ...**

Well, I know that sounds very drastic, but I must say, XXX never felt that big because at its head office, there were only, I'd say maybe, max probably 30, 35 people. And even in some of the subsidiaries that I worked in, you know, even at Green Star when I worked in the recycling head office for a while, there might have been 50, not even, like probably another 40 people there. So it never, even though, you know, you, I knew it had 4,000 employees, it never felt like it had that many. That's because everyone was so spread out. So in that sense, it hasn't seemed that different, moving from a big company to a smaller company. Resources wise, it can be, you know, there's the, I suppose the perks, if you like, you know. But in terms of, you know, culture or whatever, it doesn't feel that different.

**Before asking about your typical work day, Can you tell a little bit about your family background?**

And where am I from, yeah, sure. I'm from the West of Ireland, so I was born in County Mayo, and we lived there until I was 8. And my dad got a transfer with his job, so we moved from County Mayo to County Cork. So I would have finished off four years of primary school and have all my secondary school in Cork. Some people ask me where I'm from, I say Cork, you know, even though I was born somewhere else. So my parents moved to North Cork, it's about a half hour north of Cork City. I went to secondary school near Cork City and I went to an all-Irish secondary school, where we spoke, we were taught through the medium of Irish. Then I went to university in Dublin and pretty much lived in Dublin ever since. It became my next home, if you like. So I've been, kind of been in Dublin actually longer than I've been in Cork. So I was in Dublin, I'm 34 now, and I was in Dublin from the time I
was 18 up until, you know, bar going off travelling a little bit, just up until last May, so, you know, and I bought a house there a few years ago and so, you know, I was sort of establishing Dublin as my base, and then this opportunity came up and I thought ...  

OK, so you've been living in Limerick for five, six months.  

Yes, since the end of April. Yeah, yeah, sorry, yeah, exactly, yeah. Yeah, less, yeah. But like it didn't, it didn't, I mean, it was a change, but I'm lucky that my brother lives here. I have four siblings, I should say that, I'm the middle child. I have two older brothers and a younger brother and a younger sister.  

What are their jobs, what are they doing?  

Their jobs, Colm is the oldest, he's a chemical engineer, he works with, he works over in Edinburgh. He used to work with BP, now he works with a separate company. In Scotland, yeah. He's married over there. Eoghan then, the next brother, he's actually, he did mechanical engineering here in UL, and now he's working as a lecturer out in the LIT, in kind of like maths and car mechanics and things. So I'm next. And then I have a younger brother, who is a, well he did a couple of things in his career, but he's now working as a primary school teacher. He recently retrained and he's in County Cork. And my sister Moira is working as a physio-therapist, and she's in Cork as well. She's the youngest, yeah.  

And your parents, what did they do?  

My mum was a primary school teacher, yeah, and a principal as well. And my dad worked, he was, he worked with the state body for agriculture, he was a research scientist in agriculture, yeah. So we're all quite close together in age as well, we're, there's kind of two years between us all.  

Ok, and now about your typical day?  

Typical day, well a typical day I guess in Limerick is, I live very close, like I'm working in the National Technological Park, and I work, or live over in, just beyond the Groody roundabout. So, you know, it's not far to drive. So a typical day is I'd get up probably just before 8, have a shower, have my breakfast and I'd leave the house maybe around half 8, and then I'd just drive to work, I'll be in at work just before 9. And then so at work, my typical day is well, turn on my computer, and I have certain bulletins that I'm signed up to, like news alerts, so I tend to go through those and have a look at what, you know, if any emails have come in over night, or any that I didn't get to the previous day. And then I would turn, you know, I'd turn my attention then to what's, and if there's a deadline coming up, like if, say last week, the managing director was going off to a conference, he's going to a conference this week, but I was putting together his presentation, so that was like something that needed immediate attention. So I'd keep an eye out on what the deadlines are, but I also have this longer-term project, this research project that's going on as well. So I seek to get a balance between, OK, I got to fulfil this for Friday and send it off, but at the same time keep on top of the reports and the people I need to contact to get further information for the research project, because that has a deadline as well. So I just want to get the balance of those.  

Then I suppose, you know, we have lunch at, maybe between 1 and 2, you know, there's a canteen in our centre, we're in the Innovation Works, and it's a centre, yeah, the Shannon Development. And they have a canteen there. Sometimes I'll come home for lunch, other times I'll, we'll go out. Or I like to go out and get a walk at lunch time, just to get a bit of fresh air. And then the afternoon, the afternoon will fit really into the same kind of pattern again, you know, some of the news bulletins come in again some time in the afternoon, and I would just, you know, if there's an immediate request for something to be done, I'd do that. But I suppose at the moment, over the last couple of weeks, my daily focus has been on this research project.  

So you provide support to sales in preparing proposals?
Not really, the deadlines really have to do with say like if there's an advertising, I do that sort of lighter marketing stuff as well, like there might be an advertising deadline or some editorial that needs to be prepared or like say a deadline for, you know, a conference or whatever that, you know, they can come up kind of quickly, or we might decide to, you're right, I suppose, on the sales side. I do, some of the research I did was like to help our sales guys build the case for long-term future energy prices increases. And sometimes, like even today, I was asked could I add a few more slides to that presentation, to update it. So there is that kind of continuous thing. I see those tasks as being, you know, quick. You know, I can do them within two to three hours. And on the other side, I have tasks that take maybe two to three months.

Yeah, I saw the calculator on the website.

Oh the calculator, yeah.

And I was a bit confused, I think there is some glitch there. Yeah, the number of turbines, and how much money, unit price, and then for example, if I enter one turbine, the smallest option, and then ask it to calculate, it comes with a tremendous number, two billion euros. So then I thought well maybe if I put 1,000, it actually means one million euro, you know, 1,000 units. So I noticed this last year, so just to let you know.

Thank you. OK, I'll have a look at that tomorrow. Thank you. Because you don't want that.

Yeah, so you're helping your sales team to provide more information about the savings, accumulated savings over time?

Well, those kind of savings, actually, they have sophisticated financial models. When they would engage with a client, they'll ask the client for their base load of electricity and their unit cost of electricity, and then they're able to calculate, over five years and ten years and twenty years, which would be the average life of a turbine, what those savings will be. So I'm not so much involved in that side. The research in terms of energy prices that I've done is taking information from the likes of the Association of Peak Oil, it's addressing, you know, the fact that product, you know, our access to easily reach oil is declining fast. There's still oil out there, but it'll be more expensive to reach. And there's more demand. So I put together a research presentation showing, you know, drawing from a wide variety of sources, you know, drawing from the International Energy Agency and so on, to say, you know, what, they do various studies looking at the outlook to say, you know, long-term outlook is demand going up like this, production, you know, coming down like this. And like, you know, what that means for us here in Ireland. So we try to, my proposal is to distil it down, and the fact that Ireland is so oil dependant, and there are a number of independent research studies out there on that.

So, you know, it has been an effective tool because initially the sales guys were verbally communicating this information, but now they can go in with a PowerPoint presentation and, you know, none of it is our opinion as such. We are simply taking data and graphs and so on from credible third parties. And I know different people have views on Big Oil and the timing of it, but you know, essentially like it's going to occur, whether it occurs in 2015 or 2030, it will occur at some point. So that's what that energy prices scenario, or research is about. You know, and even already we, over the last few weeks, there have been a number of articles saying that, you know, as the global economy is recovering, we're seeing upward pressure on the price of oil, yeah. So, and some clients see that really clearly, and they see, for example, the carbon savings that this brings because, particularly if they are of U.S. multinationals, they're all very aware of carbon. Other companies are not so aware of carbon and the fact that there'll be, you know, that there's the EU emissions trading scheme, which at the moment is only applicable to a certain number of industries, but it's going to get wider and wider. Eventually, you know, more and more industries will be asked to regulate their carbon and there will be limits to it, so.

I see that you're very passionate about your work and business.
Oh yeah, do you think so?

Yes. You're telling me about your afternoon (you prepare proposals and, you do all this business intelligence work), and then if, what time do you leave?

So we finish up at half 5, and we all tend to leave around then. There isn't really a culture of working late, which is, I mean if someone has to work late, they do, but pretty much everybody finishes up at half 5. So typically I could be home by 6 o'clock. And then my afternoons in Limerick, excuse me, I took a while to get into a routine here, but now that I am in my own place here, because initially I was staying with my brother. My routine pretty much at the moment is like, because I'm away at the weekends, when I come back down on Monday, I tend to do like grocery shopping and laundry and all that kind of stuff. Tuesdays I leave open, Wednesdays I used to do running, but now I switched it over to yoga, so I have a yoga class at half 8 on a Wednesday night. And Thursdays, I'm meeting up with a friend who, we both did a life coaching course together, and we're thinking of putting together a workshop. She works out in the UL Adventure CeXXXe and given all the students she deals with, young students, she and I brainstormed around a workshop that we could put together in terms of techniques that would also be accompanied by outdoor activities, you know, doing team building stuff with ropes and that. So at the moment, my Thursday evenings are put aside for that. And Friday, Friday I leave open as well. Friday will probably just be, sometimes I go back to Dublin on a Friday afternoon. But more increasingly, I tend to just chill out at home in Limerick. Because I do find the travelling up and down a bit tiring. So I tend to ...

You drive to Dublin just to see your fiance.

No, he's not my fiance, but yeah, to see my boyfriend, yeah. I tend to go up more, partially because, well sometimes I'm up in Dublin anyway for businesses, or for work, sorry. We're sponsored by Enterprise Ireland and so often we have meetings with them. So if I'm up in Dublin anyway for a meeting on a Thursday or a Friday, I would stay over. I can work from home as well, which is good.

Yeah, this was going to be one of my questions, right.

Oh was it? Yeah.

So do you work at night, I mean from home? Do you take work home?

Not really, no. I try to stay, I have found that I haven't necessarily needed to, in terms of work load. However, I'm, sometimes I'd work a little bit on a Saturday, actually last Friday I did bring some work home and work on it at home. But that was probably only the second or third time I did that. So generally speaking, I don't. It's just kind of, you know, work day's over when I leave the office here in Limerick. But this research project that I'm working on, the UK research project, I have a deadline for that by the end of October. And I could see all right that I'd probably be working a few late nights or do some work over the weekends.

OK, the nature of your work, do you have to interact with people all the time? Or is it more a lonely type of work?

That's a good question, and I don't like if it gets too isolated. I think, because I do like communication with people. It can be, yeah, I mean there was a period there in August where I was just reading loads of reports all day, and I found that kind of like, it's heavy going, you know, because you're conceXXXating so much. So in that sense, it can be, but even now with the research project, I'm picking up the phone and ringing people in the UK, I'm ringing the UK Department of Energy to check something, so there's much more contact on the phone now. And also I share an office with Michael and John and they're both on the sales side, so even if my work might be more solitary, there's good communication going on.
And I, John is also, Dominic's the managing director, John's the commercial director, because we sit across from each other, I would bounce ideas off him much more. Even though he's technically not my manager, I kind of see him as my manager because I, I would check in with him on stuff and, you know. I suppose I kind of have two managers really, Dominic and John. And on a day to day level, it's John. So in that sense, it's not, it's not isolated. But I guess if I was in my own office, it could be, yeah. Then when you're doing more of the sort of marketing stuff, you know, you might be talking to the web developers or talking to the whatever. But I, you know, we've been at one or two trade fairs. But I think until I go out on the sales side of things, I probably won't get that much exposure to clients, you know, that kind of frequent interaction.

**Yeah, so could you do your work remotely from home?**

Yeah, I could, yeah. Once I had all my, you know, my stuff with me, like if I am, say for example, if I had a meeting, which happened about two weeks ago, I had a meeting in Dublin on a Thursday, and I asked could I work from home on the Friday, which was no problem. When I say work from home, working from home in Dublin. And I just had to kind of go through my desk and make sure that I had all my stuff, and then take the laptop and, you know, that. So yes, I can, but you know, it hasn't happened yet, but like if I kind of, it would kind of suffer things if I went, oh damn, the thing that I need is down in Limerick, you know. So yeah, you could essentially. But I think from a knowledge learning thing, you know, I'm still learning a lot about the industry, and I think from a point of view of just bouncing ideas of people, you know, that, the benefits of that would be much less if I was working from home a lot more.

**So the technology you use to work, is it a laptop or desktop?**

At the moment, it's a laptop.

**Any other, Blackberry?**

No, I actually, I don't have a Blackberry, no. I have my own mobile.

**Can you check email on your mobile?**

No, I don't actually, no, I can't. Yeah, I didn't ask for one at work either. I suppose, most of the time, most of the time I'm at my desk in Limerick, so I'm getting my emails anyway. But no, that's the primary piece of technology.

**And when you call UK, do you use Skype?**

No, actually we use, we just use, I use the office phone, and I don't know who the phone service provider is. I don't know if we chose the person or if it's because we're in Shannon Development's building, I don't know if it's like, you know, they have a contract with one provider, I'm not sure. But yeah, that's a good point, yeah.

**Many companies there in the park are using Skype ...**

That's a good point. That's a good point, actually, because it would cut down on telephone bills.

Yeah, but funnily enough, people don't use the video feature. You know, I see my wife on Skype because if you have a web cam. The quality can suffer but if you have a super Internet connection, then the likelihood of having a problem with the video is little.

OK, wow, that's great. I'll suggest it at work because ...

Anyway, I was just curious to know what types of technologies you use with work. So I suppose you download lots of PDFs and docs. So you have to have a good anti-virus.
Yeah, a lot, yeah. Yeah, you do, yeah. [Francis], our project manager looks after all that. Yeah, we have, I couldn't exactly tell you what we have, but I know we have anti-virus and we have firewall and all that and he sends around bulletins every now and again, alerting us to whatever. But yeah, I would, yeah he looks after the updating our software on the laptop.

**Are all the ten people in Ireland? Or do you have sales people in the UK?**

No, all are in Ireland. Now eventually, excuse me, when we do expand into the UK, John has mentioned that we'll probably set up an office over there. And he jokingly said to me that maybe I'll have to move to Glasgow, I don't know why. I don't know whether they would just see staff doing more to-ing and fro-ing or whether they would see people actually moving over there.

**My next point is exactly this. It's about mobility. Do you travel, I mean, you mentioned that you go to Dublin on weekends, or Cork, that's for personal reasons, right. Do you travel for work?**

Yes. Not extensively, but I can be, like September was quite busy. We were, we went to a conference in the UK, an energy conference. That was on in Birmingham, so that was work related. So I drove to Dublin and we flew out to Birmingham the next day, then back again. That was one week. The next week then, we were having a meeting with, through Enterprise Ireland, we did a workshop a few weeks ago with a branding kind of messaging consultancy in the UK, and we had homework to do and then we were coming back to meet them again to go through the, our own analysis of what our messages are. So then we were back up to Dublin again for that, and then the following week we were back up again for another Enterprise Ireland event. So that was kind of unusual, to have so much happening in three weeks. You know, I wouldn't say it's very frequent, but there is, there is some travel. Like so far this month, there hasn't been any, in October, but there's a British Wind Energy Conference at the end of October and I might be going to that. So, you know, and then if I do get involved in the sales side, there would be a lot of travelling, because I can see the travel that the two sales guys have to do.

**So your potential clients would be mostly in this region or elsewhere in Ireland?**

Anywhere in Ireland, and in fact, like our market is, our target market is pretty, is very specific. We are targeting the largest energy users in Ireland. So a typical client would have, you're really looking at someone who has an electricity bill or an, yeah, an electricity bill of about a half million euros upwards. So I think Munster Joinery's electricity bill was in the region of, I don't know, two plus million or something. You know, they're talking to some of the larger pharmaceutical companies and...

**Munster Joinery, the one on the video.**

Yeah. Yeah, they manufacture the windows of ...

**You're not in the video, right? I saw a couple of ladies there.**

Oh yeah, no, our managing directors, no, no I'm not. So our clients are, yeah, everywhere because, you know, given that we're looking at the biggest companies, and also, you know, our ideal client would be somebody who has a 24/7 operation. So for example, Munster Joinery, they have a daytime shift and they have a night-time shift, so they're using electricity all the time. That gets most efficiency out of the turbine, and also it means that they can, well the turbine particularly enables them to lower their energy costs during the day when it's more expensive. Very, like a very, we're currently talking to two large, I think one is a meat processing or a refrigerating company, anybody with refrigeration would be perfect.

So, you know, when you look at the size and when you look at, now we would talk to all industries, but also, because turbines are large, you know, again, the site is very specific, so the client needs to have land around them.
You can't cross, there's an unusual rule here, it's called, it's to do with the ESB, you can't cross a third party road, so say for example, if, and we're also talking to UL, actually, they're looking at putting up a turbine. But if they thought the ideal site would be over near the student village across the road, we wouldn't be allowed to put it over there because we'd have to bring, we'd have to ask the ESB to bring the connecting lines in across a road. Now if it's a private road on your site, that's fine. So again, those kind of things and it has to be away from, a certain number of metres away from the nearest house and things like that. So there are certain what we call, when we do engage with a client, we go through a thing that's called a show-stopper review, and wind analysts or our wind engineers will look at things like the site and, you know, take pictures from Google Earth. There are a couple of criteria that they'll know really quickly whether it cuts them in or out. So with all those factors then, our clients could be anywhere. You know, we can't just say, we're only going to deal with Munster.

And where are the turbine construction sites? I mean, your office is in the park, but what about the turbines?

No, we don't get involved. What we do then when it comes to sourcing a turbine, they would look at, [Francis] or the two wind engineers, you know, they might, like we would deal then with the manufacturers who might be in Germany or in Denmark. So for this particular project, they bought two turbines from a Germany company called Enercon, and Enercon then worked in partnership with us to actually construct them. So depending on the type of turbine that is deemed most suitable for the site and for the type of wind, they could, you know, they could buy from any number of suppliers. So we're not tied into a supply contract.

About gender: how are your experiences, as a woman working in high-tech companies, considering current and prior companies and your experiences in New Zealand?

OK, yeah. Yeah, that's interesting. I suppose, my experience in my last company where I was there for five years, especially when I was in the head office, it, my manager, Sarah, who was American actually, she would have been the only senior female member of staff, like in terms of being on the group executive team, which would have been the key decision making body. And outside of that, which kind of was kind of typical was Christina was the HR manager, but most, I suppose, heads of this and heads of that were men. But that didn't seem like a particular, it didn't seem like a macho culture. In fact, it seemed, like it was a very, the corporate culture there was very much like a family thing. It was quite small, and I suppose, originally it had been a family run business. So you know, I think they were good at recognising potential and it didn't particularly matter, I think, you know, what your gender was.

Now since I've left, there are now two senior appointments onto that senior executive, executive team. So I think the chief executive was able to, you know, he just recognised what your qualifications were regardless of what your gender was. So yeah, although I do remember one time thinking, I did feel all right that it would be important to have maybe more women. Like there were no women on the board of directors initially. I think they brought on one woman. But then I suppose one could argue, well, you only get on the board of directors if you actually deserve it, you know, you can't just get on it if you're a woman. But I do remember one incident where I kind of just thought, is this kind of a female-male thing, and it was, we had our annual, our AGM ...

What's AGM?

Sorry, our annual general meeting where they would announce the results of the company and talk about the strategy for the next year and so on. And XXX's approach to it would be to invite, they would issue out the invitations, they'd hold the meeting in a hotel in Dublin, and then they would invite shareholders if they wanted to a lunch or refreshments afterwards. Now a certain number of people would turn up, so they kind of would gauge the numbers. And I just remember one particular year, we were, the venue that they picked, there was only a certain number of tables, and so the way we were asked was like to, for the staff to hold back until all the shareholders had sat down, and then to, you know, if there's a table free or a seat free, feel free to take it.
But whether it was just a coincidence or not, I mean, a lot of the next thing anyway, the shareholders were, had sat, and all the extra spaces were taken and there was only, and I was glad there was one woman there, which was Helena, she was an accountant, but so everybody else kind of ended up going downstairs into, like sort of a less important room, and it just really struck me that it was people, it was kind of people more on the softer side of the business, you know. It wasn't people on the accounting side, it was more on the kind of the marketing and the PA side, and you know, we were all downstairs in, now we still had food and that, but it just really struck me that like, you know, how come it's all of us girls down here and all the guys upstairs, you know. And I just kind of thought, you know, I suppose it's not, it just struck me as kind of like, you know, women, do we hold back, you know, a man wouldn't have held back from walking up and taking the spare seat, you know, he probably would have just gone for it. And yet, like it was ironic that the women who had organised that event were actually downstairs, so that was one thing that kind of struck me.

What did Sarah do?

Sarah did, you mean, what was her background?

No, did she go upstairs or downstairs?

Oh she'd actually, she was American, and she had gone home to, she was, she had, her husband's job got transferred back to America so she had left at that stage. But no, she was good. I would see her network. She did an MBA in Harvard and I think she really understood the importance of networking. And yeah, even at Christmas parties and things, you know. And she would say that to me, she was a real mentor to me, she would say it's really important for me to get out there and me to get my name known and get talking to people. She was really good to bringing me in on meetings, which were meetings really I suppose above my level, like when we were doing the market entry strategies and stuff like that, I was working along side her as, I suppose as her assistant and learning the ropes from her. But she would bring me into these senior executive meetings and she made sure, once she got permission, like sometimes they would be discussing very sensitive stuff, so Jim Barry, the CEO, would take a decision on that, but he was also very inclusive. But yeah, she really highlighted the importance of being seen, getting your name out there. Whether she meant that specifically as a woman or just as a professional, but, you know, I think it's advantageous to both.

Still on the annual meeting layout, the display of people. Did you make any comment about that with your female colleagues at the time?

Yes, I did.

Can you tell me the story?

What did I, I just, I don't think the other people, it didn't bother other people, they were kind of nearly, a few of my colleagues were saying, oh they're just glad to be out of the, away from all the noise and away from all the kind of trappings that go with that. I saw it, I suppose, as an opportunity to meet people, other professionals, like people from the banking community would be there, people, you know, you'd probably have small shareholders, but you'd have significant shareholders, you might have journalists there. I just saw it as a great opportunity to mingle and get to know people, you know, learn more I suppose and share more, as opposed to being, it just felt like we were more now in the cafeteria like we would be at work and we were talking about other stuff, you know. And I just thought it was an opportunity to be upstairs. Most of my colleagues, I think one or two of them recognised, oh yeah, you know, how come, I don't think they would have noticed anything or maybe not even commented on it had I not been a bit annoyed about it. But having said that, one of the corporate affairs director, who was a real gentleman, he came downstairs, checked in that we were all OK, thanked everybody for their work, you know, so he was aware that some people were upstairs and some people were downstairs.
So if I understand you, are you saying that you missed an opportunity to network because you were at the margins of the conference?

I don't think that annoyed me so much, I think it was more, I suppose, see at the beginning, we were actually, I mean obviously the senior executive team are going to sit at a particular table, and the other tables were opened up and we were just all advised, you know, wait till all the staff, all the guests, the shareholders have seated, and then, you know, if there's space available, feel free, feel welcome to have a seat. I guess what struck me was, it was probably more self-reflective that people, the other members of staff, and particularly the guys, I suppose they just saw it as, I perceived it as they just saw it as an automatic entitlement, I don't know, that, you know, they're going to get a seat is because they were working on the finance team or they were working wherever. I just couldn't, I didn't see anybody stepping back and saying, oh there's Nicola, she's working as a PA, maybe she'd like to sit here and talk to the shareholders. I didn't see any of that happening, and I just kind of thought, well maybe it's a case of you just have to fight your corner and get in there. But it just struck me as maybe as women, we shy back a little bit. I mean, I didn't barge in there and make sure I got a table. I did see Helena do that, you know, she picked in that. And it was a learning point for me. I said, OK, well if you want to be at the party, you have to really make sure you're at the party. But it just struck me as ironic that...

Who was Helena?

Helena, she worked in, she would have been a senior accountant.

Oh she didn't sit downstairs?

No, she would have been the woman who was upstairs.

What's ironic? Sorry I interrupted you. You were going to say something is ironic.

Oh did I? Let me see. Yeah, I suppose it just struck me that like, whatever way it happened, it just struck me as ironic that, I think what really struck me was that the guys saw themselves as being important enough and was valid enough for them to be upstairs. And then the girls, for whatever reasons, kind of, subject, you know, kind of genuflected or took a step back, you know, they were happy to have what I perceived as the lesser position, you know, at the event, because we were all there and all invited to it. But like I couldn't see, like I couldn't see ten of the guys from the company being happy being downstairs and being away from all the action, do you know what I mean?

But was this because of gender or because of their job functions?

That's a good question. Probably more of job functions.

They were like what, engineers or production?

Mostly finance, mostly ... Mostly finance, yeah, yeah.

Recycling operations people?

Not really. Like at the AGM, even though the company would have those people, at the AGM, it was mostly people from the head office went, like it was open to staff, but not very many would ... 

This episode is very interesting from an anthropological point of view.

Is it? Maybe it's just me ...
Because that's a moment in which you detected a certain layout of gender and, so to say, power relations. But wouldn't these things happen 24 hours a day, and you just don't see it but it happens all the time in the workplace? Or do you disagree with me?

Good question. It's I suppose, it could happen all the time. Although I do think with XXX like if you, your merit was recognised, like if you were, like women did get promoted and women did get rotated into new positions. Having said that, there was a certain, I suppose, work gender delineation. Like you didn't have any male PAs, all the PAs were women, our receptionists were all women, you know, I suppose a lot of the people on the, now there were women on the finance team, but how many were there? Three, in the end. So no, I mean, there were promotional opportunities for women, whether that was happening 24/7, it's hard to say. I suppose, my experience of it was that it wasn't, because I know, because I had a very good manager, she actively promoted me and my work and, you know, made sure I had opportunities. But I do think it probably takes a conscious decision like that, you know. See I wouldn't really have, I never really had anyone, you know, my friends, I never heard anyone complain or say, God, like I'm being denied an opportunity because I'm a woman or anything, I didn't see that.

But then at the end, she moved back to America because of her husband?

Yeah, he was over, they initially came to Ireland, her husband was a trader, and he was promoted to the, you know, he was in the banking sector, and then he was, the stock company had a branch based in Dublin, in the international financial services side centre, so he got promoted to be the head of the company in Ireland, so then Sarah came over with him. And initially they planned to be here for two years, and I think she got the job at XXX because she, I mean, it was smart, like our CEO, Jim ...

Do you want more cookies?

Oh no, I'm grand, thank you. He had done an MBA in Harvard, so I think Sarah looked up ...

He as well?

He as well, yeah. So he looked, I think she looked up the alumni database, and she made contact with Jim and, I mean she had a very good CV anyway, so he hired her on the, really supposed to be kind of, to take some of the load off him, you know, he wasn't able to manage all the strategy stuff and the research stuff and the business development, so then Sarah took that on. And initially started working five days, but she wasn't very long in Ireland when she got pregnant with her first child, so for the most of her career in Dublin, she worked three days a week, yeah.

OK, so she had strong business credentials (Harvard MBA) but she also had family choices and issues, like baby, husband and ... How do you see that?

Yeah, yeah. I thought she managed it really well, yeah. When she was in the office, she was 100 per cent focused on what she was doing, she never let her professional standards slip. She had two children in their time in Ireland. She had a nanny at home. I mean, they, she was lucky in that they were, you know, she would have earned well, her husband earned well, they could well afford to have a really good nanny at home. Yeah, she managed very well, you know. She would, she had arranged, Sarah would come in at maybe half past 9, just slightly after 9 whenever, she would drop the kids to school or the creche in the morning, she would take a very short lunch break, but then she would leave again by 4. She had that arrangement because she needed to be home to pick up the kids and so on, or was it just maybe 4, half 4. But XXX would go, I mean if you want to job share, you can job share, but I think she'd proven herself in terms of her, well her credentials were strong, but also she had proven herself in terms of her work quality, that I think the CEO had great confidence that like, OK, you know, if a working day's shorter or if she's not in for two days, the work will still get done. So she had very good productivity levels.
Yeah, but in your case, the business that you're working for now will grow into the UK, maybe the U.S.. How do you see matching that with your future family plans if you have ...

Yeah, that’s a good question. Well I suppose it’s all to be kind of explored. You know, I would often say to my mum, oh I would love a job where there’s a lot of travel. Well, you know, no, well I haven’t said a lot, like I did, I could see people at XXX who were, you know, it sounds great. I mean I love going to America, but you know, they were going to America maybe once a week, you know, back, get over, back, get over. You could see the toll on them, the long journeys and, you know, not seeing their kids and stuff, and this was particularly for the men. So I am interested in travel, but I kind of like the tempo I have right now, if it's once a month or something, that's perfect. So I think that could work very well with, you know, a family situation. I mean, we haven't really explored that much of work as to what it really means when we expand into the UK. Are we really talking about relocation or are we talking about still being based here, but we'll go to Shannon and fly over to meet a client.

Yeah, but even if the business grows only in Ireland, if you don't have to relocate internationally, would you say that your work load could eventually go against your family aspirations? Do you see it this way? Would you see yourself as having to choose one over the other? What’s your opinion about that?

Personally, I wouldn’t see it as you have to choose one over the other. I could see maybe if you, you could let one become very, very dominant if you didn't manage the two. I think it's a balancing act. I would see it for me as, you know, I'd need to know what my boundaries are in terms of, you know, my working day and, you know, OK, exceptions granted. But like it wouldn't be appropriate to be working from say 7 o'clock in the morning to 7 o'clock at night on a continuous basis. So I would feel very comfortable about communicating about that to a manager, if I felt my workload was just way above what I could, you know, to keep that balance between family and work. So I think a lot of it comes down to communication, you know, when you take on a role, it's important to know what the company culture is, and also you need to know what, I suppose when you're discussing a project or when you're taking on more responsibility, you have to, I would find you need to factor in, well, you know, how much of this is achievable in an X time frame.

But I think you need to, I think for both of them to work well together, you need to be very organised, that’s my observation of people who do the whole, one of my other colleagues at work, my previous job, Niamh, she also worked three days a week and she had a girl, but like, you know, she was very organised in her personal life and very organised in her work life. And when she was in the office it was, I did notice, I mean, we would chat and stuff like that, Niamh would be, she wouldn't have the luxury I suppose of going for a second coffee break if that's what other people were doing, you know. So I noticed how like, you know, she had to leave at 5 to be home for half 5 to pick her daughter up at the creche. And so, you know, she would just be very, very productive. Whereas if you have, if you can work five days a week, you know, if you don't do Thursday, well you can just do Friday, you know, that kind of way.

But would family get in the way of career development?

Oh right. I think it's very, very much down to the company. It depends, I suppose, it depends what you're looking for out of your career. I think, I think as well it might come down to, you know, how much time as a woman you think is important to spend with children or with your husband, your partner. It perhaps can, you know. I remember, I suppose, I feel like I’m talking a lot about XXX, but it's the company I spent most of my time with and it's my most recent one. When one of my colleagues, like this girl, woman, Helena I mentioned, like she would have been a senior accountant, and then she decided to, like she was doing very well and she had a lot of responsibility. And she decided, I think it was after her second child, she decided then that she'd work half days. She'd come in the morning and then be gone by half 12. And that was the arrangement she made.

But one of my other colleagues who worked also finance, she intimated that that was going to affect her career, you know. And I didn't have an opinion on that, but she just thought, oh well, you know, she's in half days, you know, now she still has the same role, I believe, and does it very well, but could that affect her career? I suppose it
could do because, I mean, she wouldn't be there for an evening meeting if there was any afternoon meeting. I think the company, I think if a company really wants to promote that kind of equality, they have to be very, you know, they have to be very active in it, you know. And then for women, some women make that choice, like I know, my colleague Niamh on that, like she, I think they did want her to work four days a week or whatever, but she really wanted to work three, you know. For her, spending time with her child was really important. Whether that'll affect her career, somehow like, I think, I think not. Like if you're good at your job and you're productive, I think, certainly you can go up.

Whether you would get into a full-time managerial position, I don't know. I'm inclined to think that you mightn't because you're not there. Or you're perceived as not being there one day, two days a week, you know. Now I know since I've left, a new lady has come in as head of business development and she, she seems to be very nice, but I think she had quite, like from the last company she came from, I think she might be one of these alfa-male equivalents if you know what I mean, very, very high achieving, works incredibly long hours, takes work home, you know, one of my friends there said like sometimes you might get an email that she sent on a Saturday night from her home, now she has a husband and she has two kids, and she has two nannies I think, one doing something and I don't know, one doing cooking and one doing looking, I mean, they have the resources to be able to afford that, but she seems to have a very intense work life, but maybe she is, I don't know anything about the lady. It's just what I've heard. But she has a very senior position, but she's putting in those kind of hours.

I see, yeah. I interviewed a few senior directors of companies here who are women, and they worked part-time, and they chose to work part-time with flexible time hours, but they were founders and co-owners of the companies.

Right, yeah. And maybe, you know, maybe as well, yeah if you, I think maybe if you have a strong relationship with the CEO or whatever, which I can see between Sarah and Jim, you know, they'd both been (inaudible) university together and so on and they weren't in the same class, but I think that certainly helped Sarah get promoted up there and then perhaps to be able to do the, you know, maybe she didn't have, I don't know, maybe she didn't have such a strong CV, she mightn't have reached that level and also do half hours and do part-time hours, you know.

It seems there's an element of networking there as well.

It does, actually. You automatically in a position of influence by being, by being a co-founder of something, yeah, yeah.

Moving towards the final part of our interview - seeing the long-term past (say, ten, twenty years), what have been the main transformations in Ireland in terms of work relations and gender relations?

Wow, yeah, that's, well funny you should bring that up because two weeks ago I went to this lecture in town, Jose Manuel Barroso, the head of the EU Commission was in town, and he was giving a female business network called Network Ireland.

He came to UL as well.

Yeah, that's right, oh yeah, sorry, I had forgotten that, yeah. Did you see him?

No, I saw on TV. I was elsewhere, I don't remember. But I missed, I missed his lecture here.

Oh OK, because he gave a lecture, yeah because he was a bit late coming into ours, so he was giving a lecture in town and it was organised by a female business network called Network Ireland, and the topic of his talk, speech was the future of women in Europe. And there were other women there, you know, one lady from the business network, one from the Irish (inaudible) Association, and the third lady was from the National Council of Women in
Ireland. And so they spoke about as well where women's roles in our society have changed, and my mum was there as well, and one of the things that I had forgotten about is this whole thing which really has only, I think it was in the early 1970s, it was disbanded, and I think it was just disbanded prior to us joining the EU or even we were forced to, I'm not so sure. But essentially, there was a thing called the marriage bar, and if you had a job in the public service, if you were in the civil service or, yeah, I think it was particularly for the civil service because my mum became a teacher and she didn't have to do it, but my aunt did. As soon as you got married, you had to give up your job, yeah.

You had to by law?

Yeah, you had to give it up. Because I think your role then was to, I really don't know, was it because they didn't want you going off on endless paternity leaves or whatever, but, you know, maybe it was partly to do with the Irish constitution, that the role of the women, you know, the whole family ethos in the constitution. So my aunt Maeve stepped down from her role in the civil service, and then went off to retrain as a teacher. So I'm not exactly sure how many professionals it affected, but it definitely affected the civil service. So I suppose that was like in the 1970s.

So when you, I had forgotten about that until I went to that lecture, so when you, I suppose, when you look at where we are now, you know, I think there are vast opportunities open for girls. I mean, the, like all professionals, you know, all professionals in Ireland are open. There is a certain irony, and my mum just raised it as a point at the meeting, is that like girls tend to, you know, every year when the leaving cert results come out, and I would have experienced that even in my own secondary school education, that generally speaking, the girls out perform the boys in their leaving certificate, or even in their exams all along. I'm not so sure about it at third level. But, you know, then it's not really, maybe it's going to take time to filter through, but that ability to achieve very well in school, and a certain measure of intelligence isn't reflected in, I suppose, women being in positions of power, necessarily, in corporate or in the head of the civil service and that. So there's something going on there, you know, it's whether, you know, is it because they decide to have families or whatever, but there's, or is it just that it takes time for that whole thing to filter up, you know. It's a phenomenon that's been measured for the last ten or fifteen years. So, what, in my own experience, well I can't say I've ever felt that an opportunity was denied to me because I'm a woman. But I haven't gone down the route yet of having a family, so I don't know how that would, how that would tally.

Besides gender, in terms of economy or society, is there anything that strikes you most?

I mean, we have had huge change, like when I, yeah, I mean, I think just the overall wealth line, it has increased and people's average incomes generally have increased. But then also so to have the cost of living. I don't quite buy into this, oh the Celtic Tiger was brilliant for everyone because I, you know, personally would have experience quite a hike in standard of living, you know, I bought a house in Dublin three years ago, and that was very expensive. So, you know, yeah, the Celtic Tiger's been great and I think the Celtic Tiger primarily had promoted jobs, you know. Essentially there were enough jobs out there for everyone. Now we're not seeing that right now. But I don't think the Celtic Tiger necessarily meant that everybody was going around with, you know, thousands of euro in cash to spend willy nilly. I think certain portions of society benefited, we'll say, maybe, oh I don't know, you know, maybe the banking community or accounting or people in property development. But I think when people use the overall catchphrase of the Celtic Tiger, you know, they're, lots of people out there I think who, you know, their income did rise. But I don't think they saw it like this, you know, massive surge which you often hear about in the papers, you know, that they'd go into the department store and spend a thousand euros on a handbag and stuff like that. So I don't think that's a very valid claim for everybody.

But yeah, no, overall I think the standard of living has raised, you know. The country's infrastructure has improved, people's confidence I think, well I'm kind of taking that on third party, you would have heard, I hear people older than me saying, oh you know, Irish people are now very confident about their ability to achieve in business. Well I never did, you know, I graduated in '97, I didn't ever see a pit of a lack of confidence, but I think I just came out at
I have a core group of friends in Dublin and we all got jobs in Dublin and ...

Your brother went to Scotland.

My brother went to Scotland, yeah, that was by choice as well. He went there to do a PhD and then he stayed on afterwards. But, I know for example, my cousin, he's a good few years older than me, but like he said when he graduated, and he did civil engineering, there were only three people in his class who stayed in Ireland and everybody else emigrated. Like that whole idea of having to emigrate, like that was never, you know, in, you know, in my, we'll say, my generation, it wasn't like that at all. But like when we came out of college, you could choose to stay in Dublin and get a job or choose to go somewhere else, or you could choose to go abroad, you know. Whereas now, I'm reading newspaper articles, you know, where students, you know, they're coming out with degrees in architecture and there's nothing here for them, you know, there's a change in that. So we had that before and then we had full employment, and now there's a wee change again, so.

So now they're starting to travel overseas again?

Yeah, they are, yeah. I think they, two or three weeks ago they said something like fifty to sixty thousand people have, and that could be across the whole range, like fifty to sixty thousand people have left Ireland recently. So I think one of the good things as well that happened in the last few years was, even though I know it's expensive, but they opened up third level education to everybody. You know, they did away with the fees, but now I think they're looking at reintroducing that again.

Yeah, there are fees. But it is not bad I'd say, But they want to increase the fees. It's around 1,000 Euro per year, I think. I mean, just to compare, in America, that is 20,000 euros per year, here is 1,000 euros per year and people are thinking about rioting on the streets.

I know, yeah. Now when I was going to college, there was a registration fee, but it was much smaller, but you had a fee. Like my parents paid for my education. There was a grant if you were means tested, but it was quite low. So a lot of people, middle income earners would nearly all have to pay for their children to go to college, except for farmers. For some reason farmers, farmers got grants and were allowed to send their children to college for free, some weird rule for that. But yeah, there was a registration fee. But then when they did away with the fees, like I don't know, fees at the time, I suppose fees for my course were about 2,000 pounds, you know. It was, like it was an awful, because my parents, because we're all so close together in age, there nearly always were two of us in college at any one time, you know. So it certainly was a challenge.

But now, but then when they did away with the fees, the registration fee ballooned a little bit, but nothing in comparison. But you know, I think that was a good thing during the boom, that it opened up education to everybody. So that would have been a big change. Yeah, I suppose, you know, and what else would I have noticed over the last ten years? Oh of course, the diversity in Ireland, different nationalities, you know, that's just been a phenomenal change, a really good change, I think. But, I mean, I remember when I went to college in '93, I was just, I lived on campus for the first year, and I was just delighted to be sharing a house with like an American and a German and a Dutch, you know, it was just the whole international flavour. And I cam remember clearly a day in Cork, I was probably about 12 or 13, seeing my first black person, and it was like just a, not a shock shock, but it was just like, you know, I do remember it, you know. And now it's wonderful to see such a range of people come into Ireland.

And did you study German? OK, did you live in Germany?
Yeah. I did, yeah, yeah. I spent all my college holidays in Germany, and also our third year of our course, we did Erasmus, so we studied abroad for a year as well, yeah.

OK, one of my follow up questions is: you have a house in Dublin and then you applied for jobs and then you came to Limerick. I mean, why were you open to come to Limerick and not apply for jobs overseas or go overseas, go to New Zealand, work in the UK, or in Germany? Why did you come to Limerick?

Limerick, it really kind of just happened like that. I guess my, I was looking initially for a role in Dublin, I think I was getting to a point where I was going to consider, my first preference was Ireland, or at least Dublin anyway, and then when I left my previous company, it still felt like the economy was doing fine, and then within three months, it suddenly like, the banking crisis happened and all that. So, you know, things weren't as, there certainly weren't as many people out of work as there are now. So I think I probably would have come to a point, I wasn't actively seeking to move to the UK or to Germany. However I, you know, the opportunity to move to London was always there in the background, or to do the working holiday visa to Canada, they were two things that were in the background that I could do, but I guess because I, you know, the renewable energy sector is growing in Ireland and I like that sector a lot, I was keen to stay working in that area. So I was looking for an opportunity here in Dublin, essentially. So when I first saw the add for [alternative energy firm], I thought, oh this looks cool, and then I saw the location was Limerick. And I was like, oh OK, it's Limerick, so I left it.

OK, Limerick good or bad?

Oh like very, no but …

I'm saying this because some people refuse to go to Dublin as some people refuse to come to Limerick.

Absolutely, yeah. No it was neither, it was neither good nor bad, it was just more like, oh OK, because I like Limerick, I like it more now that I'm living here, but my brother Eoghan has lived here for a long, long time. So I've always known Limerick to be a really, I've always liked it, you know. I don't, I think if you haven't really experienced a city, you can just go for the whole stab city reputation. So I always knew Limerick was a much nicer place than its reputation kind of would lead one to believe. So when I saw Limerick, I just remember thinking, oh OK, that's not in Dublin. So I just kind of discounted it initially. And then I had interviewed I think at one or two other places, and I got to the final level but I didn't get the offer. And then I came back then, you know, I re-evaluated, and I said, OK, I think I need to, you know, in the current climate and so on, I need to keep my focus a bit broader. So then I looked at, so then I applied and I got the role. And then, I said, OK, here we go, and you know, even though it's only, it's not a huge change, it's still Ireland and Dublin is only two and a half hours away, making the change was kind of like, oh OK, you know. It was a little bit tough at the start, but more mentally. But then once I was here, it was not, and the transition was a lot easier in the sense that I could stay, I stayed with my brother for about five or six weeks until I got established and then I got, move into an apartment over across, over there.

Yeah, but you are strategically located between your parents in Cork and your boyfriend in Dublin...

There's a lot of mobility, absolutely, yeah, yeah, I mean.

But, if you think about being at a cutting-edge type of business (green business), you could have thought, “I'm going to apply for jobs in Germany,” and you didn't try it? I mean, it wasn't as exciting to you? It seemed you were a bit aloof to going to mainland Europe?

Yeah, it never really kind of, I think because, you're right like the green area is a growing area and it's quite cutting edge. But I got the sense that like there was a lot happening in Ireland. And, I mean, it's kind of ironic because, I do love living abroad and any time I've lived abroad I've always enjoyed it. And sometimes I kind of feel like Ireland is way too small and I just say, oh God, I really want to live somewhere else. So I mean, and my friends
kind of remarked that like, you know, of all of us, I’d be the one to kind of pack my bags and go off. But funnily, when it came to actually, you know, and I was looking for jobs, I didn't actually, it's not that I sought to avoid it, it just didn't really come up high on my radar, you know. I suppose moving to Germany, and maybe because I'm in my 30s, you know, it's not quite the same, moving off to a new country, and especially if you were to move off on your own, you know, is, I mean, you certainly can do it, but I, I think, it's, you need to establish yourself again in a new place, it's definitely a challenge, you know, if you're, you don't have any support network in that country and you're moving solely for a job.

I had recent, I had in the year previous taken up on the opportunity to do, I had travelled to Australia, I was thinking of moving to Australia for a year to do the working holiday visa out there. But then when I got, and I had been to Australia before, and I went out to just to kind of check out Sydney and check out Melbourne and see which of the two cities I would like to live in, but when I got there, it was really weird. I kind of thought, sometimes I believe that far-away hills are greener. When I got to Australia then, I realised all the good stuff I had back home in Ireland, you know. And it kind of, it really helped me re-evaluate. So that’s probably part of it.

I didn't, I didn't, I thought I suppose there was enough adventure in what I was doing here in Ireland that, and also I had just recently come out of a fairly prolonged period of, like when I was doing the CIMA qualification I mentioned, I was doing that at night, and that took four years at night, and it was like two nights a week, sometimes one night a week and then sometimes at the weekend. So it was, I mean, it was broken up into semesters, but it was a fairly intense qualification to do. And I had just come out of that in May 2008, and I think I was just glad to have loads of free time and to be able to spend more time with my, you know, mountaineering and the stuff that I'm into, and more time with my friends and stuff. So I, I think I was just focused on enjoying that more as opposed to packing my bags and heading off somewhere new. Having done the Australia thing, as well, and having got a sense of, you know, when you do move to a country on your own, it's like, you know, especially if it's very, very far away, I know I could do it, but I, I suppose, because I was seriously contemplating it then, it was more, I think I got a bit of a wakeup call as to it's not always easy.

And so I think it was a combination of factors and the fact that the renewable energy sector in Ireland is growing, I didn't really feel the draw to apply to a job in Berlin or whatever, yeah. However I was aware that as the months went by, it took nine months, I think, from the time I left my job to actually securing my new position, you know, I was increasingly thinking about it and being positive about, you know, if I do move to London or if I do go to Canada or whatever, it was there as a background thing. I think had the process taken another four, five months, I probably would have, yeah.

**Because your degree is in international business, right?**

Yeah, yeah.

**And another follow up question, like your brothers went to study engineering, the three of them?**

Two of them. The youngest studied arts.

**And your sister studied physical therapy, which a sort of “mechanics of the body”...**

Yeah, yeah.

**And I was wondering, you never thought about studying engineering? Why?**

No. Just never thought about it.

**Any influence from your brothers?**
No, never thought about it. Like I did maths and when you’re in school here, I don’t know if you’re familiar, you can do like, most of your subjects you can do them at a, well some of them you can do at a higher level or a low level. And maths is funnily one of those areas where they, especially for the leaving cert, number one, not many students tend to do honours level maths, and if you’re in a mixed school where it tends to be more boys than girls, not very many girls go ahead to do honours maths, and maths wouldn’t have been one of my strong subjects at all.

Why?

Why? I knew when I worked at it I could do it. And it was funny, like I, partially because my brothers did it, that was, I suppose one of the influences of the, maybe the engineering thing, they both did honours maths for their leaving cert and had no problems with them, you know. Like they studied hard at it, and like Colm got an A, I think, and Eoghan did very well as well. And when it came to my turn, partially I think because, I think partially because they did it and also because it’s a challenge and I wanted to prove myself, I wanted to do honours maths as well. And when it came to actually enrolling for the class, part of it, I think, our teacher, our maths teacher kind of initially selected, you know, I think you should do it and this, you should go into the higher level and you should go into the lower level class. And I think, I don’t know, was it, I can’t remember my results from the inter cert were, but she put me in the lower level class, and I really wanted to go into the higher level class.

Who put you in the lower class?

The teacher, the maths teacher. And it wasn’t like a black and white decision, but that was where she had advised people to go, you know, based on her experience and one’s attitude, for maths. And I remember approaching her after the class and asking and saying to her, oh I really wanted to go into the honours class, and she was a bit hesitant but she said, look, OK, sure, you know, come on into the class and, you know, we’ll see how you go kind of thing. And I remember thinking to myself, you know, I have to prove myself here. So when it came to the first exam that we had, I remember studying really, really hard and going over the questions over and over again, and I got the highest score in the class, in the honours class for that exam. And I just remember, she just made a point out of it, she said, oh you know, if you apply yourself, you can do it. So she never, she got, I was able to stay in the class and she didn’t, she never said I couldn’t stay again. But I still had to work hard at it like, really. And I used to borrow my brother’s books, their copy books from before to get it. I think for me, it was just more, you know, it will take more work, but I really want to do this. But that was the only kind of, I suppose, time I felt maybe kind of under, not peer pressure, but kind of wanting to do what my brothers did. But I never felt I wanted to do engineering. And my parents, they left it wide open to us to decide what we wanted to do. Yeah, so I, like I really enjoyed languages and I got involved in a school company and I did business studies, so I wanted to put the kind of entrepreneurship together with languages, and that’s why I chose the course I did.

The final question, I think it connects with all these things we’ve been discussing, and the key word is improvement. If something could be improved either in your life or work or the nation or the technology park or business, what’s the top priority for improvement you’d like to see sorted out?

Yeah, in the current climate, I’d like to see more accountability and more corporate governance. In Ireland, I don’t think we’re very good at, either in the corporate sector or in the political sector, you know, if you take advantage or if you really screw up or whatever, there are consequences. And I think, you know, I think we’re seeing it with some of our politicians and say some of the leaders of the banks only resigned, only stepped down when they were put under increased pressure. You know, they didn’t seem to have the integrity or the whatever to say, look, you know, I embezzled funds, I really, really mismanaged or whatever, you know. That, I think that element of, there can’t still be, which kind of galls me a bit, is like, and particularly having studied accountancy and that, you know, I’m aware that there’s a corporate governance code and, you know, you’re held accountable to whatever. But I think at, yeah in the political sector and some of the corporate sector. You know, for example, everything that’s happening with FAS, you know.
And I think in other countries, just my brief knowledge of, like I think, what I’ve observed about some of the things in the UK, I mean, scandals happen in the UK, but my, there was a scandal, and it wasn’t such a bad thing, but like I think two years ago, a disk, a sensitive disk with revenue details of people from the revenue commission in the UK went missing, or got lost in the post, or someone’s laptop was stolen. And the head of that department, not quite the head of the revenue, but the head of the department resigned straight away. It was like a process had failed and even though he or she mightn’t have been involved in it, they still took responsibility for it. I don’t see that here. You know, Sean Fitzpatrick, the head of Anglo Irish Bank, you know, didn’t step down for ages, Ronny Malloy from FAS, you know, he gets a huge payoff, you know, they give him a car, because I think it’s, it was going to, there was something, they had some vagueness around the legality and saying that, you know, he could have challenged them legally, but then they never sought to get legal advice to see if he could challenge them legally, they just paid him off, but they paid him off scandalous amounts of money. Like I just think that kind of thing, that’s what I’d love to see, yeah.

OK, before you came to Limerick, when you saw the job ads and the company was in the technology park, what’s your opinion about the technology park?

Yeah, I was excited when I heard it was in the technology park, and prior to my first day of work, I drove down to familiarise myself and I thought this was a lovely area. My impression of the technology park, I think it’s a very good idea, I can see there are a lot of companies out there, I think the idea of the innovation hub is, you know, set up for small companies. I’m not really, I suppose, I don’t really see what's going on at the other businesses, so it’s hard to say. I think the building that we’re in doesn’t strike one as very innovative. It’s called the Innovation Works, it’s quite, it’s a bit old and it’s kind of like 1970s and, you know, it doesn’t strike me as kind of state of the art technology, which you might think it’ll be in a National Technology Park.

And I’m not quite sure, I know it’s owned by Shannon Development, but I’m not quite sure what Shannon Development does, you know what I mean? So, you know, it’s great to be there. I don’t know, maybe I could talk to my managing director about this, I mean there must be some benefit to the company for being there, but I don’t know exactly what that is, you know, whether the premises, he’s able to rent the premises for less than he’d have to do somewhere else or whatever. But, no, I really do enjoy being in the park, it’s nice to see, like there’s a great sense of entrepreneurship going on there, you know, you can see all the names of the companies and it’s always very busy. And Shannon Development had a really good event in the summer, they had a barbecue down in the Castletroy Park, and so they invited all the companies from the park down there, and then quite a few people turned up and it was a great night. It would be lovely, I suppose, to have some sort of, it’s funny, even in the area we’re in, like we all have little, well, the building itself has many different little offices, and there are a number of different companies in there. But there doesn’t seem to be much communication between the different companies, like there are people in the room next door to us and we still don’t know what they do. You know, we say hello to them, but we don’t know what they do, you know.

Can you go to the canteen to have lunch?

They go to the canteen to have lunch, people tend to sit in their company, you know, they tend to sit with their colleagues. I’ve never actually shared, like the tables typically sit about four to five people. Yeah, I guess it’s just kind of, you kind of, sometimes I would, if I was, had a late lunch or whatever, I’d sit on my own. But I might chit chat a little bit to people in a queue, yeah, but there doesn’t, it’s funny, maybe it’s just human nature, you tend to gravitate towards the community that you know, yeah.

Anything at that level that could be improved? I mean, something you miss or something that you would like to see happening?

At that level, in terms of the park and that is it? Yeah I think, you know, at a very basic level, I think it would be good to know, if there was some sort of forum where maybe even the heads, maybe this exists now, I’m not so sure, but like, you know, for all companies that are in the National Technological Park, I don’t know if there’s a
forum where the chief executives of those companies get together once a quarter to talk about issues that, even though they could be in different industries, maybe there are certain, you know, maybe the broadband into the park needs to be expanded or parking needs to be looked at, or whatever or as a group. Because I know Shannon Development has a status almost like the IDA and like Enterprise Ireland, and I know they’re talking about merging them in, I think, with Enterprise Ireland with this new government restructuring.

But like, I’m, Enterprise Ireland have nominated us as a high-potential start-up business, and we also have expansion capacity for abroad, and that’s part of the reason they’re supporting us. But like I know (inaudible) regularly in touch with them and they bring us to workshops and they organise events and seminars and stuff like that and we go up to Dublin for those. I don’t see the same thing, and I don’t even know if it’s part of Shannon Development’s remit to do that, but I’m not sure what their role is besides providing the land and the building, you know. I’m just not so sure. But I just wonder, is there room to, see maybe they do provide some of those services and we’re not availing of them or we just don’t know about them. And if they do provide services like that, I think it would be great if, you know. I suppose as a park, maybe if there was a bit more synergy going on between the different companies. And, you know, I don’t, like if people recognise that there’s a training need, you know, that all the accountants in the park need, I don’t know, yeah.

Yeah, this is not central to our study, but the company was opened in 2006.

Yes.

And it was already connected with Enterprise Ireland? Was it Enterprise Ireland who told you guys to come to the park? I mean, how was the triangulation there?

Oh right, I don’t know to be honest. I don’t think they got involved with Enterprise Ireland until last year, I think.

So the business was already there, up and running, before connecting with Enterprise Ireland.

Yeah, yeah, now whether it was actually in that park, that’s a good question. Because I know initially, like the company was set up by Dominic and he worked very closely with Munster Joinery, the client for him there to get that established. And it was actually born out of an idea that he got when he was doing his MBA here in Limerick. And he was going to establish his business in the biomass area, and I guess he was studying the renewable energy sector and then he, I don’t know how, he came across the idea of, well it’s done quite a bit in the UK, on-site energy, and then he got, I don’t know what his relationship with Munster Joinery was before then, but he started to work with them. So I’m not too sure at what point he got the offices in Shannon Development and moved in there.

But John Cusack who’s come on board as the commercial director, and John and Dominic had worked together in a previous company, John is a mentor for some companies who get services through Enterprise Ireland. So he understands Enterprise Ireland a lot and how they can help companies. So I, this is my assumption now, but I think he might, it might have been through him that they first started talking, yeah. I’d imagine Enterprise Ireland might have needed to see the company kind of, you know, just being beyond the very first stage, and maybe they needed to see a project, even if not completed, but in the construction. Because that project, with the two turbines there, from start to finish took three years. Now the other ones won’t like as we move forward, they won’t take as long. But part of the delay was the fact that there was such demand globally for turbines. You had to put your order in and you might get your turbine 18 months later. So I think, I think Enterprise Ireland came on board maybe halfway through that cycle.

All right, all right. So of all these questions that I’ve asked you, is there anything that I didn’t ask that you’d like to tell me? Anything that you’d like to add...
I hope I haven't been, you know, I was thinking, oh God, I've been really negative, I've been dishing the politicians and some of the senior business executives.

Well I think it might be interesting, you know, as a lot of women study business in Ireland in college, it might be interesting to have a course there that addresses some of these issues, you know, that, you know, the career planning side of things is often left to the career's office and you have a quick look at it towards the end of your fourth year in college. But it might be interesting to have a course, a module that's about, partially about career management, but also, I suppose, not just for women, but also for men, you know, to understand the dynamics that happen to create that balance between family life and work life. And I think, you know, perhaps if men are more aware of what it's like to be a woman trying to forward, progress a career and be the, maybe the mum, the primary career, that, you know, both parties can then move forward as they go through their careers to ensure that the structures are there that are supportive for both, if you know what I mean. Like I think, if you have an awareness of that from an early age, I think it can certainly help. You're probably just a bit more, more aware of it and you might be more proactive in it.

So I think that could be something that we study, or not so much study but just like, you know, the way now ethics is often taught in college because it grew out of a need for it. I think there possibly is a need for this. So that might be, I don't know quite how, that could be delivered but just even, you know, you know, it's fascinating, the whole gender, sociology side of things, but we, I mean, my experience of going through business school, we didn't do, we did organisational behaviour in one year. We didn't do any of that, you know, it was very much kind of on the finance side and the economics side.

**Do you have any concerns about this interview, the questions I asked you?**

No. Maybe just the fact that I gave a lot of examples from XXX, maybe if we could not disclose the company's name, XXX, my previous employer, you know, I was giving the, when I was giving the examples, you know, about my colleagues and so on, you know, maybe ...

**OK, I will erase that, sure.**

Yeah.
If you could tell us, please, your current profession and job titles and your function and role?

OK, well, entrepreneurship I suppose is what describes me best. I'm the co-founder of a start-up project called the [firm name occluded]. What we're doing is developing educational software, specifically based around virtual world type scenarios, like second life for simulations. So that's my third start-up. One of the other start-ups is still going, it's just more or less a lifestyle business at this stage. And the other one, we rolled into the current project because it's a, it's based on convergent technologies. You've got virtual presence and you've got tele presence. The previous project was all about tele presence, which is converging with virtual presence in the virtual world. So it made sense to roll up those two projects into the current start-up. I don't know if, I don't know if that makes it any clearer now, but.

Yeah, you'll have to tone it down for me because it's very difficult to understand some of these terms.

OK, so, the new business is, as I said, educational software, OK, it's based around 3D virtual worlds, which look like a lot of the modern console games that you see. 3D means that you feel like you're, you're actually in the situation, it's 3-dimensional, you can go in any direction, OK. So it's like it surrounds you. So if you've seen Star Trek, and you might have seen the Holodeck on Star Trek where they actually feel like they're in this particular place, this make-belief, fantasy. OK, this technology is the forerunner to that in a sense. It surrounds you with a simulated situation. OK, and that has a lot of implications for education, where you can put people into educational situations. For example, if you're a language student, you're learning French, why not be in France, why not be walking down the Champs Elyse and talking with your teacher about what you see in the scene. It brings education to life, as opposed to reading a book, a 2D book. Not that books are bad now, but. That's basically what the technology is.

And Nom---k?

Nom---k is, sorry, that's another project. But at this stage it's being sidelined because it's a hobby. It's, at this stage it's just hard to squeeze everything in. And I believe it's just not ripe, the time isn't ripe here yet. It's something we'll come back to, but we threw out, we threw out the fishing line last year and we didn't get too many bites because it seems like it's still a bit too early here in this country. Nom---k is all about bringing, well organising, I mean, there is a growing trend in this country towards co-working and nomadic working, which is what you're seeing here today. Most of these people here today, like myself, can work from anywhere with a laptop. And we had an impromptu meeting out there a while ago, which you saw, with just four guys coming together, working on a project. But we don't, we all work from home or different locations. And we just had an impromptu meeting, without ever prearranging it, you know, these things happen in an ad-hoc fashion. They don't necessarily need to be scheduled.

So it's a very fluid kind of a lifestyle, and that's the kind of trend we've noticed growing here. We're a couple of years behind Silicon Valley, but I feel that there's opportunities there to organise facilities for people like myself who are nomadic workers. And so what I mean, for instance, is that you could organise, if you wanted to, part of the problem for people like myself is of course the problem that we work 24/7 a lot of the time, 365 days a year if you're an entrepreneur. But that's, that doesn't exactly chime with your family. So, you know, if you wanted to go on a break with your family, are there facilities for you to continue working so that you can be with your family in the evening at a particular, you know, sea-side location for instance? So that's what we're trying to, thinking of
doing, is organising office space and cafeteria space and restaurant space and so on that you can avail of as you travel around.

OK. And so you’re an entrepreneur, and do you work with teams or alone? I mean, do these projects comprise groups of people; or how do you ...

Yeah, they’re very much ad-hoc groups. For the most part, I mean, I work on my own in the sense that I work at home the whole time. But I come together for ad-hoc meetings like this on a regular basis. They are team projects, but the majority of the work would be done obviously on your own. It’s information processing, a lot of it is, so that’s why you can just do it on a laptop.

And are you all partners or are they your employees or you hire them? How is it ...

No, we don’t have any employees at the moment. And I tend not to want to have employees because of all the bureaucracy and the legal paperwork that entails. So I tend to work with partners or freelancers mostly, yeah.

OK. Before we return to this, tell me about your background, your history.

My background, a rural background. My father was a farmer, and you know, mum and dad worked hard to make sure that I could go to college. I have a twin brother who was, he was interested in farming, I never was interested in farming. He didn't end up farming, but he stayed at home on the farm and started up his own business. So I suppose there’s a kind of an entrepreneurial bug in the family, even though, well, I mean farming is an entrepreneurial adventure as well, you know, very much so. A farmer has to ...

And risky as well.

It's risky and a farmer has to fend for himself the whole time. In fact, you'll see, it's quite interesting, not to just deviate for a second, that there, there was a very interesting programme on TV there a few weeks ago on Nationwide, I think it was. It was about all the inventions that come out of, out of farming because every farming situation is different, so there’s not too many off-the-shelf technologies that suit a lot of problems that you’d get on farms, and farmers have to have the skills. They're the ultimate hackers in a sense because they have to have the skills to hack together a solution to problems that are specific to their situation. So a lot of them have welding skills and soldering skills and, I mean, my own father, like he was never trained in carpentry, but he was a good carpenter because he had to be able to come up with solutions to his particular problem.

So in a sense, when I look at it, yeah, he was an entrepreneur, and that rubbed off on both his sons at least. So my background, as I say, is a rural background, they made sure that I could go to college. And I was just very interested in technology from an early age, I mean, I think that's what, all I was really ever interested in as a youngster. Well, obviously you’re interested in sports and whatever. But I was always interested in mechanics. I thought I was going to be a mechanical engineer, and then I decided to be, to do electronic engineering because I became very interested in TVs and radios and so on. So I went and did electronic engineering in the University of Limerick, and switched to computer engineering after two years because I just became more interested in that specific area.

What years were those?

Well I went to college in, I did my leaving cert in ’89, so I started college in ’89, graduated in '95, sorry, '94 originally, but things weren't good then, the Celtic Tiger hadn't exactly kicked off. So it was difficult if you hadn't got a good honours degree in computer engineering to get a job at that stage. So I just stayed back and did a year diploma in marketing. And then things had started to take off at that stage, so I, I went to Cork and worked in a small company starting off, and again, that was, because it was a small company, you had to be quite
entrepreneurial, entrepreneurship, as they call it, because you had to fill in a lot of different roles. So that was good experience, I think it helped me to think positively about entrepreneurship. But then ...

What was the company?

It was Solastay (spelling??) Unlimited so it was, it was developing kind of engineering solutions for, in terms of CAD/CAM they call it, Computer Aided Design/Computer Aided Manufacturing. I was involved in sales there, and interestingly I was, the Internet has, I mean, the World Wide Web had kind of just come about, just very recently at the time, so not too many people knew about it, but I knew that we should be on the web at the same time, and we should start marketing on the web when there was no such thing as web marketing of the day. This was '95, certainly not in this country, not too many countries did it. So I was involved in web marketing back then, you know, fourteen years ago. And it was probably another five years before I saw an actual, a job titled web marketing, you know. So again, a good experience, but the opportunity came to move to Apple computers in Cork, so I took that. And then I moved from there after thirteen months, I was nine months in the first company, I was thirteen months in Apple.

What were you doing at Apple?

In Apple I was doing software test, a cross platform test, so I was making sure Apple computers could network well with Windows computers and Windows software could run properly on Apple computers and so on. And then an opportunity arose to go to Motorola in Cork, so it was, I mean, the times were good, the opportunities were getting better and better, the money was getting better, and I was a young lad, so you know, I kind of took those opportunities. And moved to Motorola, I was there for six months, and then I moved to Analogue Devices here in Limerick. So three multinationals in a row, all good experience, good learning experiences and improved the skill set as I went along.

But then I kind of started to realise, I mean, at the end of '99, that as good as the jobs, as good as the money was, and as good as the lifestyle was, I was kind of feeling, this just isn't for me, you know, I'm not getting anything out of this. So I was kind of at a stage in my life where, what age was I? I was 28, I guess, about 28 and I was kind of thinking, you know, it's time to either settle down or go and do what I've always dreamed of doing kind of thing. So I was thinking about buying a house, pity I didn't really at the time considering what happened afterwards, but instead of that, I just decided to cash it all in, sold my car, packed in the job, and decided I wanted to be, to run my own business. I just didn't feel fulfilled, I suppose, in a sense, working for other people, as good as the lifestyle and the salary was. So I went from living in Limerick, living a fairly urban lifestyle and moved back home to my rural background and ...

Where was that, the town?

In Newcastle West, but I mean, we're a few miles out from Newcastle West. County Limerick, so on the way towards Tralee, Killarney, back to Kerry. So it was quite a step back, you know, a lot of people, a lot of my friends were kind of rubbing their heads thinking what's, what's wrong with this guy? Why would he give up a well-paid job, a good lifestyle and move home? Move home to live with his parents again? You know, because I decided I'm not going to spend the money on a house, I'm going to invest in business instead. But it was just, I felt like I wasn't getting anything out of that lifestyle, really, not what I wanted to. So I made the sacrifices to start up my own business. And I'm still, to this day, I'm not earning anything as much as what I was earning back then ten years ago, or I'm not having anything like the lifestyle, I would say. But I'm still a lot happier doing what I'm doing because I'm doing it for myself. And I feel like, you know, I feel like I'm really achieveing things for myself and not for other people. And I also, I also feel like I'm really contributing because what I'm doing is hopefully going to generate more jobs and employment.

So, in the beginning, you described a few of the projects. Could you describe the business that you set up?
In the first business? Well, ironically, I wasn't actually that sure, I guess, what I wanted to do. But I knew it was going to be in the Internet area. So for the start, the plan was just to be a web developer, to set up websites for companies. And it was a time when you still could without having any great expertise in any one side of web development. You didn't need to be a brilliant programmer, you didn't need to be a great graphic designer, you could do a bit of each and still do a fairly good website. But then, shortly afterwards, these web studios, web development studios came along and, you know, where it was turning out much better websites than the cowboy, working alone, not that I was a cowboy, but a lot of cowboys were out there who didn't really have any of these expertise. It was a very competitive area. Everyone was getting into the web development business.

But coincidently, a project, or a hobby, what had been a hobby for about three years at that stage, which I started in '98, was an online forum. Because my brother, I said he was an entrepreneur, he started off as a greyhound trainer, and it's a very niche sport. But there is greyhound racing in the states, Ireland, England, Australia, New Zealand, Guam, Macau in China, you know, it is an actual international sport in Europe, Sweden as well. But it's a fairly niche sport, and it's what appealed to me about it, even though I was never interested in the sport, it appealed to me, the fact that, I recognised, I suppose, back then that the Internet was all about niches. So there was an opportunity there to be the biggest in this niche.

So we started off a kind of an online forum. I started one off, actually, for my brother, attached to his website. He was the first greyhound trainer that we were aware of to have a website. That grew quite quickly to get a fairly large audience because it was the only one. But then maybe about a year and a half after it started, an American one started up and I was kind of in competition with it for quite a while. So I got to know the American girl running that, and we said, after about two years, we said, look, you know, instead of competing with each other, it's quite a niche area, let's just come together. And so we did. We started up a business called Global Greyhounds, and that was the first business as such we started up, the first company. And that grew quite a bit, but then in plateaued because it is, as I say, a niche sport.

So that has developed into kind of a lifestyle business, it's there in the background, it's kind of my cash cow, in a sense. That's what allows me to go off and to research other projects. Because it's very much automated at this stage, just generating a certain amount of income from advertising and subscriptions and so on. And in fact, my partner in, she was in Michigan at the time, she moved to Louisiana then, I've only met her once in person, and that was just coincidental in a sense really. It wasn't the plan, meeting or anything, so there's another example. I've been in business with her for, you know, ten years almost and I've only met her once for about ten minutes. But we successfully run a business through email and telephone exchange.

And she was a trainer, she would travel to train the dogs?

No, she wasn't a greyhound trainer either. She owned a few greyhounds, she was interested in, she was much more interested in greyhound racing than I was, as such. I was never really interested in the sport, it was just a kind of, the opportunity arose, let's say. My brother was interested, all my family were interested in it, I was kind of the black sheep of the family in that sense. I wasn't really interested in the sport, ironically, but you know, the website grew, I was interested in the website side of things. So that grew, and it's still kind of one of the biggest greyhound racing websites out there. But it's not worth putting any, much effort into it because it's, it's reached a plateau, and the business is in decline in the states, it is, yeah. And that's our biggest market. It's a lot of animal rights people are kind of getting it out of business.

So you're mentioning all these different projects and businesses that are parallel at certain stages. How would you describe your typical day, work day? Like you wake up every morning...

Yeah, it's very, it's very disorganised. It's just that, you know, I've tried to, I've tried to maybe get into this getting things done. Have you heard of that GTD philosophy? There's books about getting things done and being more organised and that. But it's just not for me. I'm kind of a disorganised person, but I'm kind of, it's kind of organised chaos in a sense that I can get more done by attacking things in a disorganised fashion. I mean, there's a lot of, I
read quite a bit of stuff about that actually, this idea of multi-tasking and can we achieve more multi-tasking or are we just, are we splitting our attention and getting nothing done? I find that I work very well as a multi-tasker and I can, you know, I can write an email one second, take a phone call another second, browse the web, do a bit of research, I juggle all that stuff, I think, very efficiently. And I find it much more, much more satisfying than being very organised, I guess. And I think that's, I think that's an approach that a lot of people are going to have to take.

There's a guy called Stowe Boyd, have you heard of him? S-T-O-W-E Boyd. And he, I mean, is it Linda Stone was the girl who came up with the idea of continuous partial attention, this idea that we're not paying full attention to anything, we're continuously paying partial attention to a whole lot of things. And there's a lot of argument about whether we're actually being more productive or less productive because of that. But Stowe Boyd has an interesting philosophy. He feels that we might be actually less productive personally, but we're more productive as a group. So the individual output might be less, but the group output and the network might actually be more. So it's almost kind of getting back to the ant colony type of thing where, you know what I mean, it's kind of a, these network effects kick in.

So in a sense, I can see that, being, partaking in discussions on Twitter and these other social networking forums might seem like a total waste of time a lot of time, but you get very interesting network effects out of it at the same time. For instance, this outvesting project that I've been involved in for the last two months arose very much in an ad-hoc fashion out of reading blogs, listening to feedback on Twitter about it.

So outvesting, just to describe it to you, was we saw a few people, I noticed a few people kind of complaining, and justifiably so to a degree, about the lack of venture capital, the lack of angel funding in this country for, to get businesses off the ground. But at the same time I felt like we should stop winging and whining about it and just start helping ourselves. We should have more of a, a kind of American philosophy of, of getting ourselves boot strapping, so to speak, getting ourselves off the ground by scrounging a bit of money from family and friends. We don't seem to have enough of a culture of doing that in this country. So one, one of the blog posts that gives rise to this idea was a girl in Cork who has a start-up company and she wanted to attend a conference in the U.S., the TechCrunch50 conference, which could give her a lot of exposure and help to get her business off the ground. But she said it was just too costly, she couldn't get the money together to do it.

So the figure of 5,000 euros came up there, which coincidently was the figure that, of money that I got from Social Entrepreneurs Ireland last year, 2008, when I applied to them with a project, an idea to do telepresence for the elderly and the socially marginalised. I'll get back to that maybe in a minute. But that was 5,000 we got as a level one awardee with Social Entrepreneurs Ireland. But we established this 5,000 euros as a kind of a baseline figure that you could actually, as an entrepreneur, you could actually do something useful with, not a whole lot. You're not going to do a whole pile with it, but you can buy some computer equipment, office equipment, you can maybe attend a few trade shows and so on. So I said, well, you know, why don't we just do a whip around here, and just get a hundred people to donate 50 quid to a fund, a 5,000 fund, and have business start-ups apply for that fund.

So I termed, came up with the term outvesting for that because it's not investing, it's specifically, you're just donating money. You're not, you don't want anything back for the money that you contributed to this project. And I suppose there's a few people thinking, Jesus, that's not going to work. But within a few days, we had a hundred people had pledged 50 euros to that. We collected the 50 euros through PayPal within a week or two weeks, and we had 60 applicants that applied in the following weeks, 60 start-up companies applied, and we're now in the judging round at the moment, this week. So on Sunday night, judging finishes and on Monday morning, we announce the winner. All that's happening on Twitter really. The judging process is even happening, even happening on Twitter, in an open format. People are assigning points to the different companies. So it's a very open, collaborative, ad-hoc type of project, a perfect example of a network effect, which is achieving something without ever anybody coming together and kind of organising it and spec-ing out the project and going through a whole load of, in fact, I told at the start that this had to be a light weight project for a light weight fund.
The second you introduce any kind of complication into it, it's just not going to work. So some people were saying, you should actually, you should write an application to take all this information into a database. And I said, no, we'll just do it on Twitter like we organised the thing in the first place on Twitter. I mean Twitter's a simple, an information hub as you can possibly have, 140 characters, you've seen it, Anthony, yeah. And then people were saying when it came to the voting process, they were coming up with ideas. Now, some of the, some interesting and good ideas, all very valid, but they wanted to do, programme it again like, you know, I said no. The second you start adding in complications, programming steps, you start reducing the fluidity, the momentum behind this thing. So we said, no, let's just judge it on Twitter like we've done previously. So happily, that's actually working quite well. A few people objected to voting in public, and we said, OK, we'll take your votes in private if you ...

So you spend many hours a day online, on Twitter, reading blogs? You're spending most of your day on the computer?

I spend a lot of time, yeah. And I suppose still a lot of people would say, gees, you can't be too busy, spending a lot of time, but I feel it's very important to, it's such a fast-paced world that you can actually miss out on quite a lot by not, you have to be very focused in one sense in which information you choose to filter, and that's a very important word, filtering is very important. And I've learned how to filter over the years, I've learned how to scan stuff very quickly. Like I use RSS feeds to just, to bring in feeds into a feed reader. I don't pop from website to website to website, from blog to blog to read stuff anymore. It's just terribly inefficient. And I have, I use tagging and I use search key words and this kind of thing to really focus in on what I'm looking at. And I've just become quite attune to processing large amounts of information and zeroing in on exactly what is important and what's not important. It's kind of a skill that I suppose you can't teach people, but people learn it.

Would you define yourself as a nomadic worker?

Yeah, I mean, even though ... Well, to me, OK, I mightn't be the atypical or the typical nomadic worker, I'm not on the, I'm not like a salesman on the road every day. But I am, I mean, even on a daily basis, I work between two different locations because it just so happens that my sister's house is a very quiet house whereas my own house is quite a noisy house during the day, so I usually work in her house in the daytime with my laptop. She has broadband, she has wireless broadband, right. And then I come back to my own house in the evening.

How many miles away?

It's only a few miles, three or four miles apart. But then typically, I'll drive into the hotel in Newcastle West to have a meeting with one of my partners, Keith, maybe a couple times a week or a couple times a month, depending on what's happening. You know, I'd come in here into Limerick, meet up with the lads like you saw there, I'd come to these open coffees. I'm on the road more actually lately with these different projects, with the Social Entrepreneurship thing we have to go to Dublin quite a bit so I'm up and down to Dublin a lot more recently. I'm going up next week and I'll be going up the week afterwards. And I'll, I'll usually, I know places I can pull in along the way, hotels that have open wi-fi so I can get on the Internet. And, you know, recently I've decided, like instead of just driving straight to Dublin, I'll make a day of it. I'll spend maybe six, seven hours driving to Dublin because I prefer to pull into these places and actually do an hour of work, drive on up the road, pull into the next place, do another hour of work, then, it just breaks up the journey, instead of sitting in the car for three hours. So that is, I suppose that's quite nomadic, and becoming more so, becoming more so really. That probably doesn't fit in with your image of a nomadic, does it?

Well, actually a definition of nomadic work is not set in stone, you know. I worked with concepts of nomadism, but that refers to pastoral, traditional nomads. And the high-tech understanding of nomadic work is not as holistic. But, you can understand it more loosely, and use the word nomadic the way you want, as long as the definition is consistent or coherent.
Well that's, that would be my understanding of it, as kind of wherever I lay my hat, that's my home, wherever I lay my laptop, that's my office. That's just my understanding, and I am quite mobile in the sense that I do move around and work in different places. I mean, here today now, like I mean, after this meeting is over, I'll probably just log into the laptop for a couple of hours here.

And so are all your partners and colleagues nomadic workers as well?

No, they're not, there's a variety of set-ups, you know. Some of them are, some of them are academics, some of them are, yeah most of them are entrepreneurs I guess really. But they all have different situations. Some of them have their own offices and would divide their time between half nomadic, half office. I can't say there's any real consistency there between them, you know. I must just take a loo break, be back in a second.

And that's, I mean, that's probably another part of it, is the time flexibility thing. I work away until midnight a lot of the time, you know. I don't have a 9 to 5 or, most people don't, I guess, but.

Yeah, but what do you think about this: I interviewed several corporate workers, and they have Blackberries and lots of responsibilities. I asked them if they have any discipline on what time to stop working, say at 5 p.m. and go home. So, do you have any type of discipline of when it's time to have fun, family or friends?

Yeah, I suppose I'm probably, I mean, I'm different to a lot of people in a sense, I'm still unmarried like, I don't have a family. So I have kind of more time to myself really, I don't have responsibility to that degree. If I did, I'm sure I would decide, OK, that's it, I'm clocking out here at 8 o'clock and I'm going to have dinner with the family and I'm going to spend time with the kids. But I don't, so again, I'm not typical here, maybe but, I love what I do, so I guess it would be my hobby if I didn't, if it wasn't my job. So it's very hard to just say, to divide the time between that's my job and, because they're the same thing, my job and my hobby. I recognise that it's unhealthy some of the time but at the same time, is it unhealthy to be doing what you love all the time?

Your leisure, do you have leisure activities?

Yeah, sure, sure, I mean. A few years ago I was bad, OK, I was nearly all day I was on the laptop. And I had stopped completely watching TV or going to the movies or whatever. But now I'm trying to vary it a bit, so I have gotten into a few TV programmes.

I was quite sporting until a few years ago, but I'm just getting too old for it now, you know. So, yeah, I'll try to get out and go for a walk or a cycle or whatever. But, you see, I'm not, I'm kind of limited in that sense, you know. I'm not very interesting, that's why I said to you I probably won't be that interesting. I don't have a whole pile of hobbies besides, besides what I do on the Internet and technology. I mean, that's just my passion and that's what makes it easy for me. I guess I'm lucky that way.

I'm trying to understand alternative types of work, right, out of the office style 9 to 5 jobs, the corporate job, and then the nomadic worker. And the other time you were describing to me, some new office styles. Can you recap on that? You used some terms for software programmers who rotate offices and each ones houses.

Oh yeah, sorry, yeah, that was called Jelly, that particular, Jelly that was called. Yeah, I'm not too sure if I understand the history of it like, but it was ...

Do you know people who do that, Jelly?

Not here, not here. I'd like to see it here, and again, that's why we kind of put the, a pause button on the, on the Nom---k project that we were working on because we felt it was just a bit too early here yet. But certainly, that seems to be a growing trend in the states, is this Jelly thing, which is, you know, I mean, the first thing was the co-working, I guess, this idea of, for freelancers like myself, you would call me a freelancer, I guess I am, who didn't
particulary want to work from home and found it just too noisy to work in a cafe, and Starbucks was your typical example, people used to be working in Starbucks. They decided let's get together and work in a common office space.

So they weren't the one company, but they were all a group of freelancers who found they got benefits from working in a shared office space. Of course there's the sharing, sharing printers and expenses and so on. But the key thing to co-working is the idea that you're, that you're, that you have a lot of different skills in the room. And there's a, there's a certain magic that can happen in that situation. So there's a very much an entrepreneurial aspect to it that, OK, they're all freelancers working on their own projects, but there's great opportunity there for, to come up with other ideas by knocking these people's heads together with different skill sets. And of course that's very much a Silicon Valley thing and it's wonderful to see that. But it's not just in the Valley that's happening. That's co-working. And then, as I understand it, Jelly then is kind of taking the next step and saying, OK, instead of working in this office space, why not work from our homes, but not individually in our homes. Why don't we all work together in one person's home this week and one person's home next week. And it's very interesting. I can't see that taking off here any time soon really. I'd say it's very much a cultural thing.

And I recall I asked you about noise, when lots of guys are in the same room, and you explained how people prevent being disturbed.

Yeah, and it's very much an individual thing, that is. I mean I know some people can't work with music on and some people have to have music on to work. But I think you kind of get used to it, you kind of just block out disturbances if you're in that type of environment, I mean, people working from Starbucks. I mean, that must be a very distracting environment to work from as well, but a lot of people can do it.

You mentioned the headsets.

Yeah, they are noise reducing, reduction headsets if you want ... If you want to do that kind of thing. I don't know how well they work in that environment. I think they're meant for a continuous hum, like an airplane or a train or whatever. But a lot of the people I would know of that persuasion, I mean programmers and so on, they don't tend to have any problem with distractions. Programming, you kind of, I think as a programmer, you develop skills of really just blocking out distractions and zeroing in on what you're doing. And you don't need to be, I think, anyway terribly focused on it at any one stage, it's a kind of ...

Just to clarify something, you are a computer engineer, right?

I did computer engineering, but I was never, I was never as such a good engineer.

Yeah, but are you a software developer, a programmer, or a businessman...

I'm a jack of all trades, master of none, really. I am, yeah, and I suppose that's what you have to be as an entrepreneur, as a freelancer, you have to, so I'm not great at anything, but I'm able to do a lot of things. I know a little bit about web marketing, a little bit about programming, a little about, a little about systems administration, you know, a little bit about accounts, whatever. I mean, you have to have all those skills when you're ...

And these are the basic skills of a leader, of the organisational entrepreneur leader, right?

I guess, I guess ... Well, yeah, I suppose, you know, that's whatever you like doing, is I really like being kind of a systems analyst, kind of having a bird's eye view. So that's why I keep my eye on a whole pile of things that are going on. And what I'm good at doing is seeing where the synergies, the synergies possibly are and bringing pieces together and spotting where things are converging and where the technology is going. So that's kind of what I've done as I'm talking about the two projects. I saw that there was a convergence going on between tele presence and virtual presence. And it's very early days yet in terms of that convergence, but I think it's going to happen.
And what types of occupations would be ideal for the Jelly arrangement? What types of guys would get together ...

I think that, to me that seems like it's mainly Internet type web development, kind of hacking, programming, I don't necessarily think that would work much outside of that. It might do, I must check up on it and see what kind of people are actually doing it. But I think it's mainly programmers. I guess, there's no reason it shouldn't work.

And the next question actually, as I use the word guys, I must ask what about women? How do you see the role and experiences of women working in the high-tech sector?

I think, you might even see it here today, even though this is called open coffee and it's meant to be about entrepreneurship, it started off as a kind of, we used to even call it geek meets one time, just to kind of take the piss out of ourselves really. But it was because it was a bunch of guys who were interested in technology mainly who started off. But we've made it very clear since then that it's not just, we want more people from different backgrounds. And there are, now, you'll see there's only one or two girls out there, one or two women out there today, and that unfortunately seems to be the case. And when I was doing engineering in college, there was only, less than ten percent, I'd say, in the class was women doing computer engineering. I don't know what the statistics are now, it's probably different now.

So unfortunately, I mean, and then I went to work with three multinationals where it was, except Apple, OK, in Apple because it was software test and a lot of the people working there didn't actually have engineering degrees, there was quite a, I suppose it was nearly 50-50 women to men in that situation. But that was the first and last time that I've been involved in that situation professionally where there was that higher percentage of women. Every other place I've gone and worked, the department has been dominated, a male dominated department unfortunately. I'd love to see it being different, but it seems the reality of it is it's not, at least here in Ireland, I don't know about elsewhere.

Have you had experience of working with females for your projects?

Well, I mean, my business partner in the Global Greyhounds project is a woman, obviously. And that's been a very positive experience.

What types of comments do your colleagues make about women in the high-tech sector?

Just that there aren't enough of them, really, I mean. I mean, I think we'd all like to see more women involved in the high-tech sector. I don't see any, I can't recall every seeing anything negative like or any stereotyping or wanting to keep it that way at all. It's just there should be more, why aren't there more, but I guess it's a fact of life that there just aren't more. Do you have any answers for that? What's the reason for it? Is it just that, can you stereotype it and say look, men are more interested in technology and women aren't?

Well, from what I can conclude from several interviews is that it starts in an educational system, back to high school or to primary school, where women are not encouraged to study math or sciences. And then they go onto humanities, education, psychology and related fields.

I know, but, I'm sure that's probably part of it, all right, but you know, even in my own family, the guys are the ones interested in the technology, the girls never really were. And I see with my own little nephews and nieces, without ever being told like, you know, the girls typically go for the dolls, and the lads, the young boys typically go for the, the kind of the racing car or whatever. So is it not just part of human nature, I wonder, you know. Maybe we can do more to encourage it, I'm sure we can, but I presume there's a little bit of human nature in there as well.
So do you see the situation changing any time soon?

I don't really, I mean, you're probably more aware of what the statistics are currently. But I mean, unfortunately, in this country, there seems to be, have been a trend away from science and technology in the last number of years. Everyone seemed to be wanting to be a lawyer, solicitors, accountants, this kind of thing. I don't know.

Even though Ireland is a main ICT exporter.

It has been, yeah, but will we continue to be? I don't know. Actually, I think there's a trend back toward sciences now, which is good to see, but there for a while, the Celtic Tiger I think was bad for science and technology. It seemed to me that ...

You think it was bad?

I think it was bad, yeah.

But lots of technology parks and ICT start-ups happened during the Celtic Tiger, and the multinationals also came...

They did, yeah, but I think that the young people at the same time seemed to veer more towards, towards what they, I mean, is sexy, is that the word for it? Like, you know, I mean engineering doesn't seem that sexy. Whereas you see a lot of lawyers on TV don't you? I think the, maybe I'm stereotyping here now, but it seems to me that the young people, there's a lot missing in terms of career, career guidance in this country, and they tend to go with the fashion. It's almost like it became unfashionable.

But isn't Ireland a reference in terms of software development or niche types of software development, plus Dell was here, Ireland was the main exporter of computers in Europe.

Sure, yeah.

So how, how do you see this situation changing? Is it getting worse?

I still, I'm not that well up on it to be honest with you. I can only talk from a personal kind of family point of view. And in my experience, like I don't see enough interest at all in science and technology really. My family members of that age, going to school and going to college now, they just, it's not, I remember my nephew like, in particular, who was, who is in the University of Limerick now and he's doing business, and he seemed to me to have a real interest in technology growing up, he was big into computer games and, you know, mobiles, whatever. And I used to try to encourage that, but you know, when he was in his teens, it was kind of, sure, that's not cool like, you know, there's nothing cool about technology. He saw other stuff as being cool, be it business or accounting or lawyers, stuff that you see on TV like. I mean, CSI, I mean, even, obviously it's been seen, it's being shown in the states that that's encouraged an awful lot of young people to get into ...

Forensics.

Yeah, so they do, they do follow the fashions, there's no doubt about that, they do. And it's, thank God they're showing that here now as well and it's encouraging people to get into it. But they really do follow the fashions.

But have you had any experiences with a technology park? Like you worked for these three multinationals. Two were in Cork, the third, where was ...

Analogue Devices in the Raheen Industrial Estate.
How do you see the technology parks in this midwest Ireland?

I don't really have a view on them. I mean, they don't figure in my experience one way or the other, you know.

Have you ever considered like opening your business in a technology park?

It hasn't come up for me, you know, because I don't see the reason to open my business in a technology park, I'm not a manufacturing company. And I see myself, that's why I'm encouraging you to look at this video that Richard McMahon has put up, I'll send you a link to that this evening. It's, you know, he's never going to be a massive business, but it's quite a good business he has going there. I don't know, is there about maybe 10 people in the company and they're all working.

That's very interesting, because it makes me think about questions of remote working. For my interviewees at the technology park, I asked whether they could work from home, or employees work from home. And the general stance from most was that "no, I prefer them to be located in the office because of inefficiencies, and risk of miscommunication ... How do you react to this?

That's bull, that's just old-fashioned bull, that's what it is. I think that's dying, that's dinosaur type thinking there that's dying out because it's just, you know, it's people can't lose this idea of I lose control, I lose, it's power, power trip control freak type stuff from my point of view. I'd be very much thinking in line with the way Richard McMahon thinks, is I don't care how many hours a day they're working or where they're working from, as long as they're just getting the work done. It doesn't matter, he doesn't have a clue how long his employees are working. All he knows is they're getting the work done. And I'd be very happy to work with people like that. I don't give a damn what they're doing, what they look like, where they're working from as long as they're getting the work done. That's dying out, that old-fashioned ...

But what do you think about the risk of miscommunication, of you know, saying I want this and then two weeks later you come up with something different?

No, I mean, why is the communication any better when you're there talking face to face with someone than you can be with a phone, with the instant messaging, in writing? In fact, it's often better in writing via email than it is verbally, isn't it? That's where the miscommunication happens, face to face, verbal, because you're maybe taking too much by body language. I mean, we're getting there anyway, technology wise, I mean, video conferencing and virtual worlds and that's why we're, I'm really interested in what we're doing, is this virtual world is the idea of coming together inside in this virtual space to collaborate. So we're getting around that. To me, that's only a bull shit excuse, lack of trust, you know.

How do you see the relationship between face to face interaction and trust? How do you trust someone you have never seen? Do you have see the person first?

That's a good question. I think, and a lot of what helps the trust is getting to know people beforehand. So a lot of the people I would work with would be people that I got to know through social networks. So that's an interesting dynamic that you notice in social networks, is you get to know people over a space of time, and you get to know from the way other people interact with them. You get a good idea of what type of people these are, you know. Other people aren't necessarily saying positive, how this guy's a great guy or whatever all the time. But you get a sense of how much other people trust this person by the way that they communicate with them in the social networks. And you get a very good idea of what kind of person that person is that can't be faked, you can't fake that, you can't fake a hundred different people communicating with this person over a length of a couple of years in this particular way. You can't be faking then that he's that type of personality. You can have a very, very strong sense, probably a better sense all together of what that person is like than you would through face to face meetings over a short length of time.
So these are the people who I have actually developed relationships with, and have, I worked in that outvesting project for instance, I came up with the idea like, but then this guy called John Keyes in Kilkenny who I've never met in person said, I'd like to help you with that. And because I knew John Keyes from a lot of interaction with a lot of other people that I respect online, on Twitter and LinkedIn and these other social networks, I knew that John Keyes was a good guy, a trustworthy guy, or at least I believed he was. And then when he started working with me, it proved me, he just lived up completely to the image of what I thought he was like. He was hard working, you know, took responsibility, very trustworthy, absolutely. So it proved me right. And that's just one example of the kind of thing that has happened over and over again. Face to face, it's no big deal now. It's not that important.

In terms of social networking online, Twitter, LinkedIn, where are you and these people located? Are they all in Ireland? Are they Irish overseas? If you could break down...

It varies, it varies, OK. What I have is I have a number of different personas, well not personas, I have a number of different profiles online, OK. I don't use Facebook that much personally myself because it's very much a personal family type thing I think for most people. But on the likes of Twitter, I'll have a number, I have about six different log-ins, OK, for different, not personas as such, but different profiles that I want to expose to different groups of people. So my typical one is mainly Irish people, OK. But then for a specific project that I'm working on, I specifically go for educators, and those educators can be in Ireland, they can be in England, they can be in America. So it can, it varies according to topic and project. I don't have one network, I have multiple networks. You understand?

OK, yeah, yeah. Have you ever lived overseas?

No, no I haven't. Not ...

Have you ever had opportunities or offers to move overseas? Have you ever thought about it?

I would have been uninclined to if I had the offer. I'm kind of a bit of a country lad, I'm a bit of a home boy, I guess. I love travelling, I love just seeing different places. I'd be more open to it now actually, I guess. I wouldn't mind living away for a few weeks, months, but this is, this is home really. I'll keep coming back to here, I suppose.

OK, and returning to issue of work and talented workers, would they prefer these new types of work arrangements or the conventional office job?

I'd imagine they do, yeah. I'd imagine employers are going to have to be flexible to keep, to keep the best hands, absolutely. Because, none, there's a certain, I won't say arrogance, but there's a certain confidence to anyone who's really good at what they do, so why do they want someone looking over their shoulder? Everyone has a different pattern of getting their best productivity and it mightn't meet the image of what a typical employer thinks it should be. So yeah, I'd say they're going to have to cop on and just (inaudible) flexibility if they want to keep them, get the best people. Most of the best people I know are, yeah, they want that independence.

Final question. In terms of improvement, you described all these new concepts about new styles of work and how things could be in Ireland. You mentioned the Silicon Valley a couple of times, maybe as a reference. So what types of changes would you like to see being taken place in Ireland?

John, sorry, John, you're not going away, yet, are you? You're not going away, yet, are you? Yeah, we're nearly finished here. OK, grand, yeah, OK. Sorry. He could disappear quickly enough. Keep an eye on him.

Typically, me being a techy now, I suppose I'm kind of focused on the technology side of things. But obviously the big one is broadband, just the broadband situation here is terrible compared to other countries in Europe at least. And it's becoming vital to every area. That's just one. Cultural change, I want to see more cultural change to
acceptance of these more fluid, fluidic, whatever the proper word is, styles of work. We're going to see that, like we're going to see these dinosaur attitudes dying out, but there needs to be, it needs to happen more quickly. I'd like to see more infrastructure there, I suppose, for people like myself. You need to be able to, you need to be able to get together in ad-hoc situations more easily in a lot of places. Even this hotel here has adapted a bit to what we do, you know, they're encouraging this kind of thing now. Sorry, now, I'm kind of, it's such an open-ended, it's such an open-ended question, I'm kind of ...

I could probably get back to you in an email with a lot more answers, but I'm struggling to think of them here.

Just a clarification question I forgot to ask you about. Do you think that these new technologies increase your productivity? And that, in telecommunication, do you think it dispenses with travel and mobility, or how connectivity affects mobility?

That's a good question, actually, and that's kind of a paradox isn't it in a sense. I won't say it's making me travel more, but I just happen to be travelling more recently because they're, that's because there's still people who insist on being face to face. I think in time it will do. I mean I do, I very much have this kind of a science fiction kind of a minority report style image in my head, the Star Trek Holodeck probably more so, where we'll work in kind of a cubical that won't be like the cubical that you have in an office, but you'll have this, a room, I think in every house, you'll actually have a room, of course you do, in a lot of houses, you have the office room, but I'm talking about kind of an almost Holodeck room where you can go in and you can sit down and you can be virtually, like virtual world wise, wherever you want to be. And that's, the technology is getting there. That's what we're working on. So if you want to one second be surrounded by your colleagues, you can be.

Like in a hologram?

A holodeck, holodeck, hologram, yeah. Absolutely, you can be. If you want to be on your own, you can be. If you want to feel like you're working beside the beach, you can be. I think absolutely in time there's going to be no need, and I know that the trend in the world at the moment is towards urbanisation at an alarming rate. There's way more people living in urban centres now than there used to be. I think that's going to reach a plateau, I really do, fairly soon. And I think it's going to go back toward a more dispersed lifestyle.

Yeah, but you see one of the attractors of living in the city is not because of work but because of lifestyle and the consumption. To see, to be seen, to enjoy the city, the amenities of the city. So even though people could live in the countryside because of work, technologies and remote connections, they would still prefer to live in the city...

OK, maybe that's my bias as a person who was born and raised in the countryside and I can't, I could never see myself settling down to live in the city. I just, I want to live in the countryside. I can't, yeah, maybe it's just my bias.

That's the pattern in Chicago now, like. All the people, young, single move to Chicago, they live in Chicago for ten years with a consumerist lifestyle, then they get married, have kids, then they want to settle down, and then they move out towards the suburbs.

OK, so it's just really to mingle, it's the mating game that's bringing them to town. Yeah. Yeah, but, I suppose I just don't really know enough about that. You know a lot more about that kind of stuff than I would, but I suppose maybe it's just more aspirational on my part to think that, well, I do think though that people will kind of rise up against the growing urbanisation trend. I think in time to come, people will get back towards their country roots.

But in terms of the technology and how that increases productivity, how increases in productivity affect work rhythms?
That probably depends very much in the nature of your work, but I don't necessarily see that as a trend. And again, just going back to the Richard McMahon interview, talk that he gave there, he said like he doesn't know how long his employees are working, and he doesn't care because they're achieving the work that he lays out for them. And again like, it's a different situation for a freelancer who's selling their time for money, I suppose there is the temptation there as a freelancer or a consultant, you're just selling your time for money. But as a business owner, you're creating a business that should be able to, the ultimate aim is that the business should be able to run itself or your employees should be able to run your business, sort of a cash flow quadrant when you go from employee to self employed to business owner to investor, which is the ultimate aim where your money is working for yourself.

So there is no reason once you get, move up along the quadrant that you should be wasting more of your time. You'd be out to, your business should be set up so that, I mean, in a sense, I think we're going to all become entrepreneurs. Or the idea of freelancing, even one of the lads out there today, he's a web developer, and he says he's getting sick of this. And he didn't say, I put these words into his mouth, I said because you're selling you're time for money, and he said, yeah, he said, I want to develop an application. He wants to develop a product, you have the product ties. So I think there's going to be a growing trend towards productisation skills. So stop selling your time for money, start selling your product. Develop a product that can sell itself when you're asleep, you know. That's the same, that's what a company is, it productises services or products. So I think, I think more and more people are going to become, these freelancers are going to become business owners, entrepreneurs. So I don't see then that you're going to be continually, you know what I mean?

Is there any novelty that you would like to talk about that I didn't ask? That I should know about that I have no idea that exists?

A novelty?

Like the Jelly idea, co-working ...

Yeah, look up the thing that Loic LeMeur a French guy who moved to the Valley recently enough, but he talks about a thing called the Travelling, I think, the Travelling Circus or, I think he calls it the Travelling Circus, which is kind of, he has a large group of friends and colleagues who are similar to him in that they're real global nomads. They are literally jet setters and they're going from conference to conference to business meeting to business meeting all over the world, and he's gotten to know a bunch of other people like him who he kept running into at these conferences. And he calls them the travelling circus. That really to me is the ultimate global nomad, if you haven't seen that concept before, or seen, heard about these guys, this travelling circus.

Yeah, so the travelling circus, what's their lifestyle? Are these people well off financially?

Yeah, they tend to be. I mean they probably don't consider themselves like, but by Jesus, by any standard they would be fairly well off. And they tend to be successful entrepreneurs. (Inaudible) I'm trying to think, what's his sister, he sold some company in Europe and then he went to set up another company in Silicon Valley, only last, only about two years ago he moved to the Valley and decided he had to be there because it was a kind of, it was based on similar technology to Twitter. It's interesting, his particular case is very interesting because he decided to set up a video Twitter. He decided Twitter was such a good idea, oh I can set up an even better type of idea with just video Twitter. So we'll just do video messages back and forth to each other. But it never took off.

What was fascinating was to see how quickly he changed, how quickly he changed path. And now (inaudible) he bought, because he got, he had a lot of respect, he got the venture capital, a lot of people invested in his business, that business wasn't going well, but he bought another business which had latched onto the Twitter thing as well to set up a Twitter client, which is a client piece of software just on your own computer to help you filter what's going on on Twitter to help you manage your use of Twitter. So, and he made a very good point about the best
companies are, or the best entrepreneurs aren't the ones who come up with the best ideas; they're the ones who can change track quickly, who can adapt very quickly. So he, and he wasn't too proud to say I'm going to make my video idea work, I'm going to make it work. And he could have been doing that for the next five years and it just wouldn't work. Instead he said, it's not working, he swallowed his pride, it's not working. Why don't we just buy another company that is working. And now he's becoming extremely successful. So I think he's a very good guy for you to read about, Loïc, L-O-I-C, LeMeur, M-E-U-R. He talks about the travelling circus.

And the travelling circus is a high-tech team? Are they all techies?

I don't think so. No, I don't think so. In fact, no, it's definitely not actually. You know the international Herald Tribune is it called? One of his guys, one of the guys he knows is a writer for that. So I think there's a few authors, different types of people. They'd all be obviously entrepreneurial like, but different types of background. That is one very interesting concept. What else? I think just keep an eye on the technology like, I think ...

Do you think Limerick is a good place in Ireland to study mobility of high-tech?

It's not bad actually because, and that's one of the problems like, to a degree, these meetings that I have to go now to in Dublin for instance, there's an awful lot more things in the last few months that I feel I should have attended, events that I should have attended, seminars or conferences. But they're all happening in Dublin, you know. And it's, you always have to weigh up, it's a day away at least, the expense, the travel, and I just find it really a nuisance. And that's the advantage people in Dublin obviously have, and again, that's probably the reason for urbanisation to a degree. But therefore, the people away from Dublin are better study subjects because they are probably more nomadic. I mean, Jesus, I had a meeting with a guy from Dublin there a couple of months ago. And he knows that I'm living in County Limerick, and he says, I'll meet you in Athlone so we'll go halfway so I'll meet you in Athlone. I wouldn't expect you to know the map of Ireland, Tony, but Athlone is up in the Northwest. I couldn't believe, this man was in his 40s, an intelligent guy, and he didn't realise Athlone was up in the North, was way away from the halfway between Dublin and Limerick. And it kind of opened my eyes to my God, these people ... He lives in Dublin, he's obviously lived in Dublin all of his life and had never been out of it because he couldn't, he was totally off the map.

So do you know many nomadic workers, as a young, single programmer who's always travelling and contracting for different companies. Is this a common thing or is this a stereotype?

Well, I suppose, to a degree, to a degree. I don't know is there any real commonality? There's, the ones that I know are probably a lot of the guys here, and they have varied backgrounds, very varied backgrounds. There's a few academics here, there's a few programmers, there's a few marketing people, different business people. I'm not too much of a help to you here on this one. But I haven't spotted any real ...

Yeah (inaudible) finished. I suppose you want to meet your partners before they leave.

Oh yeah, they're not going to run, I'll meet them in a while.

OK. Thank you!
This interview's confidential, right. Now we are not really interested in family names or company names. We don't think that we ask any sensitive questions.

That's fine. I really don't care about any of that. It's no problem.

OK. That's good. If you could describe yourself, your work, your job title if you have any, what you do nowadays?

You know, I am a web designer and developer and I basically help start up companies through the start up phase, through branding to product design, online marketing, start up capitalisation, everything sort of around web-based start ups.

So you are, you have your own business.

Yeah, yeah.

For how long have you been doing this?

I have been working for myself for about three years and I've been in this industry for about fifteen.

If you could tell me a little bit about your trajectory. What you did for studies and how you developed your career.

Oh God, OK. I went to university in the United States. I have an undergraduate degree in philosophy, I have a graduate degree in early childhood education. I taught preschool for one year before I discovered that I hated children. And the way I fell into what I do is actually accidental. I became very sick. I had glandular fever, or what's called mononucleosis in the U.S., and I had a really horrible case and I was basically bed-ridden for nine months. And I had a neighbour who was sort of a computer geeky guy, and he said, well I'll set you up with a computer that has this whole online thing on it, and this was in 1995, so this was, you know, the Internet was quite new at that point in terms of consumer reach anyway. And you know, it came bundled with, Internet Explorer came bundled with Windows 95, and this was really revolutionary. So he set me up with Internet access, and that meant for the, you know, sort of four hours I was awake every day, you know, I was basically screwing around on the Internet. And so I, it ...

Oh hello? I lost you for a second. Can you repeat the last ten seconds?

Yeah sure. Basically I, that's how I got online was through being ill. And it's sort of a very long story, but eventually I was hired as a contractor for a company delivering services for Microsoft online in the U.S. And I worked very closely with providing online technical support in their online tech support forums that existed way back in the day. And then I started to work with the UK team and eventually I was hired to move to the UK to do it, to do a business support, an online business support role for their business forum in the UK. And so from there I moved to being as a person delivering, in charge of delivering online services for a web start up company in London. And from there, I moved to being the director of online services for a new media agency in London, and I did that for about seven years, six or seven years. And then my husband and I moved from London to Cork, and I worked very
briefly for, as a marketing manager for a tech start up in Cork mostly because I needed the PRSI contributions as an employee. And then after a year I started, I struck out on my own. Doing what I’m doing now.

All your studies and work in America was in New York City?

Yes.

And then, was it real necessary for the company to move you to London?

Well, that's where the role was. It was a job for the UK to provide services in the UK. So, yes, I moved, I mean, in 2001 I moved to London. Yeah, I mean I was born and raised in New York City and, you know, I had compelling reasons to want to move to the UK.

OK. I think I read on your website that your husband is Irish?

My husband is, does hold an Irish passport, yes. He was actually born in London and I met him when I was living in London.

Was your decision to come to Ireland personal or business driven?

It was part, it was a combination of both really. I mean realistically what I like doing is working with start ups and I like working very closely with start ups and providing them with a sort of a range, a very broad range of services that they'd tend to find useful. Unfortunately, the nature of start ups is that all start ups are broke. So in order to be able to continue working with the kinds of really broke clients that I enjoy working with, that's not really financially feasible if you're living in the middle of London because the costs are incredibly high to live in London. Whereas it's much more financially feasible to do that if you're living in Cork where the cost of living is much lower. So it was sort of a work-life balance decision really. To move somewhere where we could work the way we wanted to work and still be able to afford to, you know, buy groceries.

Yeah, though wouldn't you say that the English countryside can be cheaper than Ireland.

No. I mean, who would live anywhere in England besides London? I mean, what is that? That's like a suburb. So, no, I mean the only place we would live in the UK would be London, and the cost of living, I mean, I could show you the math if you wanted to, but our costs of living in Ireland are dramatically lower than they were when we were living in London.

Before I move on, your family, can you briefly say something about your family background?

OK, I have, surprisingly I have one mother, she is a college graduate, she works in publishing. And she was a literary agent in New York City for about 35 years and she has recently retired. She was married to my father who left when I was 2 and moved to Canada, and he is, or was a journalist. And ended up writing food reviews and book reviews and all kinds of stuff for a newspaper in Toronto for a long time. And he is retired due to illness. And my mother remarried my, remarried when she met my step-father, so I have one step-sister who is a year older than me. And she is a school teacher, and she teaches gifted children in a magnet school in New York City. And I have a half sister who is the product of my mother and my step-father's marriage, and she is in law school, going to grow up to be a lawyer. And my step-father is a lawyer.

Yeah, I see on your website that you say sometimes you're a journalist. I know that you went into computer because of your health. But wouldn’t it be connected with your family background somehow, that you like writing and your mother ...
Well, I mean one of the things, now I mean the reason I blog is because I like writing. The reason I do what I do for a living is because I like organising things. I like organising websites, I like organising companies, I like organising, you know, the people that I work with and telling them what it is they need to be doing next and how they should do it to accomplish the goals that they've, you know, got or I've got for them. And no, I see, you know, there are always skills in your job that could transfer to another job or another career. And you know, everybody in my family is a published author of one kind or another. So I never really took that as being a particular job description. I mean, you can be a writer if you're a lawyer, you can be a writer if you're a school teacher, you can be a writer if you're a theatre director. It's just a skill, it's not a job description. So, you know, it is a skill that I use when I'm developing websites for clients or writing funding proposals for them or all kinds of stuff. But it's not how, it's not what I think of myself as doing for a living, you know. It's, I do blog to have a writing outlet. Because unfortunately, not that many people in Ireland hire me to write for them, you know. When I was in London, I had newspaper gigs and magazine columns and stuff like that. But the market here in Ireland is much, much smaller. So if I want to write, you know, something other than a grant proposal for a client, then you know, blogging is the obvious way to do that. And I enjoy it and I wish I had more time to do more of it.

Yeah, I think this connects with my next question about things that you like doing, but, first, could you describe first your typical work day?

Sure. I usually, I'm at my computer about twenty minutes after I wake up with a cup of coffee. And I sit there for the next eighteen hours. And then I go to bed. And you know, there's a break for dinner at about 9 p.m. and that's it. I mean, part of the thing about being self-employed and a freelancer is if you work the way I work under the kind of pressure that the projects I enjoy working on bring with them, you know, these are incredibly long days. So when I want to do something other than work, I generally have to take time off specifically to do that. I mean, I know that other people who work from home or work from themselves, either because they're different people or because they have different jobs from mine, are very good at sort of having, you know, an eight-hour day and then they can go do something else and sort of integrate, you know, having fun in their daily life. My work schedule doesn't really lend itself to that. So if I want to do something other than work, I have to actually put it down in my schedule and, you know, find two or three days to do that, whatever it is.

Your comment is very interesting. Are they all business owners or are they just employees of some company?

I don't know any employee who willingly works eighteen hours a day, seven days a week.

Yeah, this is my point, like you know, business owners, they usually work many more hours, right?

Well you have to. I mean, you know, you have to, that's what, you're building your own company or, you're, look, you're doing what you do, if you're a small business owner, you're doing what you do, well, I don't know about a small business owner, I mean, I'm sure there are people who do things like own printing companies who aren't passionate about printing, but I mean I do what I do because I love doing it and I'm passionate about doing it well. So if I want to hit the standards that I have for myself, it requires long working hours. But that's a, you know, that's a choice that I've made. If I didn't enjoy what I was doing, I'd go get a salary job somewhere, you know, doing something very related, like you know, art director or director of new media management or whatever. I mean, I have plenty of transferrable skills and a decent CV. I'm pretty sure I could land a salary job that would, you know, probably earn more money than I earn at the moment, but I wouldn't be as happy.

Lots of people go into start ups because they say it's a lifestyle choice. You know, there are crazy, plenty of crazy people like me who actually like working this way.

Yeah, I hear this sometimes, that people earn less but they're more autonomous or have a sense of self-expression at work, which tend to like.
Well my preference is that I may work longer hours and I may work longer hours and I may make less money, but I also choose who I work with, which means I don't have to answer to idiots, which is the most annoying thing about agency work. Like if you ever had anything to do with a big London agency or a big Dublin agency, it's just, it's a fucking nightmare from beginning to end. These people have the collective brain power of a rock. And it's incredibly frustrating, so.

Yeah, I think you blogged about this on your website. I recall reading something about your relationship with agencies ...

Yeah, we won't be doing that anymore.

And still about your family, I mean, your husband, what does he do for a living?

He does the same thing I do. He runs a website called KildareStreet.com. So he is a, he's a web developer and he has a background in print design. You know, for newspapers and magazines and print publications, stuff like that. So he works from home also, so we are together, you know, in the same house pretty much all day seven days a week.

So does he also share your opinion about, you know, earning less but lifestyle option ...

Yeah. Yeah, well, I mean, OK my husband runs this website and it's called KildareStreet and it's a non-partisan political website and he's been building that for about, I mean, it's his website and he's been working on that for about eighteen months. But it's unpaid. So I mean, he's doing what he is doing because he loves doing it. And I'm working, you know, eighteen hours a day because I love what I do and because somebody has to be earning an income in our household at the moment. So you know, that's not him because he is himself in start up phase, and you know, so that person is me at the moment and that's fine. So yes, he definitely feels very strongly about, you know, working at what you love to do and he is definitely doing that and you know that he's doing that because he's not making any money doing it. So he's, you know, that leaves why are you doing it? Well he's doing it because he loves it and it needs to be done, so.

OK, so do you work seven days a week?

Yes. I work seven days a week and, I mean, I probably work, in a thirty-day month, I would work twenty-eight, or twenty-nine days.

OK. I understand that you love your work and that it gives you lots of pleasure. But in terms of leisure or off time, do you do anything?

Yeah, I like to travel and I am actually leaving for a week in Prague on Sunday. And I am an obsessive gamer. So I will, I know this is incredibly nerdy and really lame, but for example, over Christmas, I am definitely not working for five days over Christmas, and aside from putting up the Christmas tree and unwrapping presents and making Christmas dinner over that five days, I will do nothing but game.

What types of games? I'm also a gamer, just curious.

Oh really? I love all kinds of, like anything massively multiplayer. Huge time suckage, huge time suckage! So like, you know, I am no longer allowed to log into WOW because, I'm also no longer to log into Second Life. I can't even log into fucking Farmville.

You can't? Were you banned?
No, because I, if I do, I’m there for four days, and the next thing you know, there’s a blog about Farmville, you know. Like I am very obsessive about the stuff that I do. So my plan for Christmas is that I will be playing the Sims 2 because it doesn't have an online component. My husband was like, I'll get you the Sims 3 for Christmas, and I was like, Christ, no, don’t do that. So yes, I try to limit my crack addiction.

OK, OK. So games is what you do for leisure.

Yeah, I knit, I mean, there's other stuff, I’m a fairly crafty person, I, you know, I like to knit.

I see you have a huge following on Twitter, about 3,000 people following you there.

Yeah, I have no idea why those people follow me and I didn't ask any of them to. Seriously, I think they're just there to count how often I swear.

Because I see that your Tweets are always directed to someone, they are not generic, it's just answering someone.

Well maybe not always, I mean, I think probably one out of twenty of my Tweets, every twenty is a general broadcast Tweet. But I think the reason people follow me is, there are a lot of people who just follow every designer that they've heard of. So you know, that, you're going to get, if you're a web designer and anybody's heard of you, you're going to get some number of people following you just based on that fact. But I think that other people who are actually interested in me as a person are probably interested because I do complain a lot about clients and, you know, stupid systems and, you know, but it’s the, if you're an employee you're never allowed to complain about that stuff, you know, because the clients pay the bills, whatever, you're always hoping for more work from that client, blah, blah, blah. If I have a client who's a complete shit, I'm never working with them again, and it's not, you know, there’s no filter. I don't need to filter. I'm not required by somebody else to filter. So a lot of, you know, I think that the only interesting thing my Tweets offer is that they are unfiltered opinion about the reality of working as a designer. Which, you know, sometimes is frustrating and pisses you off. People can be shitty.

In a sense, you are almost counter-cultural.

I guess, so, I mean ... Yes. Because I have the luxury of sitting outside the system.

Though your income comes from the system...

Not really, because the clients that I work with would generally be too small to ever go to a Dublin or a London agency. No agency, could you hold on for two seconds?

Yes, I can. (Phone interruption.)

Sorry. I have the longest ring tone in the world, so if I would have just ignored it it would have rung for ten minutes.

That's totally fine. You were telling me about your clients, that they are small, so ...

Oh they, you know, they're small. They, there is no London or Dublin agency that will talk to you for 5,000 euros. They'll laugh. You know, they'll say come back when you have 25,000 euros. But I'll talk to you for 5,000 euros. You know, I'm happy to talk to you for 5,000 euros. You know, yeah, we can do a project for 5,000 euros. So you know, that wouldn't be typical of ...
So let me ask you, would you be the marketing and advertising agency of small companies then?

Yeah, yeah, probably, yeah. I mean if you have a big project on a small budget and you want to know, you know, who the go to person is for design and development and online marketing and you know, building your brand and, you know, getting a logo that's going to carry you through your first two years and, you know, making sure your website sounds intelligent and doesn't make you look like an idiot and stuff, then there is a handful in Ireland of people you can go to who can deliver that kind of end-to-end service. And you know, I would be in that very small handful of people.

What's your differential then? What do you provide that other competitors wouldn't?

Babysitting. I'm not kidding. Babysitting. It really, it's nursing start ups through the first two years. And, you know, at the end of two years, you should either have outgrown me or gone bankrupt. Those are the two options really. Because if you're successful you're going to outgrow the services that I can provide to you and you're going to need specialists in each one of, you know, those areas. And if we've all done our job poorly or your idea sucked or your management skills are crappy, you'll be bankrupt. So they're the only two possible outcomes.

OK. Before I move to issues of technology and mobility, I forgot to ask you about you and your husband, like how do you guys divide home chores and housekeeping?

We don't, we hired a housekeeper. We outsource them, which is the only thing that, you know, I think … We get our groceries delivered and everybody does their own laundry. It's a very practical system and it works very well.

So, thinking in terms of gender, gender roles or gender division of labour, how would you describe that?

I would describe it more equal in my relationship than any other relationship I know of. My husband does, you know, for the grocery shopping that we do, my husband does 95 per cent of our grocery shopping, and I do about 65 per cent of the cooking. And I mean, I guess that kind of stuff that breaks down in our house in more traditional gender roles, like he would, by default, he would be the tech person in our house. Like he hooked up our, you know, our whole media centre thing and is like running fucking DVDs off our Xbox and like has hacked, we have TiVo in Ireland because my husband has hacked the TiVo box. And you know, that kind of stuff and I would be the person who picked the furniture and the paint on the walls and the floors. You know, and he doesn't care about any of that stuff. So I mean, I guess that pretty much, traditional genders, traditional gender division, but in terms of our day to day life, it's very, it's really pretty even split. Because then I wouldn't have married somebody who wasn't totally on board with that. You know about those studies that show that after, that men and women when they live independently do almost, I think women do 10 per cent more housekeeping than their single male counterparts, but that after marriage, men do 65 per cent less. So I was not, that was never going to be, that was not going to work for me. So, yeah, that, our relationship would not look like that.

And something you commented about other relationships. How would you see gender relationships in other couples?

Well, I mean I think there's a huge, I think that the domestic default still faults to women within the home, whether you're working inside the home or outside of the home. You know, whether you have, if you are employed or have a job and you know you're working from home or you're commuting to your job, the bulk of the stuff that has to happen on the domestic front in terms of household management and childcare, the woman is still the default person for that role. And I know that it has changed since the 1950s, but I don't think it's changed as much as we pretend it has. You still regularly hear fathers in their 30s talking about babysitting for their children. You're not babysitting for them, they're your fucking kids. But you hear that all the time. If you listen for that phrase and you have friends who are at an age to have children, you will often here that, even among people who will surprise you to hear that come out of their mouths. You will never hear a mother say she's babysitting her kids. If you listen, you will often hear a father say that.
Yeah, I hear the expression, "oh, I'll help my wife to do the home chores", right.

Yeah, I'll help my wife do the dishes, yeah. Thanks, buddy.

Yeah, I try to avoid saying that to my wife.

Yeah, exactly. But I mean, you know, it does speak to the fact that this is still very much an issue.

OK, yeah. Well this is a more personal question, you don't have to answer if you don't want to. Do you have plans to have children?

We cannot have children.

OK. [Brief silence]. So can I move on?

Sure.

OK. In terms of technology, you say you stay eighteen hours a day on your computer. Is it a laptop?

No, a desktop. I'd go blind and have carpel tunnel syndrome if I was spending eighteen hours a day on a laptop.

So you're pretty much, fixed in your work, static, as you can't move around with a desktop, it seems.

No, I mean, I, for example, if I need to come to Dublin, I would rather come once a month for two nights and stack up all of the meetings that I need to go to in that forty hour period rather than go up and down, you know, the country twice in a month. I mean, I do, it's not like I never leave my house. I do leave my house, and I probably go out for meetings in Cork once a week and I'm definitely up in Dublin or at a conference or giving a presentation on a bar camp or whatever, you know, which I consider to be travelling for work, once a month. But I do try to restrict it to just once a month.

So your contact with your clients, it sounds it's very limited in terms of personal face to face, personal interaction.

Yeah, yeah, I mean, I'm on the phone with people all day and the email goes back and forth. But I have many, many clients I've never met, including clients in Cork. You know, people are always like "can we meet?" And I'm always like, "why? Yeah, we could, but why?" None of this stuff is rocket science. Nobody's reinventing the wheel here, so.

That's very interesting. So your clients would prefer to meet you in person, but you ...

No, my clients assume that a meeting is required. But when you explain to them that a meeting is not necessarily required, they are often happy to forego that. In Ireland it's a little different than in the UK where in the UK nobody wanted to meet me. And in Ireland, it's more common for people to insist on meeting me, even offering to drive down to Cork from wherever they are to do that, because people here want to shake hands with the person they're doing business with. It's just a difference of the business culture. So, you know, probably 25 per cent of the people that I ultimately work with do really push for a face to face meeting. And it's fine, it's not like I don't want to meet them. It's just that, for me I think it's inefficient. It's a question of efficiency for me, not a question of preference. But if you really want to meet me, sure, come down, you're welcome to.

How would the American culture, in your opinion ...
I don't know because I never freelanced in the U.S. and I never worked outside the corporate culture in the U.S. I couldn't answer that question. I haven't lived there for fifteen years or more now.

In terms of colleagues who do the same thing in America, wouldn't they share comments about this?

I don't actually talk to anybody who lives in America except my mother. There's a reason I don't live there. I don't like those people very much.

Yeah? So you are an expatriate then?

Yes, I am definitely very much an expat and a very committed expat. But I would think that, you know, I do know other people in Ireland and the UK who always meet with clients, but they tend to work locally. Like I have clients up and down Ireland and the people that I know who have that much more traditional approach to working tend to work, have clients who are very local to them.

Do you have clients in the UK or other countries?

Sure, yeah.

OK. And I suppose that, you know, you don't go to see them either.

No.

This thing about meeting is extremely interesting. I discussed this with lots of people and also there are all these theories about the importance of trust, face to face interaction. How do you see this then...

See that's because of communication styles. I have an extremely forthright communication style, which means that people understand what I'm saying to them very clearly. And because of the way I communicate and deliver the information that I have to deliver, people trust what I'm saying if they don't agree with, you know, they may not agree with me, but they know I'm not bullshitting them and they know that I am being dead straight with them. You know, I'll tell you if I think your business is a terrible idea, you know. And that kind of, that communication style that I personally have engenders trust. Whereas other people who are more circumspect with their communication and perhaps more careful with what they say still need the face to face meeting to build the relationship. And it's not that one is better than, you understand that I'm not saying one way is better than the other, I'm just saying that the way, the only way that I know how to do it does have this particular side effect, which is that when I speak to you you tend to believe what I'm saying. And it's just different.

And so how do you react to the claim that I sometimes hear, that "as long as I meet the person the first time, face to face, then the rest of the time I don't have to meet that person ever again."

Yeah, I've had that, that's fine. That's typically, you know, that would be the 25 per cent of people of Ireland that I end up meeting. They just want the face to face meeting, and that's, that's fine. I mean, there's something particularly Irish about wanting to meet people you're giving money to. And you get that, this is interesting, you get that a lot in philanthropy as well, in the U.S. and the UK, there's a real culture of philanthropic giving. People are much more inclined to give money to organisations and they will, it can be, it's direct giving. You open up the post in the morning and if you're running a charitable organisation, there will be cheques there from people you've never heard of and not solicited from. In Ireland, if you're doing fund raising and you're looking for large scale donors, all of those donations will be made in person. You will never get a check for more than 10,000 euros from somebody you haven't met face to face in Ireland. It will not happen. So it is a definite cultural difference.

Yeah, I understand what you mean. I would just remark that I still think it's not an Irish thing only.
Oh, maybe it's not. I'm just contrasting it to the UK. It's very different than it is in the UK. The rest though, everywhere on the planet except the UK could work that way for all I know.

Wouldn't that be because you are very much in the cyberspace, which is marked by non-face to face interactions, for many years now?

Probably, I'm, you know, it's something I'm very comfortable with and I do business this way all the time. So it seems the meeting always just strikes me being inefficient. It really isn't that I don't like people, it's that I think it's a waste of time. I never accomplish anything in a meeting, ever.

OK, I understand. We spoke a little bit of gender in the domestic field. How would you say about women and the cyber world nowadays? How would you describe that?

Are you looking, are you interested in the gender balance for various roles in online development?

I suppose the gender ratio is still male dominated?

Design is female dominated and just in terms of sheer numbers of workers, and development is male dominated in terms of sheer number of workers.

And, so but you are in, you are a mix of development and design, right?

Yeah, I do both. But that's rare. It's not, it's not typical. I only know maybe a dozen people in Ireland who are comfortable doing both and of them three are women, is that right? Yeah, three are women and the rest would be men. There are very few women statistically speaking who have development credibility.

In terms of experiences, you said that your work gives you immense satisfaction. Can you elaborate a little bit more about pleasure and femininity in the high tech work?

Yeah, because, you know, there's a very specific start up culture, there's a very specific pattern for start ups. You run around and there are a million ideas on the table and you take all the information and you refine it down and you produce some kind of visual design and user interface that's going to work really well for what needs to be, you know, you're creating something from nothing. It's an active Biblical creation. And there are not very many industries where you're allowed to do that over and over again. If you look at a big company like Procter & Gamble and you research how they do their product development, what they do compared to what I do, when you look at them, it moves at the speed of a glacier. It could take two years to get a new product onto a supermarket shelf, and that would be consider a very rapid product deployment. But I get to do that eighteen times a year, and you know, there, it's a huge, it's a huge buzz.

Why is that? Why can you have such a fast turn out?

Because I'm working with very small companies, so I'm usually working with one or two or three people at a company. And I'm not working with 300 people at a company and there isn't the money to do, you know, pre-market testing on a huge scale. There's sometimes the money to do user interface testing with five people, but I'm not going to do focus groups with 500 people in five cities, you know. It's, you do the best you can with what you have. And what that adds up to is an extremely rapid development cycle. So you, you know, you ride this roller coaster, it's a roller coaster, and you get to ride it like eighteen times a year and it's pretty cool, unless the client sucks in which case it's an enormous drag and every hour is an hour you resent spending.

But in terms of the speed that you work, wouldn't it be because your work is intangible, high tech services and projects rather than things.
They're not all intangible. I mean, if you, no, you mean compared to like me versus Proctor & Gamble. It has a project that they're putting on a shelf, right, and it comes with packaging and it looks a certain way and it's described on the box a certain way and the only, and you know what, for a lot of these web start up companies, especially if they have a business to consumer actual product, like wine, or a television remote or a SIM card or even a service that has various service levels like this is our service and you can buy service agreement one or service two or service three, it really isn't any different. It still needs to look a way that conveys a specific set of values that positions it in a market place a specific way that is targeted to a specific audience and demographic and is clearly described in a way that is going to work for that audience. It really isn't that different. It's just a different, of the, it's a difference of corporate culture. Procter & Gamble could not be that agile if their entire company depended on it. And that's not a criticism. I mean they, you know, they do one product every two years, but you can be pretty sure that that product is going to be successful because it would have had the snot researched and tested out of it. You know, with tiny start ups with no capital, you're going to lose some. You know, and it's, if they had 30 million dollars, then you wouldn't lose any because you'd make the right decisions at every step. You'd make the safe decisions at every step. But that's not how start ups work.

OK, we veered off from the gender question. How would you describe the ups and downs of being a woman working with high tech issues?

I think people are generally surprised that I do development work. I mean, I'm known for design and design is much more present when you look at a website than functionality usually. So I'm known for being a designer and I'm not really known for being a developer. So often times it's, clients are surprised when they say, you know, I'm looking for a website that does this, can you design it for me and help me find a developer? And I say, well I can design it for you and develop it for you. And they're, you know, a lot of people are surprised to find that out. And, but I've never, I mean, certainly there are enormous gender issues in my industry, but I myself have never actually like had somebody say to me, you couldn't possibly code my project, you're a girl, or, you know, or anything like that.

How do you feel about that? About this type of comment?

Well nobody's ever said that to me. So, you know, it's not, for me personally, it's a non-issue, my gender is not an issue. Oh, here, I'll tell you what I find annoying. I find it really annoying, I do a lot of interviews for like design magazines and design blogs and design, whatever, you know, I probably do two or three email interviews or phone interviews a month with people. And I find it really annoying, really, really annoying when the interview's done and the piece is published and I am on a list of women designers, because I never see the list of male designers. I just see the list of designers, and women designers. Like being of a certain gender sticks you in a fucking ghetto you can't get out of. That I find very annoying and that is very common. On a list of awesome designers, sometimes I'll be on it. On a list of awesome female designers, I always make that list and I find it really irksome to, you know, to have my gender be attached to my professional credibility.

Yes, it looks patronising in a way, but also, in America, this is very common, to have women business networks and associations of business women, to propel and support ...

That is different. That is women self organising to help rectify a long standard gender issue of women in business. That's different. That's different than, there's no list of women accountants, you know. Nobody attaches professional credibility, gender credibility to people in traditional professions, in non-technical professions. I mean there's very few, way fewer lists of awesome female lawyers than there are of awesome female web designers.

So what do you think is the purpose of having lists of female designers? Or what's the consequences of that, the intention behind it?

I think the intention is good and the consequence is bad. You know, the intention is probably to show more people and women who are coming up, you know, women who would be younger than I am by a good ten or
fifteen years, you know, that there are other women out there who are doing notable work, and that, you know, you should be encouraged and carry on or whatever. And I'm sure that that's the intention and the intention is all good. The actual consequence however is that women designers are still stuck in this fucking really boring ghetto of, you know, we're not real designers, we're women designers, which is doubly irritating because there are more of us than there are of male designers. So it's like you know ... the default is still ...

Oh, hold on. I lost you for a few seconds.

Yeah, that's fine. I can say it again. What I was saying was that the default is still boy even though there are fewer of them.

Yeah, so in a sense, in terms of being a minority, there should be like lists of male designers.

Yeah, exactly. But that doesn't so much happen. And you know, there are very specific reasons for that in this industry and it's because, you know, design came, design came to the web so much later than technology came to the web, and the web is male dominated in that way. And that, you know, that's fine. It's very early days. I'm pretty sure we're not going to be having the same conversation in another twenty years. The other thing that's nice is that, you know, online evolves rapidly, so I think we'll see faster change in terms of that kind of thing online than we will in, you know, off line positions and stuff.

The fact of being a foreigner, how would you describe your work relationships when you were in the UK or in Ireland, how people see you and how you see yourself.

Oh, every expat will tell you that the best thing about being an expat is that people cut you a huge amount of slack. Like maybe I'm just an obnoxious bitch, but people think that, you know, I communicate the way I do because I'm American or because I'm from New York or whatever. And maybe that's true but, you know, you just end up, there are certain social conventions you don't have to, that don't apply to you basically. They don't apply to you. It's not even that you're ignoring them, it's that they don't apply to you because you're not from here. And it's, I mean I've never had a down side to being an expatriate and I've never had a problem with being an American in Ireland, except the other Americans in Ireland who drive me insane, but never mind.

So you, do you connect with Americans in Ireland?

Not on purpose.

I mean, do you have dinners with them and invite them over?

No, Christ no. No. No, I barricade the door, no. I mean when Obama was elected, I did have an election night party at my house and there were a couple stray Americans in Cork who came over because I sort of opened my house to the Internet. And that was nice and that was fine and I am friends with one of those women. Because that was, but that was a particularly American experience, you know, and you kind of wanted to be with other Americans for that one night. So that you could, you know, share it, because it's not every, it's only your election, you know, it's my election, it wouldn't be for example your election. So, you know, but that was a one off rarity. It's not like I, you know, throw a fourth of July party every year or anything like that, no.

OK. So you host or attend social events or dinners ...

Yes, yes. We host stuff at home and it's stuff to which we invite, we generally do invite the Internet. Like if I have an open house, we'll, if we have an open house, I'll post it on my blog and people we've never met before will turn up, which is nice, it's a nice way to meet new people. So we do that maybe twice a year for different occasions. And I go to open coffee like it's a religion because it gets me out of the house. You know, even if I've
been up all night and I'm in my pajamas, I will go to open coffee. And what else do I do? I go to lots of different conferences. Like do you know what bar camp is? Yeah, I go to lots of bar camps.

I see online you gave this talk called “Stalinist web design”, was that you?
Stalinist web design, yes.

Are you familiar with social theories and such?

No, the Stalinist web design is basically you will hire me, I will give you what I think is best and you will like it. It's a, it's a presentation about not working collaboratively with clients, not giving them lots of choices and not being afraid to say no when they ask you things. It's basically a kind of my way or the highway kind of thing. And you know, it's not, I have my own statistics and whatever, and it's not about making clients miserable and unempowered, it's about you know, if you do it right, the project moves faster and the client's just as happy with the result, you know, the client is happy with the result. There's a lot of studies that will tell you, a lot of studies about the psychology of choice, that if you give people too many options they don't know what to do and they choose nothing. And also that the decision of a group, that a group makes collaboratively will always be dumber than the decision that any single person on, within the group would make independently. So it's just a style of working that was born out of, you know, my experience with big agencies, referring big clients, you know, where everything goes back to a committee and there are 97 revisions and Jan would like to see it with a green button and, you know.

Yeah, I know what you mean, I was a business consultant for a while and we had to babysit clients very carefully quite often.

Yeah. I mean that's, you know, I don't have that, for that kind of thing, I don't have the time and you don't have the budget. So let's not do that. Let's just get this done, you know. So that's really what Stalinist web design is.

We are heading towards the end of the interview, but would you like to say anything else about being a women in the high tech sector that I didn't ask you or that I interrupted you for some reason?

I think that the industry that I'm in itself, here's a really interesting thing, if you look at the statistics about the number of women who work in design, design is heavily weighted towards women. I mean, statistically, we are the majority and nobody's going to argue that. If you look at industry events, if you look at the design conferences, if you look technology conferences and you look at who's on the panels and you do a count, the people who are, who are the industry itself grants authority to are disproportionately male, and you see that in conferences all over the world, all across the industry, and it's really, really, really annoying. And you see it for blogging where you would not expect to see that at all, you do see it quite often. You see it for design and you see it for development. You can make the argument that women are a tiny minority in the dev world, and that's fine, I'd like them to be there for a tiny minority on your speakers list, which they tend to not be there at all. But you cannot make that argument for design, and you absolutely cannot make that argument for blogging and the statistical swing is still the same.

But why is that annoying?

What do you mean, why is that annoying? Because you know yourself that when you are a speaker at a conference you are being granted with authority. You are placed in a position of authority and you know, women are not being given that opportunity. They are being denied industrial credibility. And, you know, there are a million reasons for that and we could have a very long conversation about the way conferences are organised and how that of itself is a gender problem, but that's not what you asked me. So I will just say that it is, that you know, the imbalance that is not representative of the actual industry statistics is very annoying ...
Oh this is very important. Actually I was asking more in terms of experiences rather than statistics. You said that you were very straight forward with your clients and your communication and I'm not sure if you would connect that with the fact that you're a woman or American ...

Oh no, I do, no, no, I do, I very much understand that I have a male communication style, I know that and I'm aware of that, you know. And I actually gave a lecture once entitled How to Blog Like a Boy for women to help them realise that the communication style that women embrace online is not doing them any favours and that they need to cut that shit out if they want to be taken seriously.

What's the women style online?

Oh God ... Women tend to be peace makers and therefore they choose to avoid confrontation whenever possible. So when a woman is blogging, she will not simply state her, she will not unequivocally state her opinion. She will often use language like, it's just my opinion but, and state what she thinks. Whereas a man will say, and obviously, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah without the qualifiers because of course it's opinion. Who else's fucking opinion would it be? It's his blog. Women also worry a lot about upsetting their readership, whereas men tend not to worry about that kind of thing. There's a lot of stuff around punctuation even. Like women will say something and finish her sentence with an ellipses, you know, the three dots. You see this very rarely in male writing. And also women will splatter their text with exclamation points and smiley faces and stuff, all of which says, don't take me really seriously. Because they are, they're trying to soften their own opinions by communicating that it should not be taken too seriously. And men do not do that shit.

Would that also be the case in male communication?

Yep, all digital written communication outside the professional arena. And you will hear, in terms of non-written communication, you will definitely hear it in women's speech in a workplace. Often, you will hear, well, it's just my opinion, in my opinion, or I feel like, you know, you're working for a fortune 500 company, nobody's paying you to feel, tell me what you think.

Yeah, or the words "perhaps" or “maybe we could do this" or “perhaps”.

Yeah. And it's weak, you know, it's a very weakening use of language, and women don't do themselves any favours by perpetuating it and most women do it without realising that they are.

So does the, does your existence in the cyberspace make you feel more or less feminine, or it has no connection whatsoever?

None. It doesn't, it doesn't, I don't really think about it.

Like when you play games, do you have a female avatar?

Oh, I'm always a female avatar. No, I don't perceive myself as being male. I am aware of the qualities that other people would perceive as being male, which would be my communication style. But, you know, I don't, it's not like I wear the pants in my marriage or anything like, you know, it doesn't extend to anything other than the way I, you know, manage my business.

I forgot to ask you, do you have multiple personas online, like one for work or clients, other for friends...

No, no. Have you seen my Twitter stream? Like can you imagine if that was the stream for clients and there was another Twitter stream for friends? Jesus, no. I guess probably because I am my own brand, it's not like Sabrina Dent of XYZ Communications. I mean, I'm just SabrinaDent.com. I am what I am and I am what you're buying and I am my brand.
OK. Doesn’t it create any problems for you, or do you see that as an advantage?

Well apparently you’re not supposed to say fuck in a conference call, but other than that, not really.

OK. So that seems to be working for you.

OK. Yeah, I mean it does work for me because it’s self selecting. I mean the clients who are not comfortable with that don’t sign up. And that’s absolutely fine, I’m very happy to see those people go because it’s not going to work. And I know, you know, I can’t be somebody that I’m not. This is how I do this, and it works really well for the people that are OK with it, and it doesn’t work at all for the people who are not. So that’s that, that’s all I have to say about that really.

OK. Yeah, this is very interesting because, conventionally you’d have a separation between private and public, and whereas in some emerging sectors, maybe the high tech sector or cyber space the boundaries are blurred: the separation between private and public, professional and domestic, leisure and work seep into each other, are more mixed up. Is this just a theory?

I think it’s more an online thing than a tech thing. I just, I don’t know, you possibly, maybe it has something to do with being a blogger thing or, you know, I don’t know. I mean, to the extent that I have a professional website, like when I started SabrinaDent.com it really wasn’t a professional website and I have never built it to be a professional website. I think of it almost as being my personal blog, yet that is the only place you can really find me if you want to hire me. It’s not like I have another website somewhere, you know.

Yes, I noticed this hybrid style on your website.

Yeah.

I was a bit confused in the beginning when watching it. I didn’t know exactly if it was a professional or a personal website in this conventional ...

Yeah, yeah. And I do spend some time thinking, you know, gee, maybe I should do something about that, but you know, when you’re hiring me, you are hiring one person, and I think it’s OK that I’m a person. I don’t know. It is what it, I don’t have time to do anything else, so fuck it. It’s been fine and it will keep being fine. There’s a button that says portfolio if all you’re interested in, but the thing is, nobody reads my blog for the portfolio. They read it for the snarky opinionated ranty crankypants stuff, and that’s how my brand built.

Excuse me, they don’t read it for what?

They don’t read it to like see what site I most recently released. They read it waiting for me to get pissed off about something and write a scathing blog entry. You know, they are reading for the personal stuff. They’re not reading for the professional stuff. And that’s totally true and I have a lot of statistics that would back that up as not just being an opinion. Yeah, the blog entries where I, you know, really get my rant on because something has pissed me off get way more traffic than any other kind of blog entry.

Yeah, I think the, your complaint about the hotel charges or something, you have twenty comments about that, twenty replies about that. That was a very popular one.

Yes, it was. They did actually issue me a refund by the way.

Are you at the same hotel now again?
No, I'm not. I'm staying at a very nice hotel where they are, oddly enough, taking very good care of me.

All right, yeah. I don't want to take too much of your time, but the final topic, it's about the knowledge economy, what you think about that in Ireland.

OK, you're going to have to tell me what the knowledge economy is because I think that term is a bunch of bullshit and I don't know what it means.

Yeah, well the fact that economic and social life are more and more influenced by science and technology that people have to have more education in order to occupy new professional positions ...

Well I think that's, first of all, I think that's overblown. My, the person who collects my rubbish, look, the people who keep a society running are not the people sitting at the top of the knowledge economy. The people who keep a society running are the people who are doing blue-collar work, you know. You cannot have a society if you do not have people to collect your bins. You cannot run a hotel if you don't have somebody to clean the rooms, and you cannot have a restaurant empire if there's nobody to cook in any of the kitchens or deliver the food to any of the tables. So I think that Ireland has a big problem coming up where we have educated the snot out of every fucker to crawl out of diapers. And we end up paying our wait staff 25 pounds an hour because they all have graduate degrees and there's nobody left who doesn't.

This is where, this is where the Polish and the Eastern Europeans come in, right.

But my housekeeper is literally an astrophysicist from Poland.

Yes, I saw many graduates Poles working at very basic even manual jobs.

She works, she has a PhD and speaks six languages and cleans my bathroom. And then she and I sit down and read the paper and have huge arguments about, you know, the Irish economy. But she can't get a job here because as my husband points out, she may speak six languages, but one of them isn't really English. And there's also no nuclear industry here, you know. And that's what she did, she worked in nuclear power plants in Poland and the former Soviet Union. So you know, you still need people to do the manual labour or do the blue-collar work that keeps, it's actually really what keeps your economy running.

I do not buy into my own self importance as, you know, a knowledge provider or whatever the wanky term for that is this week. You know, if the work dried up, I would happily turn around and clean toilets to keep a roof over my head. You know, I am not overly impressed with my ability to not do that at the moment. You know, I just, and I think that when you have a country where everybody's working in a call centre answering phones and your whole, you know, to file insurance claims for people all over the world or whatever this knowledge economy is that we're building, you know, you've got to make stuff, you have to have farmers, you have to have food, your GDP goes down the crapper when you import all your basic goods, you know. And so let's just have a reality check here, we're importing 70 per cent of our food and we manufacture no goods. What is it that we're exporting again? Somebody remind me, because I don't think we're exporting anything. And you know, that's just stupid. It's extremely poor economic planning.

Yeah, but much of the Celtic years were exports of software and computers, you know, from these handful of American multinationals.

And look how well that worked out for us. Because it just evolved. It moved, it's moved to Poland and Czechoslovakia. And you think that's not going to happen with the rest of this knowledge industry? So, you know, but what do I know? I'm not, you know, an economist.
The ICT infrastructure in this country could not be worse. We can't figure out how to get broadband to a farm without a satellite dish. Are you kidding me? Like the structure, the telecommunication structure in this country is nothing to brag about. And I don't know if you've taken a good look at the electrical grid lately, but I can tell you that all those technology degrees aren't really helping to improve anything. I don't know if it's the level of the teaching or that industry simply, there's, you know, no money for this kind of, I don't know what the problem is, but you know, we have some serious infrastructure issues in this country, you know, that are not any closer to being resolved than they were fifteen years ago.

What are the main bottlenecks for your work? Like what would, what types of improvements in society or in technology or in work style, culture ...

The biggest issue is broadband access and mobile broadband access. You know, I have clients who live not very far outside of Cork at all who have no Internet like at home, so you know, sending documents back and forth is really a nightmare. They could never work from home. They have to have office space in an industrial park that has broadband rolled out to it. You know, that has an impact on their financial bottom line and impacts what they do, you know, the money that they're paying every month in rent is money that they're not paying for marketing. So, you know, those kinds of issues actually do have a significant impact on the bottom line for very small businesses. And you know, it would be nice to see that sort of thing get sorted out. It would also be nice to see, for example, we have a lot of, you know, mobile workers in this economy, as you know very well. It would be nice to be able to pitch up in Dublin and have wifi, just be here so you can collect your email or whatever, you know. That finding a hotel that has, making sure that you're booked into a hotel that has wifi and, you know, knowing where you can get wifi and have to buy a cup of coffee at the same time just so you can get your fucking email, you know, and check in on your Facebook. You know, it's ridiculous. You look at other big cities and this is not an issue.

OK, yeah. To think of mobility, so you told me that you like travelling for a vacation thing, right. You don't travel for business, and try to stack up all your meetings for one or two days in Dublin.

Yeah.

So you're not a mobile or a nomadic worker.

No.

What do you think about the concept of nomadic worker?

I think that's absolutely fine. I know people who are, you know, in my industry who, if I wanted to go and work from India for a year and there was broadband, I could do that and I think that's a wonderful thing, you know, about what I do that you can do it from anywhere. And, you know, that's an absolutely brilliant thing. And you know, I'm not adverse to doing it, it's just that I don't want to do, I'm comfortable in my home and in my work environment, you know. So it's just a preference, and I'm lazy, you know.

Yeah, I had this image that you would have, that your office would be a laptop and that you would be a type of maybe Starbucks junky where, you know, you're working anywhere with a wifi connection.

Yeah, sorry to disappoint you. In fact, no, I am not, I am very much like parked at my desk with a million papers spread out and little wireless dongles hanging everywhere and, yeah, it's chaos.

So for you, connectivity dispenses with mobility.

I'm sitting in a hotel room in Dublin that has excellent wifi for which I do not need to pay and there is no password, and if I really had to work from here, I could. But mostly because it's a smoking room. But my preference is to work at home. I just, it's a preference. I could do it from here and I could do it from anywhere in the world as long
as there was an ashtray and some broadband, but I, it's just a personality thing really. I think I'm just a home body and I, you know, I like my husband being around. And you know, we have lunch together. I think you get into a groove and your best stuff happens where it happens. And I guess I, maybe other people who have a different skill set or who are more talented than I am can make that happen anywhere, but for me I can only make it happen the place it happens most often.

How do you react to this thing that I hear a lot, that people say that you are more productive if you go to an office and work 9 to 5.

Oh please. Those people just are trying to substantiate their pay checks while they're clocking out at 4:59. That's ridiculous.

And about the idea that there is better communication and more productivity if you have all programmers and developers working together in the office.

Well, I'm only talking to myself, so I can't really, no, I mean, I do think that if you have a corporate environment that it is essential that you work, that you mix your workforce. But there's no reason you can, but that's so you can get up and walk to Ted's desk and be like, hey look, Ted, we're thinking about doing this to the UI, you know, is that a programming pain in the ass? You can talk about things you would never email or whatever. But you know, I have, I make a lot of phone calls. I don't know what to tell you. I will do anything to make working from home work for me.

You don't have employees or contract work?

I do, I do, I work, I do not have any employees. I do have two people that I work, you know, in partnership with, though. I have a guy who lives in Chile whose name is Guillermo Moreno and when I became too busy and I had to offload something, I couldn't offload the design or the marketing, but I could offload the CSS and xhtml coding and so that got offloaded onto Guillermo. And he does that from Chile. And when I work on ecommerce products, I work on ecommerce products with my friend Katherine Nolan who lives in Kilkenny who I have been friends with for fifteen years and who I'm actually going to Prague with on Sunday. We go on vacation once a year together.

Oh OK. I think she was one of the names that Gabriela gave to me.

Yeah, and she can give you the name of somebody else who's in Kilkenny, another woman who's really, really interesting because I think that she is like a cobalt programmer or something, like something, maybe vax, like seriously old school heavy corporate stuff, that she does from her home in Kilkenny at the end of a broadband line for big companies all over the world.

I think I emailed Katherine, inviting her for this interview, and I didn't ...

Well Katherine definitely knows Gabriella because Katherine's doing a web project for Gabriella. So I'm seeing Katherine tomorrow, obviously, as we're about to leave for Prague, so I will tell her.

How did you connect with Guillermo? How did you get to know him, online?

Oh, I posted a job listing for a CSS coder on a website that I belong to that's not a technical website. And he answered the ad and he did, you know, I just gave him one tiny project and he did a great job, and I actually gave another project at the same time to somebody else who did not do a great job. And so I gave the next project, which was a little bit bigger, to Guillermo and we just went from there. And actually last year, a year ago, he came to Ireland, you know, well obviously you know, if you live in South America, your summer vacation is at Christmas.
So he spent his summer vacation in Ireland for three months and lived in our spare bedroom. And that was really nice, it was great. So we're going to try to get him back.

So you met him after having a professional connection with him.

Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. He had done nine months or a year of work for me at that point. But he's a college kid, you know. He needed, he was bored and he needed somewhere to do some kind of study abroad internship thing and you know, it's like, I wanted to help him out, you know.

OK, great. Is there any comment or question that you'd have before we finish this interview?

No. I'm all happy.
Could you please describe your job title, what you do nowadays, or what you do nowadays?

OK. I'm a consultant in terms of online marketing and developing online businesses. I'm selling knowledge that I've built up over ten years of working on the Internet to sell things. It doesn't matter what's being sold. In terms of what is a web businesses versus what is a website, and so I sell these services to different companies in Ireland and the UK. And I build strategies and technology for them to help sell better over the Internet. So it's kind of, it's, once you build a website, what next? So it's all those different things that go into selling online. It's very, very broad, it's very, very new, it's very, very unscientific and it's very, very important, I think, because it's a huge global challenge. And Ireland is no more advantaged or disadvantaged than any other country, but it's imperative for Ireland to get it right. Because as an island nation, we have everything against us. We're small, we're an island, we're remote, we're expensive. So the web for us, it creates a level playing field.

Would you call it e-business or e-marketing?

Yeah, it's, you know, words start to become focused in a certain area, but you can call it e-business, e-marketing, yeah.

And how did you get involved in this?

I set up my first website 14 years ago in 1996, and I had a small computer consulting company. And we used to do everything from putting in computers and what we found was a niche was, dial-up Internet became available, and I was living in South Africa at the time, and so companies were connected to broadband and they wanted to get email addresses and I used to subcontract at IT companies and I would put in the Internet access, Internet security, email, set up signatures and things like that, very basic stuff, outlook express based, really simple stuff.

But were you an employee?

I was self-employed. I was 19.

Yes, was your professional career always independent?

No, no, I spent three years working for other companies outside of fourteen years of working for myself.

OK, and were these companies relevant in shaping your professional interests?

Yeah, I, if you want me to go right back, I always loved computers, so I could programme at the age of 8. I could programme Microsoft basic, I had a small laptop. My father was a computer IT director. He studied in Trinity in Dublin, he worked in London for ten years as a project manager, and then he became head of IT for South African Nylon Spinners, which is a huge nylon spinning company. And they had the first mainframe in South Africa and he had a big IT department. So I had computers at home and he didn't want me to go into IT. He wanted me to study business, but I took to IT very quickly. So when I was in university studying accountancy and economics, it didn't interest me, I wasn't learning. IT was where I wanted to do work. And so I could go to companies and they would, I could install Windows and I had all these skills from playing at home.

Where did you study college?
I studied for the University of South Africa, but I only spent one year, and I only went for three months. I passed
my exams the first year, but I had no intention of going back.
Your international career, are you Irish or South African?
My parents are Irish, so I'm dual citizenship.
OK, so you were born in South Africa.
Yeah, I was born in Cape Town.
Did you grow up there?
Yeah, I left when I was 21. So I worked for two, I worked for about two years in South Africa as an IT consultant,
and I worked on lots and lots of different projects, you know, installing computers hardware, you know, real IT
type stuff. Then my parents decided to move back to Ireland, and it was 1998, so Dell were growing. So I got a job
as a, I got an interview as a software technician and doing the interview I met another manager and another
manager and I got offered a role as a software engineer. And it really was the most important day of my whole IT
career because if I was a software technician, I would have been a software technician forever. It's very hard to go
from technician to engineer. In Ireland, the difference is undergrad, post-grad. And even if you studied to be, you
know, people who were software technicians when I was there were still software technicians when they left. And
it's very, very hard to break because a software technician is a repetitive role. You're set a task and you repeat,
repeat, repeat. So that would never have worked for me. A software engineer's role is to, is to look at the existing
system and design a new one, and then the technician maintains it. And so that was really the most important day
of my career.
Yeah, but your college degree is in business.
It was a bachelor of commerce degree in IT. I combined the two.
Yeah, but you're not an engineer by formation.
No, I'm not an engineer by trade.
They offered you the job because you knew a lot, on a personal …
An engineer is someone, it's about problem solving. A technician doesn't solve problems. A technician records
what happens. So a technician builds a computer. If the computer doesn't work they report that the computer
didn't work. An engineer redesigns components to make them work. So I was a programmer and I was a very
capable, because I started programming at the age of 8. By the age of 19 I was looking at operating, writing
operating systems. I'm a very, very strong programmer. And when I was in Dell, I had a huge understanding of
business compared to just a programmer. Most people come out with a, even after four years of studying a BSC
honours in computer science can't programme. It's general widespread knowledge. They can write little bits of C,
but they don't understand real programming. It takes, we estimated it takes five to seven years to create a good
engineer because you, the solution is not always a logical step. You know, there's a lot of (inaudible) thinking. And
when I was in Dell, I was there for 18 months, I had three software patents by the time I left. I had designed
software systems that became standard use in Dell factories all over the world. So, you know, it's about problem
solving not, you know, a BSC degree doesn't make an engineer.
OK. So a programmer, like are technicians programmers or only the engineers can be programmers?
332


An engineer can be an engineer without being a programmer. A technician's not a programmer. A programmer will always, would almost always be an engineer.

**All right. And was the job offer in Ireland or South Africa?**

We had moved to Ireland. I had been living in Ireland for two months. It was in Limerick, here where the factories were.

**OK. And so your parents, your father was working for a high tech, he was working IT.**

He was working in IT for a nylon, yeah.

**Yeah, that’s very interesting. And your mom, what did she do? And do you have siblings?**

No, no siblings. My mother was a housewife.

**Your daily work … How would you describe a typical workday?**

Now? Now it's in sales. So now I'm, my daily work is to field new enquiries, work out what’s a business opportunity, make a sale, and then manage the delivery of an online marketing programme.

**And more specifically, like how many hours a week you work and how many hours a day you work, what time you wake up and that. How is your typical day? I mean, 24 hour cycle.**

8 to 10. 8 o'clock in the morning to 10 o'clock at night.

**OK. Where do you go to work?**

I have an office in the National Technology Park near the university.

See when I left Dell, I went to a company in Dublin where I was head of software development for a software company, they had a software product. And then after a year and a half later, I set up my first company in Ireland where I was a software consultant, which is going and building software for other companies. And then a year after that, I added another business which is website development, and then I built probably one of the biggest web design companies in Ireland, easily in the top ten. We had offices in Limerick, Dublin, London, Poland and about four in India. We probably had about sixty employees and contractors. It was a very, very big business for six year, and we probably built five or 600 websites.

**Was this company located in the park also?**

Yeah.

**OK, and then what happened with that company?**

Before the recession started, spend on software development came to a standstill and we lost a lot of customers.

**Why is that, why the investments and R&D?**

I don't know, but I had friends who had software companies in Dublin and, you know, I knew other software companies and they were haemorrhaging money and they could no longer pay directors and they could no longer pay bills and things got very messy. And we decided we could either compete with what’s left, but we'd seen that the online marketing was coming up. But the online marketing business would not be strong enough to carry the
software business. And then the web design business became ground to a halt. And web design is an expensive business to run, if that makes sense. So I decided that just that's what we owe, that's what we had, just close them down.

With this company, were you a contractor for the company, not an employee or other ...

I was managing director. I owned half the company. I owned it for, I set it up half way through 2001 and I ran it for eight years.

And then what did you decide to do with the company?

We closed it over a year ago. We just finished all our projects, we just set with our contractors and our vendors and we just allowed contractors to move out and effectively cease training. And I took the online marketing ideas, and I built it, on the side, parallel to this, I built a whole new business over two years ago, that I had been building it up slowly, slowly. And I hired back a lot of what we had.

So, from a business owner, you decided to become a consultant.

No, I set up a new business, but no, I own this business myself entirely.

But you started saying that you were a consultant.

Yeah, my business is a consulting business, not a product delivering business. But I still have employees and ...

How many employees, if you want to say.

In and around five.

Are they employees or are they contractors?

Two are employees and the rest are contractors.

Are they all located in Ireland?

Half in Ireland, half in Poland. I kept the operation in Poland. I hired them myself. They were very knowledgeable, and when we used them to build the websites, at that point, we were selling websites at the top end because we knew a lot about Internet marketing so we were able to get a better price. But I needed those people, because I had trained them and I had built up specialised knowledge, so I kept them in my new business.

So back to your typical day - you go to the technological park, and til what time your stay there.

I'd stay there until about 6, 7, and then I would be either managing projects that the guys are working on in Poland, or I would be managing enquiries. All our enquiries come from the Internet.

We sell on the Internet, so we use the Internet to market and generate leads. And then I would then schedule, a lot of our business is in Dublin, so I would then be travelling to Dublin every week. So I would get, spend a week in Limerick, I would get enquiries in, I would work out which ones are worth pursuing and which ones aren’t, and then I would go to Dublin and I will stay for two or three days and I will meet these companies and generate sales.

And after 6 p.m., what do you do?
I would then come home and I will then work from home, so I'll then be either learning, see what's happening on the Internet, what it, you know, what a technology, what's happening in technology in America, what is Google doing? Google produce lots and lots of information every day. They have lots and lots of service groups that every day update the Internet on what they're doing. So you've got to try and understand that. And then I have to keep our own website at the top because that's generating business and that's our proof of concept. And then sometimes some customers who have very busy days, they will ring me after 8 o'clock at night when they're home. Then towards the end of the week I will then travel to Dublin, so you're travelling until 10 o'clock, midnight, and then when you arrive you have to check your emails and, see the 9 to 6 thing is lost. Sometimes I don't come to work at 10 o'clock in the morning if I'm up until 2 o'clock in the morning.

And so, OK, so probing this issue, why do you need an office? Couldn't you work from home and you know, save costs with offices?

The Internet in the office is fantastic, so it's really important to have constant Internet connection. Secondly, the office building I'm in, it's only, the office is only 450 a month, so it's about the size of this area here. But it has, I have big, big flat screens for doing meetings and presentations so I can bring clients in, show them what we're doing, and we can meet and there's plenty of space. Also the address is then the National Technology Park. And then I have, our telephone number's answered in reception, so we have someone who answers in the company name. So I could move home, but then it will be obvious that I'm a one-man company.

Do your employees go to this office?

Yeah, or work from home.

So they can work from home.

Yeah, we, it's Internet based so location is not important. Geographical location doesn't matter. The office is there because to, our clients, geographical location matters.

You're located in the Innovation Works?

No, no in Roselawn House in the National Technology Park, so it's the other side of the road from Innovation Works. I did have a business in the Innovation Works, the software company, the software consultant company, that was based in the Innovation ...

OK, yeah we'll return to the technology park later on. This is very interesting: you are open to remote working and flexible working.

Yeah, this idea of 9 to 6 has got to die. It's a stupid concept. It really, if you think about the logic behind people starting work at 9 o'clock in the morning and finishing at half 5 and starting school at 9 o'clock and starting college at 9 o'clock and starting the government at 9 o'clock, it's, it just has to be one of the most stupid ideas on the planet.

I understand your point, I'm just trying to explore this further. Do you work this much because you like it or because you are forced to. Are your stressed out, what are your pleasures and stresses... How would you say that?

The working is because I'd rather have a long productive day than a stressed out over productive short day. So at home, the weather in Ireland is kind of shit, so I don't mind sitting, I don't like watching TV so I don't mind sitting on my laptop and working from home. It doesn't feel like work. I leave the landline at work. The phone isn't ringing. I turn my mobile on silent if I don't want to talk to anyone. I'm learning, and I enjoy it very, very much. I've always enjoyed on the Internet, so before I even thought that the Internet would be a career, I enjoyed spending.
time on the Internet. I really, really like the Internet. I would hate it very much to give up what I'm doing for a living. I would hate very much to go and have to work for someone again.

**Do you live by yourself or with your parents or with your family?**

With my, with my fiancee.

**OK. What does she do?**

She's a receptionist, legal secretary.

**Where do you guys live?**

Near the university, about a mile from the office. OK, well we live in Castletroy, off the Groody round, near B&Q. Between the university and B&Q, we live in the middle somewhere.

**So, I see that you love your work. And do you have any other activities, like hobbies, clubs, sports, cinema, theatre, what will you do to unwind?**

I hate the cinema, I don't know why. I hate cinemas, I hate the idea of going to cinema. I love movies, but I hate cinemas. I don't know why. My dad hates them, his brother hates them, it's just, I don't know why.

**So what do you do for pleasure? I mean, your work is pleasure but what do you do outside?**

What happens, when I go to Dublin, I have a lot of friends in Dublin from when I worked there. Also one of my best friends from South Africa, he lives near Dublin and he works in Dublin. So when I go to Dublin, I might go, I might check into the hotel, read my emails and stuff, then from maybe 8 o'clock to 11 o'clock I'll go to their house or we'll go to the pub and we'll have something to eat and I'll do that. And I always try to mix work with pleasure as well because I find the two very enjoyable. So I have, a lot of my friends I've also had businesses with. So my current best friend, we used to own a software company together. Now he works in Microsoft and we used to work for Dell. So there's this mixture of work and pleasure. There's no hard lines. My fiancee has no interest in either the Internet or the business, so that's a complete disconnect. And my family have no interest, as in my mother and my aunts and uncles, they're disconnected. But one of my mother's brothers, he's now very interested in the business, so he acts as kind of a mentor or a coach. So we would have never had a lot in common before, and now we have lots in common so we spend lots of time together. So it's, maybe that reflects more on me, but that's how it's shaped up. So now when we would never have spoken much for ten years, now we speak almost every day.

**Your best friend from South Africa, what does he do?**

He works in IT. He never worked in IT before. It's just that's what, how it happened. When he left school, his mother got him a job with a family friend, and he came into IT reluctantly. Now he's very strong in IT. But he would be a technician. He'd be a, working with hardware.

**In terms of technology that you use to work, what are they?**

I have an iPhone and a laptop.

**A netbook?**

I don't like netbooks. I think netbooks are good ideas, but I don't, not for me.
Why?

Typically they're very slow and the screens are very small. And a lot of what I'm doing is still presentation based. So every year I buy a new Dell laptop. And I use it, I have a Vodafone remote, you know, mobile connect card so that I can have Internet access all the time, and I have email on my iPhone as well, and I have, I have lots of computers.

You mentioned Dell, why don't you get an IBM, which is more business oriented than Dell, or an Asus which has more power?

I would, I've always bought Dell, no matter where I've worked. Even if I go to companies who don't buy Dell, after I'm finished, they buy Dell. I like Dell, I've always like Dell. I worked there. I think the, I think that Dell is very business. I think they make good business machines. I mean, I know, when I'm buying a computer, I know how much memory I need, what processor I want, what ram because I was a programmer. So I find that I get the best from Dell.

Now how do you communicate with your employees and your clients?

With our employees, especially in Poland, it's all done electronically because, and with the vendors, I still have some vendors in India, it's all done by email or by instant message like Skype.

So you use voice or text?

No, instant message, yeah. Because you know, because English is my first language, I would talk very quickly, so by typing it's much easier for both sides, plus it's a record. You can copy and paste a record and build a project plan from it, you know.

So you deliberately refuse Skype VOIP.

Yeah. I only use voice for talking to my customers. So it's deliberately type.

Do you see any emerging gadgets or devices that you think you'll be interested in?

No, I think the technology in instant messaging things has been around for a long time. I think, I think it just needs more wide, much more widespread adoption, and I think also it's being held back very much by the tel-cos, you know, the Eircoms, the British Telecoms, yeah, yeah, the incumbent telephone companies.

I think, I think that they have held business back with huge costs. I think the world would have moved to a, I did economics, I studied economics in college, but I also studied economics in high school, so I studied economics for four years. I'm not an economist, it's not university level economics. But the more a company spends on things like telecommunications that it doesn't have to, this to me adds to the slow rate at which globalisation has happened. And I think that we need to realise that they've done it just to serve themselves, just to make money. And other industries aren't allowed to do this, the automobile industry isn't allowed to do it, the computer industry isn't allowed to do it, the airplane, aircraft industries not allowed to do it.

Allowed to do what?

Tel-cos, you look at Europe where we have one telecoms company per country, whereas America has lots of telecoms. But, they also only had one, which was AT&T, which was the first one, which was split up, well Belle, you know, Belle (inaudible), so in Europe, you know VOIP was banned until 2003. That's when Skype came. Germany had a, they, it wasn't just Eircom, it was Germany, it was, they all didn't, they were all afraid that they'd invested so much money in copper that when VOIP came, that they would be making no money and everyone
would be making free telephone calls. And Skype wasn't a new piece of technology, it wasn't a new idea, it was just the combination of someone else's technology, a good idea, and the lifting of VOIP bans by the European Commission. And they created a billion dollar company over night. And they didn't actually have the technology. They rented it and they lost their license for it this year.

The thing is Microsoft and Yahoo had that technology 14 years ago because we were using it. It's just that the pickup rate and the adoption rate wasn't there, and the Internet wasn't there because we were dialling. So it wasn't, it didn't make sense.

So you don't see anything emerging that you would be interested in.

No, not at the moment. But I mean, I'm not, I'm not, I don't know, I've never been a hardware enthusiast, you know, I was very slow to buy an iPhone and stuff like that.

So to talk with your clients, what do you use to communicate with them?

Telephone. And email. Skype, Skype doesn't have the quality. You don't want to be talking to a client and being disconnected. It's not worth the money.

I totally agree with you. I have horrible problems with Skype when I talk to my family.

Yeah. Skype actually isn't a good piece of technology. It's very, very basic ten-year old, twelve-year old technology. It's not good. It uses too much, it needs too much bandwidth. It's not lean technology.

Exactly, yeah. Now one of my interviewees in the park, they say they use Skype without the video component, just the voice.

Yeah, there's a social issue to having video as well. It sounds weird. It has a negative connotation.

Why do you say that?

It's, people are still very, very personal, very much so in Ireland, maybe not so much in America maybe. But in Ireland, web cams first of all sound like adult industry stuff and it is kind of strange because, to have someone see you and not see, I mean people in Ireland would be afraid of video cameras even, you know, normal video cameras, they'd be very shy. Because you don't know how you're going to be perceived. You can't see someone perceive you back, it's clinical. And you don't know what happens to that recording, you know.

Wouldn't it be like a face-to-face interaction? Like you'd be seen anyway.

But it's not because it's electronic so it's recordable, you know. It's like being on video.

OK. So... going on from technology to mobility. How often do you travel? You mention something about your travels. Do you go to Dublin every weekend?

Every week, yeah, towards the end of the week, yeah.

And internationally?

Not so much at the moment, but you know, just to Poland or on holiday. But for business, not so much at the moment.

Did you travel a lot back then, in South Africa for example?
Yeah, we used to go, we used to come to Ireland every few years for Christmas. When we had, when we were doing software consulting a few years ago, we had lots of clients in the UK, so I was flying every month to London, to Wales and then to Poland.

**And what about India?**

Never needed to go to India. India, we were never happy with India, that's why we started building a centre in Poland. India is, India is a really, really difficult country to manage to work with. It’s really, really difficult. It's, it has a different set of business standards and business ethics to what we're used to in England and Ireland.

**Can you give an example please?**

When you're, when you work in a technology company in Ireland or in America, there’s a passion for the technology, as in you want to be a good programmer at the programming level. You want to be a good project manager at the project manager level. You have a, there's a passion for it. It's like being a race car driver or an artist, you have a, the passion is the number one reason, the interest, the excitement. In India, it’s just about money. So there is no, there is absolutely no quality control. In India, there's, the belief is that you cannot alter fate. In Hinduism, your life is mapped out. Trying to change it is pointless. It's like global warming. If global warming is part of the way that the Earth works, you can’t change it. If the Earth wants to go cold, it'll go cold, you can't fix it, that's their belief. So if you look at their driving, if you look at the way India has less cars than the United Kingdom or go back ten years ago, India had less cars than the United Kingdom, it had a hundred times the number of road accidents because they don't, they believe if you turn your lights on, your just going to wear down the battery, the bulb and you'll have to replace it. So to keep the bulb you don't turn on the lights. So, there's a very good documentary, do you know Jeremy Clarkson, Top Gear?

Look him up on YouTube. He did a, he went to India and he talks about a very slow adoption that a country with a billion people have less cars than a country with fifty million. And they'll be driving up mountain passes in buses over taking rickshaws with no lights on and they don't care if there’s a car coming the other way with no lights on because if it's your turn to die, it's your turn to die, and what can you do to change it. And they had, they seem to have the same attitude in programming, so it didn't matter who we hired or where we hired them or if they were in a company or if they were a virtual employee or they were, so it didn't matter. They just, we could not get quality. And they were very difficult to remote manage. We had no, we didn't trust, there was no trust at all on either side.

**Was it in terms of deadlines or in terms of intrinsic quality of the programme?**

Intrinsic quality of the code was guaranteed rubbish. And it was so bad that even if you moved from one Indian developer to another, they didn't, the quality was always unacceptable. If you moved it to Ireland, the quality would be unacceptable. They would redevelop it. It took a lot longer to code the same things in India as it did here. It no longer is, I don't think it's financially feasible for Ireland to outsource to India. I think Ireland can develop it quicker, and the same for the United Kingdom. Maybe America because America has huge rates. They will see a cost saving. But they would need, you need money in India. You can't do it cheaply. You need to go to India and invest in research and development. And then you have a high attrition rate because it's a growing economy. But I don't, I think India has, is passing its, I think India will soon pass its, you know, the number of hours used, OK, might have a low hourly rate, but even those low hourly rates, you know, the companies would be making, the companies were set up just for profit. It's just, they're just sweatshops. There's no ...

**But in Ireland as well, venture capitalists think about profitability of the company.**
Venture capitalists are thinking about the profitability, but the people running the company are building an idea and, I'm not saying that there's something wrong with them, I'm saying that the only goal in India is profit. It's not a fifty-fifty. It's not a joint venture between profit and developing a good name. It's just profit.

Right. I have two follow-up questions. The contrast between money and passion... It seems that to work in the high tech is a lifestyle.

Yes.

What's the difference between working in the high tech sector than working in other areas of capitalist economy? What's specific about it?

I think that there's other sectors that are passion driven, too. But I think academia is passion led more than profit led maybe, sometimes. I think that people who work for architects are passion led, good architects. It's not something you can mass produce. I think people who design cars are passion led. I think people who like to farm, it's a lifestyle choice. I think there's good money in it, much more than they say, but I think farming is a lifestyle choice. I think medicine, there's a good mix between profitability and passion. I think any high quality job, there's a mixture between passion or love for the job, at least there's a love for the job before you start the job. You know, maybe you end up sick of it half way through. But I think any high skilled job has to marry passion because high skilled jobs require enormous amounts of education. Low-skilled jobs don't. They're repetitive, they just require you to switch your brain off. The guys who are good at working on a factory floor are the guys who are good at turning their brain off, I think. Maybe it's, I'm not trying to sound arrogant.

So do you see software engineering as artisanal or hand crafted?

Software engineering is, like in all things IT, there's no one fixed description, you know. It's not like in construction where the architect is an architect, the (inaudible), software engineers also include software architects. So if you want to look at passion driven success in IT, Google, Apple, Microsoft, IBM, Oracle, these are the holy grails of IT because Google, I was on the Internet before Google was, if that makes sense. And Google saw a gap that nobody else saw. Microsoft missed the gap twice, Yahoo missed a gap, all, everyone had missed a gap. It was right there in front of their face, and Google built this company up out of passion. Two guys said we can fix this. They didn't know they could fix it, no one believed that they could fix it, it was, it was a struggle, Google, they did not know how to make money. They couldn't make money. It was only when they brought in a CEO from a real life company and said look, we've got to make money from this, did they start to make money. They, if Serge and Larry had continued, it probably wouldn't have made money by now. It probably would have been like Twitter.

The overriding passion for a lot of innovators in IT was to do, to solve the problem and the money was secondary. Maybe the money wasn't even possible, you know. So when you look at software architects as a group of software engineers, they're designing things all the time. And that takes passion, you know. So it is an artisan type job because you're sitting there and you're saying how do I design this database to be very, very efficient. So when Apple built their first computer, you needed a chip to do this and you needed something to do that and something to do that, so you ended up with huge pieces of space. And what, not Steve Jobs, but his business partner, Steve Alan, what he realised is that once you started removing chips, it became easier to remove them because you didn't need as much, and that's how he built the first motherboard and that's how the first Apple computer came about. And that was pure passion because, he wasn't going to make anymore money by doing it. There was no one telling him what to do. He just wanted to do ...

Yeah, but now besides these visionaries like say the ...

But that happens on a small scale, sorry, you're right, I got lost. That happens with a software engineer. When a software engineer's designing a new software product, he's making those small little steps as well. So he's doing something that hasn't been done before. So if you're building a software application for a solicitor, and you have
to design a form and the form will allow them to record how long a telephone call is taking or how long they spend writing a letter or how long they spend doing something, a job, so it's time recording. When they start laying out the bits of information they need, it gets very, very big. And then they start bringing it back and this is, it's called relational database design. And when you do this, it's kind of fun, it's engineering and it's, it's creative because you can call it whatever you want, you can break the tables up as much as you want, it's very, very creative.

**OK, I understand your point, but do you think that the mainstream of software developers are all passionate? Can't you be a good programmer and be cold hearted?**

You can.

**It's your phone. I thought it was mine.**

No, no, mine. Yeah, you can, yes you do have assembly line computer programming, but you end up with really, really boring stuff. You see, programming is very expensive.

**In my interviews, when I asked them “why did you get this new job?”, they would answer “oh just because it paid me more” or “I moved to a different company because it pays me more”. So in some circumstances it was because, you know, it was exciting. But in many other circumstances it was because of money.**

Yeah, I mean if you're a software engineer in Dell and then IBM say, I like what you're doing and now I'll offer you more money, that's the reason to move because both things are interesting. But you're not going to find someone who's going to move into something like reviewing legal documents from a software point of view, that's ...  

**OK. So the thing that technologies make you travel more or less?**

Less. I think technology makes me travel less because without technology, that's a good question. Yeah, I think technology makes me travel less because I can, the team of people here in Limerick at the coffee club, the wider industry, I can learn this from the Internet from Limerick. I don't have to go to New York, I don't have to go to London, I don't have to go to SES, I don't have to go to, before, say, when my dad was in IT and he was managing mainframes and he wanted to know what was going to be big in America, how were they managing IT companies, they used to have conferences all over America and he'd have to fly all over America, and I don't have to do that. So I think technology makes me travel a lot less.

**So what's your take on the need or not of having face-to-face interaction?**

It's important from a sales point of view and because I have a small business now and I am the person with the knowledge, I have to also do the sales. If I was just in delivery, I wouldn't have to do any travel.

It's the sales function of my job that makes me travel. And I enjoy sales, I never realised that. As a technology, I would no longer classify myself as a technologist. Whereas I used to love new technology just for the sake of new technology, I like sales, which is a real business element.

**Yeah, so clients usually want face to face interaction.**

Yeah. They need to eyeball you, yeah.

**Yes, I understand that. But, from an intrinsic, work production point of view ...**

There's no need for travel.
What about employees? Do you have employees that you have never met in person?

The distance between, the time, like I have met them all because I brought them to Ireland, I bring them to Ireland. But some of them I haven't met because they came to the company and left or they had, it didn't work out or they got a better job, whatever. So we definitely had a lot of employees at the start that we never met. But with the work we're doing now, I want to meet them more often because I want to re-skill them. They're still from a web design background and the web design industry is the closest cousin to Internet marketing, even though Internet marketing I think is a lot more, it's a lot more detailed than web design. So I need to bring them over here to retrain them because these skills aren't available on the marketplace.

OK. So I’d like to explore the idea of nomadic workers, perhaps as a stereotype that exists about high tech workers is that they are highly mobile physically, digitally and mentally... How do you react to this?

I probably have that, when you say digital nomad when I think of road warrior, IT guy driving around, I'm thinking nomad, guy going to a hotel, you don't know anybody, when you go to a different city, you don't stay at the same hotel, it's always different places, yeah, I think that’s the stereotype. It’s probably because the first people on the road for IT were like that. So old ideas last long. What do you think a nomad is? Sorry, I'm not, I'm trying to understand why you …

OK, we can replace the word “nomad" by highly mobile or “hyper mobile", as nomadism creates a bit of confusion.

You have an office in the technology park, which is a very localised, anchored type of business arrangement. But you also have all these expatriate experiences, international business, you are passionate and very entrepreneurial about your work, and flexible work schedules. So I’m just trying to understand if you see the high tech worker as something post modern or radically new...

OK, I think if you look at pre-IT jobs where you’d have the base of the pyramid of your employment structure, lives in the town, socialise in the town, grew up in the town, work in the town. And flying around, I call it the Dallas effect, you know, it's always, you know, you always think of travel as sitting down, business class meals, the newspaper, you know, that, that's, we don't like Ryan Air because it's taken that, it's shattered that image, even though it's actually very efficient, affordable travel.

And I always wanted to travel more and I was always jealous of my friends in Dell who were flying first class to these places and it was never about work, and that's where the word junket came out. IT travel, it was, you know, when we were young and in Dell, it was arrive at the bar in the airport, when they call your name, that's when you order the last pint, so everyone's on the airplane waiting for you, but you're business class so you've already checked in, they can't leave without you. And they would abuse this and they would go and stay in hotels and just very little work seemed to get done. It was just travelling for the sake of travelling at someone else's bill, you know. Because when you travel yourself, you like keep your money for your, when you get to the destination so you can enjoy your holiday. When you're travelling for a company ...

The client is paying.

The client or the company is paying, so it’s at their expense. What you actually have is, you, IT charges big money because there is a shortage of knowledge. So you have someone earning 120,000 euro a year, not because it took a long, you know, not because it's a great job or because you have to pass some kind of qualification. If there was lots of people that could do his job, you wouldn't need him. And therefore, when you have companies build proprietary software systems and you move it geographically and it fails, you have to move that person there. And that's what it, and when you say about older people say that travel is for young people, the fun of travel is for young people because it’s new and they don't have commitments. But if I think about the people who travel most in Dell it was the senior people because you have one guy at the top, base of directors, and then Texas wants to
know how Europe is doing, they have to fly them to Texas to talk. They don't, Dell didn't use video conferencing except when there wasn't enough time to travel someone over, so a factory is down, they're losing a million dollars an hour, you can't waste fourteen hours to fly to Austin. You've got to fix the problem. So that, video conferencing was a necessity. Travel was preferential, if that makes sense. So the ideal way to share ideas was to travel and sit down in a boardroom in Austin. And it's the senior guys who do most of the travel, I think.

Still, nowadays?

I think so. I mean, it depends, I mean like support roles have become remote now. So when we worked, ten years ago, when we worked for offices in Dublin, they found it, if you, if they were hiring people from the country and moving them to Dublin, they were relocating to work in Dublin because that's where the headquarters were. But then, the customer's back out in the country so it was, it made sense to move that person, let that person live out in the country and work remotely. But essentially what IT is is that you have knowledge in someone's mind and you have to move them to where the problem is. And that's why, so let's say if you take Internet working so you have your head office in Dublin or London or Chicago, you have a local user, they've got a problem, you can log in remotely. But if their local system fails, then you're, the Internet is cut out, then you're back to the same problem.

Yeah, so thinking there are different types of purposes, like you have this strategic design type of travel, so you send a senior person to buy or open a business. But then you also have the operational tasks to be filled in by junior people, to install some specific system, do more local training, or do local work.

When Dell was building Poland, before they sold Poland recently and they were building the EMA4 or whatever it was called, they had the same problems as Limerick had ten years ago, twelve years ago, and that is that your not fixing problems, you're training engineers and you need to be there to physically show how you're working and what you're looking at. And they, you can't remotely do that because it's a whole different skills set. It's not, like the problem is in the computer, the computer's working fine, it's the controller. And to do that, you need, we still haven't.

Right, I get you. So if it's human issues, it's better to have a local presence than if it's a machine issue, you could try to do that remotely.

Machines are very good and very well designed to do what they do. And, but the need a consistent environment. We don't have software that can respond to changing environments. Because if you remove the memory from a computer, it'll stop working. There's certain things it can't, it's getting smarter, you know, when Windows used to crash, it would crash and you'd have to reinstall it. Now it's much more capable, because we built in greater allowances to recover. But much of the software in an organisation is lean built software. So you design it for a specific purpose. The more time you spend allowing for maybes, you end up spending more money on things that never happen. And so the software will process what it needs to but if you put shit in, you get shit back out. So you have to train the person to identify that that is still the, and that has to be done, still is done face to face because you're talking high transfer of knowledge.

I mean, it's an industry unlike, you know, if you become a doctor, OK, we are slowly learning more about the intricacies of the human body, but understanding the genome of humans doesn't help treating your flu, your cold, you know. Many of what a doctor's learned fifty years ago he's probably still using 80 per cent of today. It's very slow moving. Architecture is relatively slow moving. Airplane industry is relatively slow moving. It's improved by technology. Technology has allowed more to happen, but you still have, you know, most training for pilots is stress control, repeating tasks, being healthy, that kind of thing. IT is changing. The industry I work in today wasn't an industry eight years ago. There was no such business. It's just changing too quickly, you know.

And so knowledge is still a problem because if you hired a guy ten years ago who's very clever, if he hasn't kept up to date, he's no good. So it's a constantly changing industry. And the, I would say that the business we're in, we're the most intelligent at it, one of, in the top ten in the country. And it's still, within Ireland, there's obviously more
intelligent people in England or Germany or America, but we still act as separate countries. So we don't show up in England or America or Germany as much so we don't get as much business. If we targeted the UK then I would probably be doing a lot more travel. But I'm the person who's built this knowledge, so I can't, it's very difficult to train people up. And so if I was doing too much travelling then I wouldn't be able to any implementation, because I also have to do the implementation, which is one of the things that, it's not a perfect world. It's easier just to sell, sell, sell, or implement, implement, implement. It's very, you're using two different bodies of information when you're selling and doing implementation.

So you, for implementation you have to train people then.

Yeah, and it's very, very difficult to train people in what we do.

Won't you get UL students who want to learn with you on a job and learn with you?

I think that someone coming out of a degree with no real experience, I would end up just training non stop. There would be just too much training. That the time I would have spent training, I could have done the job ten times over. There's a commercial problem there. The people that I have in Poland are not costing me a huge amount of money. They're not taking up a lot of time because we still have old boring stuff like website development. To me, to some people, websites are very high tech, and to me they're very low tech, they're very stupid. The average website bought and sold in Ireland today is, it's twenty year old technology as far as I'm concerned. It's real basic stuff, it's Model T Ford stuff. The technology that we are developing slowly now is a year ahead of what our competitors are doing. So it hasn't been done yet so the guys that I have in Poland, they're doing 20 per cent learning and 80 per cent working on the Model T stuff, and it's a, you know, they're still productive without having to be trained. But it's been over a two year period, three year period in some cases. Whereas if I brought someone from the university now, I would have to train them what the guys in Poland know and then train them what I'm (inaudible) on, it, it's not what I'm good at.

The new model that you're developing, what types of visible effects will people have on them?

If you look at how 99.999 per cent of websites are built and delivered in Ireland since 2000, since 1991, whenever it started to now, even today. A company will ring up a web design company and they will say I want to design a website and they will meet, and the company will say I will charge you a thousand euro. They say, OK, that sounds good, I've seen your work, I like it. So then the (inaudible) will say I want it to be red and I want it to be green and I want my logo here and I want my telephone number here, and the client is making decisions in something they've never done before based on how they want the website to look. The website designer, his experience is built up by working with lots and lots of people who don't know what the fuck they're doing. And then you put up a website and no one has really thought about the user and how the user will work with a website. And we've never, not a lot has happened, we think of Amazon and eBay but they don't put lots and lots of money into usability. They are now.

One of the companies who's probably the most amount of vision into usability is probably Apple, but not from a web point of view. Microsoft never put effort into usability unless someone's pushing them to do it. Once they kill a competitor, they stop. So we're not really as high tech as we think we are. And what happens is you get, you meet someone and you design a website and they go that's lovely, now I want that there and that's got to flash and there's got to be fireworks coming out of that. And you just go, why? There's no scientific evidence behind it. And there's really a big opportunity in Ireland to actually put some research into it. If I could find someone to do it, I'm very commercial minded and I find dealing with universities so troublesome.

I know we have this thing where business and university have to work together. It's a pie in the sky. Intel doesn't require universities to build it. It requires universities to get people up to a point where it can take over the training and education. You can't train in an industry that's pioneering because you don't know how you've done it. I can't, there's no college, there's a college in Dublin that does a twelve week SCO training course. It took me
five years, so I challenge them on how, but it does give people an understanding of the terms we use because the terms we use don’t exist in dictionaries or encyclopaedias and they’re changing all the time. The terms we use this year will not be around next year because we’ll have improved it. Because terms are there because the English language isn’t precise enough. So we have to create acronyms all the time that are that specifically means that. And when that’s no longer relevant, we need, we find something new, it needs a new acronym because we can’t use the same word because otherwise it’s too confusing. So when you look at what’s long with the old web industry, they’re designing websites for the exact same motivator when you go down to a furniture store and you go, I like this, I want it in my house. And that’s how people design websites and that’s not a good business decision.

So the new model, are you developing something that’s going to be a revolutionary website?

No, I don’t think that we’re, I think that if you have a permit of technology, we’re at the top but we’re not at the very top, now let’s not, I mean, we’re not, I mean, we’re not like Twitter, we’re not like Facebook. We’re not really, I don’t have the money or the resources to do the type of engineering that they do. But what I’ve realised is that you can’t look at the front of a website and guess what the hell’s going on in the background. So the type of websites that we’re doing are probably picked off from a group of ideas of what we hear from what they’re doing in America, what they’re doing in Europe. And that would be around, well I build one website, why not build two websites and see which one is better. It’s a very hard concept to get across to a business because the business has only just gotten over the idea that they need a website and now you tell them they want two, you know. But this is the only logical scientific step of doing it. Because we’ve, when you do a website for the first time, you’re, you think like wow, this is great, I built a website. But once you repeat this, you start to realise it’s not such a good website anymore, you know, because you can see what you can do next.

OK. Next topic, you mentioned earlier that your fiancee doesn’t like that you spend so much time working?

No, no, no, not at all, not at all. She’s not, she doesn’t get technology like I do. She’s very slow, now we fight over the laptop because she wants to go onto the Internet to check Facebook. Now that it’s become social for her, it’s become important. She likes it to book holidays. To her it’s functional, and there’s no passion there. Where it becomes an issue is if we’re on holiday and I don’t stop working. But I find it very stressful to stop working. If someone had to say to me we’re going to take your iPhone away for a day, I would find that really, really horrible. I know a lot of psychologists would tell you that it’s only an initial addiction problem, you’ll get over it, whatever or something like that, once it’s away it’s better for you. Rubbish. I would be very, very stressed without my email. I want my email near me all the time.

How do you and her negotiate house chores and time out and …

I don’t do any house chores, so that’s really easy, but I cook, I like to cook, that’s my, that’s my hobby at home. I like to cook so, and she doesn’t. So it’s just, we’re lucky we found each other. She’s very good at sleeping, I’m not. I don’t sleep very well. So when we’re on holiday, she likes to sleep late in the morning, I work.

OK, and like who takes care of the household then, like pay the bills and make sure the house is OK?

Well we probably share the bills. I mean, it’s all done electronically.

Given your experience in different companies and clients, how do you see how women experience the high tech world as a professional? Is it different than men? How?

Yeah, very different, yeah. Lots of different ways. When we were in Dell, when you’re working with people where there’s a little more interest in the technology, there’s a lot more leeway to play with technology. If you have someone who’s very business orientated, there’s no real way to play because play is unproductive. Men will call this research and development because not all research and development ends up commercially successful. So it’s
a way, it's an excuse to play with technology that necessarily doesn't have a financial viability to it. Women who make it in technology in terms of success, so career success, so management executive positions, high paid jobs, tend to be project managers or, as we call them, ball breakers, as in they will just sit and harp and moan. And they, they double the aggression because they perceive that they're not being taken seriously.

So when we were engineers and we'd have male engineers and female engineers and female project managers and male project managers, it was always easier to work with a male project manager simply because they weren't trying as hard. Not because they were better, maybe the female was better, I don't know. But they were so hard to get on with, that if you had an idea or you wanted to try something, you would be too afraid to do it because the repercussions for failure were immense. If you're working with somebody who, see you have very few female engineers, so female project managers would come from different backgrounds. If you had someone who was an engineer, they can understand that there sometimes is a risk in an engineering solution. And females won't understand it as well, or they won't want us to take the risk.

So, are you saying that the risk and consequences of failure are higher for a woman than for a man.

Because females feel threatened, they feel that they work twice as hard to get the same amount of respect, so if they now have a failure, it's twice as counter productive. But this isn't true. It's just an attitude change. So when you're working in a factory and Dell, the piece of technology I got to work on was really at the heart of Dell and was really fucked up and there was lots of opportunity to fix it. And probably because I was young, ambitious and coming from the outside and I wasn't built into the system, I could see all the problems and I could go and fix them and I got out before I became part of the system. Whereas they just want to keep, they want maintenance, routine.

Risk-adverse?

Risk-adverse, yeah, definitely risk-adverse. But that's important for a project manager, that's probably why they were made project managers because it was seen as a way to bring in more manageable, tangible results.

Do you think the environment itself was tougher on women?

Yeah, I mean, IT is 88 per cent white male dominated throughout the western world, yeah, because it costs a lot of money to train.

88 per cent?

Well, that's the last data I read, yeah. You can't take someone who's been devoid of IT their whole lives and bring them into IT. It's really, really hard. IT people are expensive people, you know. If you look at a company, software company, you look at Daft.ie or MyHome. These companies spend millions and millions on IT. It's really, really expensive money. I mean, auctioneers don't spend millions of euros on an individual unit. And you need to get as much out of them and the creative part or the artesian part of it could be sitting at home eating a meal, not technically working, you're watching TV, but you're thinking, we've got all this data in Dublin, we've got all these estate agents here, how do we get all this information up and down? We could spend eighteen months writing software so we need four programmers, senior lead, project managers, that's a million euro. Or what if I found something that let me package this email and people could email, and then we receive it and we can cut this down to three months. One person who's costing a hundred thousand euro a year can save the company a million euro a year.

That's why they're expensive, because if they get it wrong it'll cost you money. Not because they're expensive because they cost you a hundred thousand a year, because of the ideas that they'll say, when I worked for offices, we worked to upgrade our software management system which was their product that they were selling. Their total investment in research and development was probably only 300,000 euro a year. But if we hadn't come up
with ways to make things cheaper, it would have cost millions more, you know. That's why IT people are expensive. So if you don't have someone who's super creative, you'll end up spending four million where you could have spent a million. That's, that's what I think the key is. Does that make sense?

**How would this connect with the gender issue we were talking about?**

OK, so to get someone out of a population of average intelligent people, you, and they were only earning 75,000 a year where they could be earning 100,000 as an architect or a lawyer or an accountant, passion is the balancing act. And I don't think that if you look at the way society is raised, if you look at how children play with toys, women start, both boys and girls play with dolls. OK, maybe for men it's a teddy bear, maybe for a female it's a pink kitty cat. But women stay on that line. Men play with Lego and we play with, Lego, if you look at IT people, 90 per cent of IT people played with Lego as a kid. It's a primary building block to understanding coding. Building a house in Lego and building something in technology is almost identical.

And it's the same, we learned as little boys about technology, or we got the skill sets for technology and we got interested in technology very quickly. For girls, it's not seen, you know, for girls to play with computers, it's not, you know, it's not, computer games, when we were kids, boys had computer games, consoles, it was all (inaudible) shooting games, car games, war games, these don't sell to women. So it's selling to women, the iPhone has made huge impact, the D, you know, the Nintendo-DS, these have made huge impact, Facebook has made huge impact with women. It's the first time that they're being exposed to technology.

**The Wii.**

The Wii, exactly. This is technology that, this is the first unisex technology. Before that, it was all about men. It was, when you think about my generation who grew up as programmers on, with black and white screens with 64 kilobytes of memory ...

There's no fun, there's actually very little fun. If you gave a modern kid today who's been exposed to PlayStation3 and you gave him an (inaudible) PC, they would look at you sideways, you know what I mean?

Yeah. I remember.

So I don't think, I don't think that women got enthused for whatever reason, our education system, the way we, our society issues, whatever, got, I have never met a female engineer who really, I've met some. I've met some in Microsoft who, but it's one in a hundred.

Yeah. In my interviews at the park, people tell me that it is gender neutral, even the women say that. What I'm saying has nothing to do with what you're saying, that for example, the quality of the programming doesn't change with gender. It's sensitive to talent not sensitive to gender.

Yes, OK, I would agree with that. But, you're now talking about where you have a female programmer and a male programmer. I would say if you had a female programmer and a male programmer, the quality would be the same. But she is one out of a hundred females whereas he may be one in twenty men because for her to be driven to write code, because when you're programming, it is problem solving non-stop. I hated programming when I did it in an assembly route in Shannon where the amount of creativity is lower and the amount of just generating code is higher. When it's less artesian, that's when I started hating IT. I wanted to be a taxi driver, I wanted to join the army, I wanted to be a policeman. I really, really hated it. It was 9 to 5 stuff. It was everything I said I'm not. I did it for eleven months, I got paid 75,000 pounds a year and I hated every fucking day of it, I really did. I gave, I lost interest in everything. I lost interest in socialising, food, cars, all my, everything dried up.

But that's at a technical level.
Yeah, it became technician side of programming. It stopped being adventurous and new. At that level, anybody is good. And it, you know, to say that, to take a female already working in IT, she has jumped huge hurdles because if you look at a geeky female, because geek is now, it's now a badge you wear, whereas it used to be something you got beat up in high school for. They tend to have male friends, they tend to get on very well with other geeks who tend to be male because they're not going to have a female support group that works with them. So if you, if you say, if you meet someone and you say to them so it's gender neutral, what kind of cartoons do you like on the web? Geeky females with love XKCD.com, I don't know if you've ever heard of it but it's the geek for the new generation, or the comic for the geek generation. It's very mathematical. It compromises, it bring IT, it brings nuclear, write it down.

What's the name, again?

XKCD.com. It's really wacky and the guy who writes it, he's American, he's recluse, very intelligent and the only city he's been to outside of America is Limerick. And he, that was the, you know, the 3D camp at UL?

Recently?

Yeah, last year or the year before. It was [XXX] who's a high level engineer for Microsoft who's on Twitter, [XXX]. She would be a very, she would be perfect for this. She's a very bright, very friendly female engineer in a, and she's a digital nomad. She's on Twitter. She's very easy to talk to.

Where does she work?

Microsoft. In Dublin. She would be friends with people like Alexia Golez and people like that who do live in Limerick. So if you're on Twitter, she would be a very good person to follow because all you have to do then is see who her female geek friends are and who is in Limerick and that will extrapolate for you, you'll probably find Clara [XXX] and Alexia [XXX] on there.

Yeah, later on I'll email you to send me her email contact.

So if you look at her when I go to Microsoft launches in Dublin, it's all men, and all her colleagues are all men. So to say it's gender neutral but to then be the only female in a group of 100 men, it's not really neutral, is it?

Towards the end - the Celtic Tiger and the high tech sector in Ireland, how do you see the high tech sector currently and into the future?

It's a double-edged sword. It was very good to Ireland because Ireland struggled to be a manufacturing economy. Ireland regardless of what it thinks was always an expensive economy. Even in the '80s, Ireland was a very expensive place to live. Ireland has, is very, very difficult to change. A lot of people have this perception that we're this multilingual, rainbow coloured multicultural, globalised economy and that's just the biggest load of shit we've allowed anyone to believe. And my dad always said it's OK to bullshit other people but you're in a lot of trouble when you bullshit yourself. And Ireland, in Ireland, when you grow up as an Irish family, you're not allowed to stand up and go look at me, I'm an expert. You'll be chopped down to size very quickly. We're all equal. We almost have a communist feel about Ireland. I've always felt that there's, no matter what people earn in Ireland they almost all come out with the same amount of money. If you come out with any more, you're just an arrogant show off. Ireland has this, it's built in, Ireland is this deeply homogenous, everyone in Ireland knows what communion is, convention is, we're all Catholic, we all had the same teachers, it doesn't matter. Ireland is very homogenous, everyone is the same. They're little plastic clones of each other. And therefore standing out is really obvious.

And I grew up in a country where Catholics were a minority, but I grew up in an Irish community, we had Irish priests, my parents are very Irish. And when I came to Ireland, my fiancee and I were living in Dublin and we
shared a house with a family who were Irish but they were Church of Ireland, they were Protestant. She didn't know, she really didn't know how to handle it. She didn't know, you know, does she ask if the son is doing his communion and they, Protestantism and Catholicism to her could have been as different as Judaism and Islam because she didn't know what it was and she never had to know what it was and it wasn't, they, it was kept, it was excluded from the country.

So we had, we're not as flexible as we think we are and Ireland in the 1920s and the 1800s and the 1960s and the 1970s had a problem with land control and who owned property. So in 1890, 1,000 people in Ireland owned property and everyone wanted to own property. And what happened when the country became rich? Everyone bought property. And what was the biggest lie that people told themselves? Was that property could never go down because property had never gone down. And what's the biggest thing screwing up the economy right now? It's that lie. It's that we allowed to believe, and bubbles have been going around since the Dutch bulb bubble in the 1600s. More people, it's the average person who drives it. And then when we don't, when it failed and we all believed it could never fail, we don't understand it and we, so what technology has done, it got over being expensive, it made Irish people rich because they could buy property, they could buy cars, they could travel the world. Because they were intrinsically humble, because every time they went to another country and they saw all these big things, because I mean, we never had a motorway, Ireland was a third world country until 1992. They were extremely humble because they were like, you go to America and they've had motorways since 1930s. And you just think like, wow, this is fantastic and people are very humble. But it's not, it's just they're just not that well open minded, you know. And so I think the technology brought Ireland huge wealth, and instead of taking the money and investing in IT, we took the money and invested in property.

And you look at all the guys that you interviewed from the Limerick coffee club who are entrepreneurs, the funding came from themselves and the government. I funded myself. I've never had an investor in Ireland. In South Africa, you'd have investors, no problem. In America, you'd have investors, no problem. England, not as flexible, but a lot more flexible than Ireland. Ireland, if you want a business loan, personal guarantee. It's an 80-20 rule. Like 80 per cent of directors loans in Ireland for business are guaranteed. Opposite in the UK, it's almost 5 per cent. And that's really, really important because businesses need funding. And I think, if I look back at how I've seen my clients get funding or I've seen friends, because I like entrepreneurship, I like to know how people make money. I don't think I was ever successful at it, so it's nice to see other people be successful at it.

How they do it, you'll have, if you five years ago went and you brought a hundred people to two different hotels, and in one room you said we're selling you property in a country that takes six hours to fly to, yeah, you're not allowed to drink which is what most of you like to do, but you're just going to make shit loads of money on it. Or tell people it's about technology, forget it. It ain't going to happen, it never happened. Property won all the time. And women understood property and women were probably as big investors. Property was a great leveliser for women. They could go in, but business and tech, not, it's not an attractive proposition. So I think that we got technology in, which was great, and the problem was we didn't ever build our own industry, our own technology base. And we, the technology park in Limerick is a joke because there's very little technology there. There's O2, they don't develop technology, there's nothing fantastic going on there. Vistakon isn't superb. There's not a whole lot of technology there, it's just a name. It's just a marketing trick.

And what about the software part?

There's no real software companies there. There's not a lot of software companies.

Software development tools, you know, software for software?

There's very little research and development, innovation in the National Technology Park in Limerick. There's probably mundane business parks in Dublin that do ten times the research and development that Limerick does. The National Technology Park in Limerick got a name and it ended there.
Yeah, I have a sense, by talking to people there, top level people, that the park has stagnated. That ten years, fifteen years ago, it was a vibrant and dynamic place, and people were hopeful and excited...

Yeah, you had, you had Aishling Technologies which used to design microchips. Blackbird, which was designing barcode reading. These were new technologies and they were doing really well. You know, Thompson, Prometric and Wang were there and then Dell were there, and there was some research and development going on. Now it's, I mean, it's nothing special. It might as well just be called the National, it might as well just be called the local business park. It doesn't identify, it doesn't accurately identify what happens.

So the high tech sector in the Celtic Tiger years, you know, as I understand it, there was a handful of big American multinationals, manufacturing, hardware, they came in. And then around it, you have the development of all the Irish software service providers. Now the manufacturing is moving out, but you still have this Irish (inaudible) base.

You had a couple of, you had a couple of Irish success stories. I own a, not Sysco, I forget their name, Softco, Icon, clinical research, BioTech, Elan, which is in Athlone which is BioTech. And maybe one or two more, Baltimore, which was just a bubble, and that was it, nothing dynamic or special or exciting. And software providers are just like building a factory and just having plumbers and electricians. They've become, your average programmer in Ireland now is what a toolmaker or a garage worker was 30 years ago. It's, we, we didn't, we just didn't use Dell and IBM and Microsoft and Intel as training institutions to build companies here. We just didn't do it and because we just don't have a venture capital industry.

No, but there is a number of high tech professionals in Ireland.

There is a number, but if you have to pay a one million euro mortgage because you live in (inaudible) Bringe and you've got four kids and you're taxed to here and everything is expensive, and holidays are expensive, why would you give up working for IBM as a technology director when IBM will move you to the United States and you have everything that you want? What's the impotence to give it up and become self employed?

So you're saying that they will move to America.

They will move to American or stay in, they will stay in their job. There's no, why would you give up earning 200, 500 million a year in stock and benefits to working for yourself in a country that ...

Yeah, in case the company moves out.

Oh well then you have to do it, yeah. But like you said, the companies held onto the brightest people, they moved the manufacturing away. So Dell have retained the highest people. Microsoft have retained the highest people. IBM retained the highest people and they moved the manufacturing out.

Yeah, but Ireland still exports software, niche software ...

But whose software? But whose software? Yeah, there is some good software companies. But a five people company is just about job displacement. It's not about job creation. Even if fifty people, a fifty man company, we didn't build a lot of it. I mean, Dell took out ten, twelve thousand jobs. There isn't ten, twelve thousand truly indigenous Irish software jobs in Ireland in terms of export, there isn't. I don't think so. I biggest company, Iona, probably only employs two or three thousand people now.

Yeah, you say in the technology park, in the past it was 4,000 people. Now it must be 3,000. But it's 1,000 working for UL and the other thousand working for Vistakon and Cook Medical.

O2.
And the other 1,000 ...

In small companies. And then you would have also had, actually in 1999, you would have had nearly 10,000 people because you had FlexTronics in Dell. FlexTronics weren't working for Dell then in that relationship, but there was a FlexTronics plant and a Dell plant. So you had 10,000 people working in that park. Again, no big Irish indigenous success stories. One of the biggest success stories there would have been Origin, but they were just supplying to other companies, so it's just job displacements. So instead of Dell hiring them, they hired them and sold them to Dell at a profit. So it's not, it's not an indigenous exporter. They're not inventing technologies. They're building technology on behalf of someone else.

Yeah. OK. So what's the future of the high tech sector in Ireland, then?

These things, you can't guess. If you can see them now, then we would probably be, then I would have faith that we would be coming out of a recession. Because recessions I think tend to be, the upward swing tends to be technology driven. So at the end of the '70s and '80s, what led us out of technology was, sorry, what led us out of the recession was massive technology robots. So in England you had massive strikes because workers thought they were being replaced by car robots. While what was happening was that the British were slow to embrace change, their economy was old world, and they thought in terms of huge manufacturing. Because how do you employ 50 million people? Factories employ 10,000 people, we need more factories. They were building rubbish motorbikes, rubbish cars. Now, the UK builds fantastic cars because they're built by Toyota and Mazda and Ford. They have huge factories in England, and Ford actually makes more cars, sorry, the UK actually makes more cars than they ever did because it's managed by someone else who moved with technology. So what technology would bring us out of this? Will it be thermonuclear power, you know, what, you know, will it be replicating the way the sun works to generate energy, will it be a change in the environment, will it be recycling? I don't know. I can't tell you what that is.

So you think that the software industry in Ireland is not self sustaining or will not survive, you think?

No. No, I don't think so. I think if you look at Italy, they have a huge IT industry for a number of reasons. One, the country is very Italian, so they speak Italian. They don't like to learn other languages as much, except for the hotel tourism trade. So they've kind of boxed off their marketplace because Italian providers speak Italian, they can (inaudible) software, and they have a huge, huge industrial base, food, cars, they have a huge industrial base. And their, and they have a low cost of living because they all live in apartment, they don't have a very expensive lifestyle. And so they have a much bigger IT group that's much more self sustainable. If we lose Intel and Microsoft, this country's finished. And to say that a country is dependent on two companies is very scary, because that's all we're dependent on now, Intel and Microsoft, not IBM. IBM could go, the country would live.

Intel, Microsoft, Dell and IBM at one stage paid nearly 17 per cent of this country's tax bill. They didn't employ ...

Yeah but I was told that these multinationals, they are actually the low tech work in Ireland, like Microsoft is basically burning CDs ...

That was what Microsoft did in EPDC in the, I was in Microsoft yesterday, I'm not supposed to say I work for Microsoft, but I do a lot of work for Microsoft. And they printed a newspaper article for Microsoft twenty years ago, when they started in Ireland. And that's what they did, they burned CDs. But they demolished that. There's apartments where that is. Now Microsoft have these big shiny new buildings. There's maybe twenty people that work in Microsoft sales for Ireland and the other 3,000 people work on localisation and software engineering. There's no boxes. It's all skilled labour.

So what are these people that work there.
Localisation, so in America, everything is done in English. So America and Canada, it's all English. But then in Europe, you have Spanish and French and Italian and Portuguese. So they have to localise the software for the European market. It's all done in Dublin.

So isn't this like translations?

Yeah, but localisation is, yeah, it's translations, exactly, and also you have support, so you have partners in Europe who are developing technologies and they're getting stuck. And they need to communicate and Italian and Portuguese and it's done in Dublin. Some of Windows 7, some of the shot down software was developed in Dublin, small bits, I mean not on the scale of India or anything. But there's no box shifting in Dublin anymore, and there hasn't been for I'd say 9, 10 years, because my fiancee used to work for Microsoft, but in reception, not as a technologist.

So do you think that this is a higher level?

Yeah, much higher. They took away a factory and they put in an office block that doesn't do manufacturing. And therefore those ...

But a there is nothing special about a call centre, isn't it?

It's not a call centre for Microsoft Windows users, because Microsoft don't do that. It's a call centre to Microsoft partners, technology providers. So it's not your average call centre. It's a clever call centre, it's the higher call centre. If you look at Apple, Apple may have employed three and a half thousand people in Cork in manufacturing, but now they don't do manufacturing, but they have two and a half thousand employees in the logistics, procurement. The things that Ireland will be important for or could be important for, localisation, management of procurement, engineering to a certain degree, a small bit, these are what these companies (inaudible) now.

These functions are really, really important to a company. They go to the heart of a company. The manufacturing is too expensive to do in Ireland. So in one hand it's the only chance we have so we've got to be good at these functions. I don't think that Ireland is genetically better off or superior, anything, or inferior, I don't believe in that in anyway. But I think that you, in Ireland, you have a base of reasonably well educated people with the same intelligence profile as any other country. We're in the European Union, we speak English. There's actually very few English speaking countries in the European Union, and that suits American companies, to have Irish, Americans have a myth about Irish people. They have a little, almost a toy story, a fairy idea of Ireland that doesn't, isn't real. And all you have to do is watch American cartoons, the Simpsons or anything, and Ireland is just this fun-loving place where no one gets hurt. You know, it's this magical utopian society.

But at a business level, are there stereotypes that help Ireland?

Yeah, there are definitely stereotypes ...

Which are?

It's non-competitive. The fear with India and China is that you move all your intelligence there, they will become the world power. And if America has used, abused world power for decades. It has been in America's interest to be the number one. Maybe for good, maybe for bad, I'm not, you know, but it has suited them to be number one. It's made them rich. They have been at the top of the pyramid. And if they have to use military power or economic sanctions and it helps, why not. When you look at Europe, Europe is fragmented, it's united as it's disunited. It doesn't talk to each other, it doesn't do business very well with each other, it doesn't speak (inaudible) language. It's only 450 million people, and it doesn't even do as well as the 350 million people in America. India and China are nearly two and a half billion people. They're bigger than America and Europe. If they dictate economic policy and it's not what you like, well then you're in trouble. Ireland is not a threat. Ireland is a small
country that's very easily controllable, we're neutral but you can land bombs here and fly them off to other
countries, it's not a problem. So Ireland is somewhere you can transfer knowledge to. It's a footstep into the
European Union and there's no risk.

Yeah, I understand what you're saying. I agree that these are important geopolitical concerns. But you know,
the concern that a general strategist at the Pentagon has with this is not the same concern that an American
businessman has, you know. He doesn't care if it is Chinese or Indian or Irish, as long as it ...

OK, but ... When we were shipping Windows PCs from Dell we had to have people who were trained in U.S.
compliance export (inaudible). Because if you shipped a version of Windows with Internet Explorer with 128 bits
of Internet security, which is the standard for Internet e-commerce. And you shipped it to a country like Libya or
Morocco, Dell in America would get fined hundreds of millions of dollars. So it's built into them through U.S.
foreign policy control. So if America says we want to build a part of Microsoft Windows in India, that's now going
to come back and be run in the Pentagon, then they have issues with the Pentagon.

The same as the ports in Dublin in America were going to be run by a Saudi Arabian conglomerate or a Dubai
conglomerate was turned down because of national security, whether that's true or not, I don't know. America is
a very, very nationalist country, very nationalist. You're an American first, then you're a Texan, then you're an oil
worker. And no more or no less than some other countries like Switzerland or Germany, they're very nationalist
countries as well. And they would, you know, and America can't trade in China like they want to. So in Microsoft's
offices in China and Beijing, you have the communist party there, so you automatically restrict things because you
don't want your technology to get out there. It's not that it's a nationalist thing always. It's a, if the Chinese got a
copy of the code behind Windows, they would just turn out billions of copies of it. So it's a, the two aren't
inseparable.

Yeah. So now from the macro geopolitics and the nationalism down to local technology park ...

Down to me.

Yeah, it's the final topic now, improvements. You have your opinion about the technology park and so why are
you located there? Not because of the technology, right?

I'm located in Limerick, first of all, because my family are in Limerick, and my dad's family and my mother's family
are in Limerick. And when I grew up in South Africa, we didn't have a family. So it's really important. My fiancee's
family live in North Kerry, so it's very close. When we were living in Dublin, we spent a lot of time travelling to
here, which was very difficult because the infrastructure was awful and it's a 555 mile round trip, and to do this in
a weekend means that you have very little space. When I was in Dublin all of the different software projects that I
wanted to work on, I've done them all. So I used to like big client server, database driven applications, moving
data around, synchronisation, the more complicated it sounded the better, I really wanted to do it. So I've done it
and I have no interest in repeating it. Doing it again isn't fun.

So we moved to Limerick because I, I got a job here and in 2002, 2003 there was a slump in IT. The, you know, the
dot-net bubble had busted. Then September 11 came along, that made it worse and there were very few IT jobs.
And one of the IT jobs I got was in Shannon actually, and it was a contractor, right, this was the job I hated. And
that's when I went back into being self-employed. But I was already in Limerick and we were living in Limerick and
I set it up here. But the real money was still in Dublin. So now I'm living in Limerick, commuting to Dublin, but I'm
kind of now doing it midweek rather than the weekend, so I could live in Dublin and work in Dublin and commute
to see my family. Or I could live in Limerick and commute to see Dublin. So I really just turned it around.

And why in the technology park? I think you mentioned the rent?

In Limerick, the best place to be is the technology park.
Because?

Of the address, so if someone in Dublin is buying from us on the Internet, first impressions count. So when they see our website and we say we have an office in Limerick, in the National Technology Park, we have an office in Dublin, which we don't really have, and we have an office in Cork.

Yeah, this is what I here a lot: branding...

Yeah, so you appear bigger than you are, and so you ring the number and a girl will say, oh this is such and such a company, oh I'd like to speak to someone about this. Hold on, I'll see if he's free, then they'll call me. They think that they're dealing with some big 25 man or 50 man company.

All right. But in the beginning you mentioned that they have good broadband connection, good price.

And they have good, so why am I in, that was why I'm in Roselawn House and not the Innovation Works. They're both in the Technology Park, so I'm in Limerick first of all because of family, I work in Dublin because that's where the money is. I'm in the National Technology Park for the address. I'm in the Roselawn House because it's the best financial, economic, commercial decision to be there. It's got great broadband, it's got good services. But if I had, if I, if my family were in Dublin, I wouldn't have moved to Limerick.

Is there any level of networking inside the park?

No.

Do you connect with other companies, people there, formally or informally?

I met three IT companies last year and it was because of the work I do with a company in Dublin. And they're literally across the road. So there's no networking in the park, no. I met some of the people here that work in the same building as I do, and I met them here. So there's no networking, no. That's why I said you might as well call it the local business park, because it doesn't ...

Yeah. There is a literature on concentration, advantages of clustering businesses. And I suppose there may be some marginal economic gains in clustering companies of the same kind. But, beyond that, social and culturally, I don't see much networking going on.

You have to ask yourself is it observational or is it, or is it sort of predictive? In other words, Austin in Texas has got a lot of computer companies. Before Silicon Valley it had the highest density of computer chip companies. But was it accidental or did it encourage itself? I mean, OK, clearly Silicon Valley has encouraged itself because it's got a global phenomenon. But I don't think clustering, it's like saying someone is lucky. That's a history of what they've done, it's not an indication of what they will do because you can't predict luck.

Clustering has never happened in Limerick. It's too small. I don't think clustering ever really happened in Dublin. Clustering may have happened in Cork in terms of pharmaceuticals. But I just think Ireland had the right mix to attract foreign investment because even though Ireland is expensive, pharmaceutical technology is capital intensive, and that is the same cost in Ireland or Germany, but you have a lower profitability tax. So, in swings and roundabouts, Ireland was just a good alternative for pharmaceutical industry. I don't think it was clustering because I don't think they work together. You know, if you're developing a drug for heart disease, there's no benefit in sharing it with someone who can bring it to market.

And networking with UL, do you network there, with researchers, students, faculty, events, conferences?
We've had very little interaction with UL. The only one was BisCamp in Limerick last year. But, Steven Kinsella who I think is a great guy, really the only person I know in UL, I think. To me, universities are slow, they pay too much attention to degrees and for what I do, there is no degree course. So it would take someone like me to design it, so to me there's no, I understand what universities are there for. It's for, but I disagree that universities are innovative. I think universities are expensive, money wasting black holes. The amount of money that UL wastes, as an entrepreneur who has to be lean, it saddens me. The footbridge, for 15 million euro? It can never ever be commercially justified. I understand the relationship between the university and Chuck Feeney and that they have to spend money, I understand it.

But I will never, I would never look to a university as a model for scientific progress on its own, you know. I don't see the University of Limerick as having made any major contribution. But that's fine, that's not for Limerick to do. That's maybe for MIT or Harvard to do. I can understand universities in biomedical where it's expensive and it's, there's lots and lots of, that's lots and lots of book research. I can understand universities playing a big role there. But for what I do, I do think that, going back to what I was talking about, the next generation of the web, I do think that universities could play a role there. But I think that a private company could do it quicker, cheaper and more flexible. Because I've offered this idea to UL and to Tipperary. I'm not, I don't have the time to go and push for it, and if you don't push for it, it's not going to happen. So if the people I met want to push for it then, they're not interested.

**In terms of improvements in the technology park, Shannon Development, Enterprise Ireland, UL, what types of improvements would you like to see?**

Less is more. So why do we have to have an Enterprise Ireland, a Shannon Development, a county enterprise board? Just one agency. Why do we have to have all this duplication and waste? Why do you have to apply to three different agencies doing three different things for one different, for one same person? I don't get why the university's part of the National Technology Park. I would have argued that it should be outside the National Technology Park. I think that, why is Lero in UL? Why does the university have to bring so much into its campus? I know it, I know some guys, I know him socially, not through work who works in one of the mineral research departments, and they must hand over one-third of their budget to UL which then controls their budget. Why would you do this? It's crazy. Maybe it's for ...

**All universities are like that.**

But this is the stupidity. You know, why must everything be done in the university, to me the university just takes because it's its survival mechanism, you know, and just ...

**Yeah, there is this concept of a science park, and with the science park is a technology park with a university.**

It sounds good, but I haven't ever seen anything come out of ...

**I take your point and agree that there are no direct benefits to business from university. But, you know, indirectly, they are educating people, getting people used to modern systems ...**

Yeah, so the university needs to stand back and listen, not bring in and grow and, the university, the university must stop doing too much. It needs to stand back.

**What about what they're doing, the technology transfer office, where they're trying to identify and commercialise scientific developments there?**

By the time you finish it the technology would have been picked up by someone else with more money. The university wants too much of a percentage, so when you then, as the entrepreneur go then to seek private capital, the amount of company you've given away for licensing, whatever, it's an unviable proposition, I think.
What about patenting? When you developed those three patents in that company you worked for, are they yours or, they're company's patents.

They're the company's patents, they buy them from you. It's a transfer between you and the company, yeah, yeah.

Is the compensation to the patent maker, a flat fee or it varies depending on the innovation?

They have their own legal team to develop the patent, and then there's three stages, initial approval, patent office approval and then patent granted. And so it's 500 pounds, 5,000 pounds, 15,000 pounds, and stock options and then it's, because the patent, Dell were involved in a patent war. Lucent Technology said they developed a hundred patents a day and Dell had to come up with a hundred patents a day. I don't know that, if all of the patents were worthwhile patenting in the first place, you know. It was bragging rights, it was vanity. It wasn't, we're not talking, I was only there for two years, we're not talking huge amounts of research.

What Dell, what Dell did, which is probably what IBM and Microsoft do, was instead of having one engineer work on this part of the table and another engineer working on this and another engineer working on this, is Dell had ten guys working on this, ten guys working on this, ten guys working on this. And every day you made little itsy bitsy steps towards something better. And you, by doing this, you were taking ten average people and combining them into one intelligent person. But they were accidentally just looking for things and one would just be selected, sort of natural selection. Eventually it just came right, if that makes sense, versus being in a scientific environment. We're not talking that level. It, very simplistic, little improvements, like you know, you know, you have a laptop so somebody came up with a USB light so you plug it in and it's got an LED, and then someone said, why don't we just put a light underneath the pin keyboard, and then where the letter is, that will light up, you know. And then how will we do that, and then someone said, we can use fibre optical cable like a car, because if you just shine one light, it'll shine through the cracks of the keyboard. So there was no, there was no cures for cancer. It was just little tiny improvements, yeah.

OK, all right. Is there anything I didn't ask that I should have asked? Or anything that you want to say?

No, I'm all out of ideas.

Do you have any questions about this or any concerns?

I have no concerns. Just I suppose curious as to what you're studying or, is it in relation to the National Technology Park or is it just wider?

It is wider, the technology park is just a specific part of the project interests. They are a tool of regional development, and thus interesting to study from a policy making viewpoint. But we also have wider theoretical interests about flexible work, mobility and new technologies, by focusing on the high-tech sector...