



INTERVIEW WITH

—  
GLOBAL CEO SAP & FLI THOUGHT LEADER  
BILL MCDERMOTT

# THE BEAUTY OF MOVING KNOWLEDGE

**TATIN** INSTITUTE  
FOR STRATEGY ACTIVATION

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**In 2015, we talked to Bill McDermott, CEO of SAP, on how to achieve true progress. Find out more about his understanding of progress – for big business as well as for the people.**

Bill McDermott is on top of the clouds. The CEO of SAP, one of the world's biggest software companies, answered our questions for the Future of Leadership Initiative 2015 on "Achieving True Progress" on his way back to his US office in Philadelphia – calling from a plane. His ideas and thoughts on progress are on top of visions – and are still well grounded. What does progress mean for somebody who is in charge of one of the largest software companies in the world? "Progress happens if the idea of a deeper purpose overtops profit, if you are dedicated to establish a vision."

For him, without a powerful vision there will be no progress. And even though we have to perk up our ears to catch all of Bills messages up in the air, we soon get a clear understanding of his vision with regards to information technology: "Progress is testifying in technologies the process of democratizing of information, our knowledge and learning. This contains things that result in the modern economy of information sharing, in the beauty of moving knowledge."

Digital technology helps to create new relationships and initiate global understanding. The challenge is to effectively handle the enormous amounts of data that are constantly being created in the world. Right now the amount of information actually doubles in less than 18 months. So what existed throughout the entire time of society is going to completely doubled in the next 18 months. "With this in mind I consider progress the idea of selecting and processing relevant data real-time, information that can both predict what is likely to happen next and provide all necessary information at hand to make smart decisions."

SAP therefore has developed the HANA an in-memory-technology that finds insights and decisive patterns by analyzing Big Data. "Progress means providing transparency to consumers, to employees, to business partners, to the next great frontier." Bill McDermott started his business career as a 17 year-old with a little deli-shop on Long Island, New York. His first job in industry was at Xerox Corporation. Since then he has been working in the software business for more than three decades – keeping his focus set on his clients as a priority. When it comes to McDermott's vision of progress, of a scenario in the future, his first answer is: "My vision of progress is a world full of happy people." He continues: "I think that every person should be entitled to have the same education. It is my certain desire to see everybody getting access to knowledge and information. A core value in society should be the rebirth of curiosity. Also, most importantly, I would see people having access to food and to water and to all the natural resources that



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are becoming scarcer and scarcer. This should all happen if we start to live our lives differently, behave differently and to use technology in entirely new ways to prepare society for the next mile.”

The innovations that are needed to reach this progress are seen by McDermott in the power of mobility and mobile efficiency. On the one hand it's about the mobile devices that help to bring people online even in the remote parts of the world. On the other hand it is about the capacity of people to connect to networks, to share information and to join interests. “I work together with this woman from South Africa, who used to spend 80 % of her business volume traveling in an automobile from town to town to gather information on goods and services of her suppliers. By using one mobile application she now automated the entire supply chain and all of her pains from the road were made electronically. This a great example of the power of technology. So, the more you enable networks in these faraway places and provide helpful technology tools, the more the individuals start to develop their curiosity in modern economy – and find solutions.”

Bill McDermott has clear principles regarding big businesses too. The time of linear thinking is over. Connected lateral thinking is necessary, if you want to make decisions that enable true progress. To reduce business to view factors and KPIs as a way to measure success. “The measures of success have to evolve and to change. Long term principles of a sustainable business have to prevail profit considerations“, Bill says.

When he thinks about a specific place, where progress would have been fully realized, he envisions a smart city or even a smart country where the provisions were made for all citizens of society. This means they would be able to actively participate in economy, would have access to all important goods and would have the tools to satisfy their curiosity. Digital technology would be the underpinning force for that. “I mean, this would be not possible without the complete digitalization of the economy. As much as a business has to be digitized, society also has to follow that trend. I see the convergence of everything to the device. I see a mobile world. I see the needs for transparency and information and joint governance across the global economy. And this can only be held together with amazing solutions.”

Finally Bill McDermott makes a suggestion which can be really seen as amazing in the highly competitive world of today's business: “I think it is fundamental that digital companies collaborate in bringing digital technologies together, coming up with new powerful and connected solutions. This kind of network economy is what excites me as it is the way to digitalize society.” On this note we ended our interview.

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### VERENA BRINKMANN

SENIOR CONSULTANT AT TATIN INSTITUTE

In her role as a communications specialist, Verena has been working for several years on the relevant and activating conveyance of messages to various target groups. As a consultant in communications agencies, she has advised clients from a wide variety of industries (at a national and international level) on sustainable communication using various formats in print, online and live.

She has employed simulations and process training to prepare her clients to deal with the imminent crisis in communication. In the context of an industrial company's internal communication, she has developed concepts to activate employees and executives with regard to the company's strategic goals.



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