



S04E02: Cracking the Code of Personal Cues in the Digital Age with Natalie Seatter

[00:00:01] **Introduction:** Tech Reimagined. Redefining the relationship between people and technology. Brought to you by Endava. This is Tech Reimagined.

[00:00:11] **Bradley Howard:** Hello! This is Tech Reimagined with me Bradley Howard and Natalie Proberts. I'm very pleased to welcome you to the latest episode of our show. How are you today, Natalie?

[00:00:20] **Natalie Proberts:** I'm good, thank you. I'm looking forward to today's conversation.

[00:00:23] **Bradley Howard:** Looking forward to it! We explore how technology is influencing the fabric of our society, the way we work, the way we live, and the way that we do business. Stay tuned on every podcast platform to listen to our fantastic guests this season. And speaking of expert guests today, we're glad to introduce you to Natalie Seatter, who leads OAG's products and data strategy. She's passionate about built-in innovative data products that help customers solve problems and achieve business goals. How are you today, Natalie?

[00:00:52] **Natalie Seatter:** I'm really well, thank you, Bradley. I'm fresh back from a week in Dubai, a brilliant travel event. So, I'm feeling pumped.

[00:00:59] **Bradley Howard:** Welcome along. Can you tell us a bit more about your background at OAG so that we can start off on the right foot?

[00:01:06] **Natalie Seatter:** Sure. So, I've been in tech for a while, I think since 2012 now, so probably just over ten years. And I've made a career for myself and I would describe it as literally making a career for myself kind of between commercial the business, the customer and tech. I started doing that back in 2012 and have held a variety of delivery, digital transformation and product roles during that time, ending up at OAG, quite literally ending up at OAG wasn't kind of on my target list. In fact, I've never had a target list. I've just kind of fallen into roles and found opportunities as I've gotten.

So, OAG is a brilliant place to be. It's likely you'll interact with all data every day in some way, particularly if you're travelling, but you probably don't know who we are. So, we're a data provider. We've existed for over 90 years, and so 90 is airlines from all around the world have given us their data. We take feeds into airlines every day. We aggregate that data, transform it, cleanse it, and then distribute out to the travel ecosystem in a variety of ways.

So that's essentially what we do. The likelihood is if you're searching for a flight on a or on a search engine, that would be all flight data that you see coming back in those results. But we can talk more about the different use cases and sectors that we serve maybe a bit later.

[00:02:27] **Bradley Howard:** Absolutely. I'm looking forward to that. So today we're going to dive into whether you think the rise of digital communication makes it harder for us all to take personal cues and how that can affect today's and tomorrow's working generation. And so that people understand we're actually doing this remotely as well. So, we've got lots of digital queues even while we record this. I'm sure we can all relate to getting a kick under the table or sharp elbow in the ribs as we grew up, and that's how we

learned our manners. So, if we reflect this into the work environment in today's online world, how do we translate that into digital? What's your view on that, Natalie?

[00:03:02] **Natalie Seatter:** Look, I think it's something that we've all had to adapt to. I was thinking about, you know, thinking about this a little bit earlier. I'm not sure if I'm perhaps the best person to ask this, because I've always been someone who's just had very little filter and has been told that she's had very little filter throughout her career. And so even in person, if something's not working, I've said it's not working. Well, I think we're missing the point here. Or actually, you're looking really bored in this meeting. You know, Natalie, can you put your phone down because it looks like you're being really distracted and we need you present and engaged.

So, for me, those kinds of these rules, you know, spoken or unspoken, they still apply in a virtual world. So, if people have got their cameras off on a meeting today, I'll be the person. So will my team as well. Actually, they're like, Guys, it would be great if we could see your faces. It would be great if we could look at the whites of the eyes. It would be great if we could see some passionate interest or voice your disinterest. If you're finding this meeting boring, then say so.

You know, actually, if you feel this meeting is totally irrelevant to you and your business area, say so. And it's by being honest and open and talking about our experiences of whether content is relevant for us in a work situation or whether the dialog is relevant for us or whether we can contribute to that will know and that's how we move forward.

So I think, you know, if I reflect back to pre-COVID, I always wanted more people to be doing more of that. I was blessed enough to work. I'll pay 2012 to 2015, and that was very much the culture that we had there. And it was it was so valuable for people to just say what they felt and for us to move the needle on the business like it was a product. And we were constantly iterating what we did and how we did it culturally within that business. And I think to be those rules, if you like, still hold true today in a virtual world, you know. Talk about your experience. Is it relevant? Is it not? Yes. You've got some other stuff you can use the hands up and you know all of that good stuff. But I think the more that people can be feel psychologically safe enough to speak out about what's working and what's not and the better.

[00:05:06] **Bradley Howard:** I find sometimes when I'm on a video call, I get more of a reaction. If I put my actual physical hand up like I'm at the moment than when I use the team's raise hand icon and people just sort of leave you hanging for absolutely ages. So there's still those personal cues over the digital ones, aren't there?

[00:05:26] **Natalie Seatter:** Yeah, I agree. And I thought I find that kind of thing quite clinical. I also find it a bit of a conversation killer because we then get into a we're all sitting there well-behaved. One hand goes up, another one goes up. Before we know it, we've got ten hands up. Everyone wants to discuss the point that was raised 10 minutes ago. It feels like the natural ebb and flow of that dialogue should have moved on, but we stuck where we were. I find it as a conversation killer, if I'm honest. It's very polite. It's very polite. Yes, sometimes not helpful.

[00:05:54] **Bradley Howard:** I agree about your point before, when you said that you recommend that your team leave their video on. We have almost a rule within Endava of it that we're always video first, the camera always needs to be on. But I find that it's some of the written digital communication that sometimes gets me into a little bit more difficulty. So, I'll write something in an email and sometimes it can be really misinterpreted, especially the one that always gets me is my use of exclamation marks sometimes people think that that's either sarcasm supposed to be a joke or an exclamation what it's supposed to be, which is this is important.

[00:06:33] **Natalie Seatter:** Yep. Or the old passive aggressive as per my previous email. You know, I think I've learned to be less triggered by some of those like being on the receiving end of those maybe as I've

got older actually, whereas before I would have got into a real email war, perhaps about, about some of these things. And I think if in doubt these days and I've got my to do the same is pick up the phone will not pick up the phone these days. Right. That allowed you to jump on a team's call and better to not get out that way than to get into the older ping pong.

[00:07:06] **Bradley Howard:** But that's another one as well, because I sometimes will, especially as I've been returning to the office more. Ah, sometimes write to someone on teams and say, have you got 5 minutes for a chat? Now I have to always qualify it with this isn't bad news. Yeah.

[00:07:25] **Natalie Seatter:** You're starting to give me some concerns Bradley around like people's perception of you and your written and verbal communication.

[00:07:33] **Bradley Howard:** Maybe it does need more work. So, when it comes to mentorship and especially with some of your less experienced colleagues, how do you find that digital makes a difference there?

[00:07:46] **Natalie Seatter:** I don't know. You know, I'm not I don't think it's necessarily a bad thing. I think if I look back to my twenties and my thirties, I'm mid-forties now. But if I look back to my twenties in my thirties, I think, you know, I wouldn't have changed anything. I loved being in that office environment. I really did because there is so much richness. You're sitting with people, you can seek advice, you can get feedback, sometimes unwanted, but you know you've got a whole support group around you. With that comes a hell of a lot of social interaction as well, right?

So, you know, very much certainly during my time it was working hard but play even harder. And of course, now with kind of more online digital, you don't get that I'm mentoring probably five or six women currently. And you know I don't think this is a blocker at all. In fact, I think sometimes it enables you to be more focused, more professional, more structured, and more looking to get the most out of your time that you've got in, say, 45 minutes on screen. Do you think it's really important, though, to support that with some face-to-face and connectivity as well? Because at the end of the day, we're human beings. That's that's what we're about.

And, you know, you can really get a feel for someone's energy and who they are and how they, you know, show up their mannerisms, that all of these things that make us individual human beings. Don't get me started on I will probably get to that later. But those things we've we've really got to keep and certainly, you know, that's that's why that's why I enjoy life, you know, to have those face to face interaction. So, I don't think it's prohibitive to have mentoring virtually. I think it works. I do worry about the younger generation coming in to some extent and then perhaps missing out on the social elements. I think that's really important.

But also having said that, you know, when we think about the negative things that can happen in a workplace, it's much more difficult to, for example, sexually harass someone on the teams. So I think there are other benefits that come along with virtual working that hopefully will make it safer for younger generations, and particularly women. If I think of my own experiences as they come through their working lives.

[00:09:51] **Natalie Probets:** Just wanted to add something that you mentioned about meetings being more focused through the digital medium, and I just wonder if something might be lost in that sense of see, when we're very focused on an agenda and what we're getting out of the meeting. You don't tend to have the side conversations, the softer part of and of those discussions that you would have perhaps in person in the office. What do you think about that?

[00:10:16] **Natalie Seatter:** I completely agree with you, and I think you can have that laser like focus in those in these meetings. Again, it might be personal preference. I'll be like after some chats at the beginning, Let's see how people are. Maybe a check in minutes. Let's get into what we need to talk about. I think you have to work really hard at. Okay, let's connected London next Wednesday. Let's talk. We're going to have

some social time. But that time you then spend together as people become much more socially focused. I think there's got to be acceptance in organizations for that. You know, it can now be one more altogether in passing.

We're working really hard and fast all the time and on teams or zoom all the time, you've got to have some. So. So, I said faster. For example, the time that we do go into the office, which is quite infrequent now that it's really about socialising. That's really about socialising and connecting and not being in back-to-back meetings in an office space because what's the point category with that one?

[00:11:08] **Bradley Howard:** So, do you find that you have different relationships with people that you work closely with when it's digital compared to in person in the office?

[00:11:16] **Natalie Seatter:** Another really good question. Yeah, probably. I think the relationship, I think relationships the same. I just think the types of conversations we're having a different life would be very much on here. What are we? Yep. That's good. Great. Fantastic. Oh, yeah, that was a nightmare. What about the other? Okay, what if we got to talk about going bye-bye, bye-bye. I'm done dusted and then actually. But it's in person. It's much more relaxed vibrant. Hey, we're here to hang out, chill out, talk about stuff, think a little bit more freely. So that is the way it's about, certainly for me. And I think a lot of the people who I work with say this what we're doing this, we're quite robotic and focused and have become an extension of our laptops. And then when we're in person, we're human beings. Again.

[00:11:58] **Bradley Howard:** It becomes very transactional when it's digital, doesn't it? It feels like it has to be a purpose. We've got a certain amount of time. And how do you how do you cope with the filling out time as well? So when you have a meeting that you want to catch up with someone, ask them a question. So, you've got 15 minutes in their diary. We always seem to fill that 15 minutes if it's digital, as opposed to if you're in the office and you go over and you are someone a question, what do you think about this? It's over and done within 2 minutes.

[00:12:24] **Natalie Seatter:** Yeah. Again, I don't feel those awkward. I don't feel the awkwardness around that so much. If it's just like 5 minutes, then great. And let's face it, for some people, you hope it is just 5 minutes and then other people, it's like, Oh, we've put 15 in. Actually, I could quite happily sit here, maybe talk for 30-45 minutes. And perhaps the secret is just not to be too prescriptive. I think sometimes I enjoy the surprise of where our conversations go. I might not be ready to talk about this one thing. Really need to speak to you about it and actually get one thing spread into five different things. And actually, one of those things is a game changer and oh my God before we know it, been on for 60 minutes and oh, we're going to be in London to flush out even more.

You know, I love that type of spontaneous discovery. And, you know, for me, that's where the excitement and joy lies in this which can be prescriptive and predictable. Sometimes I think it's important to allow some space for that type of spontaneity and innovation to occur.

[00:13:21] **Bradley Howard:** Within your company at the moment, do you have recommendations of how many days to be in the office or work from home?

[00:13:28] **Natalie Seatter:** And do you know, I love our approach, which is basically do what you feel, you know, do what you feel. If you want to come in once a week, come in once a week. If you want to come in three or four days a week, come in. If you want to come in once a month because you live further away, that's cool too. And I think if I think about organisations as products today, which I do actually it's about optionality, right? Products succeed in the world and all monetize because generally, they offer high levels of optionality depending on the user and what use needs are. If we think about organisation as a product is no different as thinking about optionality for the people, the employees who are using or participating within that that construct, that system.

So, I think the more optionality that you can offer because you've got all different types, hopefully different types of people in your diverse organization, it's not one size fits all and it's not hybrid or remote. It's mostly

Natalie and she has, you know, her needs and preferences and requirements which are completely different to maybe 160 other people in our business. So, I think the more that your business can offer that optionality, I think that's what will enable people to differentiate and win when it comes to talent achievement for investors, businesses because happy not stressed-out people tend to be the most productive ones, I think.

[00:14:45] **Bradley Howard:** How do you recommend less experienced people or people starting off their career can handle some of the networking, bring everything that we've talked about together? What recommendations do you have for them? I can't even imagine starting a new role at the moment and working remotely and having to find my feet and know who to turn to.

[00:15:10] **Natalie Seatter:** I think you've just got to be and again, look, easier said than done. My middle son Zach is 16. He's done an online international school for three or four years, and he chose to do that because he doesn't really enjoy the social aspects of school. Fine. He's obsessed with lots of other things like climate change and politics and things that probably someone of his age shouldn't be that concerned with. That suits him. It suits him. But you know, what he's got really good at is pushing himself out there. It's kind of looking at the landscape, identifying who the people are he needs to connect with and then going after them.

So, I think my advice to people would be, you know, you've got to be bold. The worst is going to happen to you. So, you go into a new organization. It's mainly for both, you know, take time to observe and understand the landscape. It's a landscape. It's an environment. Take time to study it, to understand it, to look at the dynamics, to understand the people. To understand who does what and why. What purpose? Assess the business. Find friends. Find a tribe. And to do that, you'll need to experiment, test and learn with people. Which might sound brutal, but it's true. You're not going to like everyone. Sorry. Spoiler alert for life. You're not going to. You're not going to like everyone.

So put yourself out there. But in putting yourself out there, you are putting yourself out there to be rejected because some people will reject you. Again, this is life. And I think people need to be brave. Experiment tested, man. Try and work. Try and make connections. But know that you may make it with everyone and ask questions. But that peace and I to remember how hard that was even going back to my early twenties, that peace around putting yourself out there for fear of rejection. That is hard. If you can do that and keep doing that, you'll be okay.

[00:16:55] **Bradley Howard:** I guess my question is how do you do that from inside your living room or bedroom? It's really hard when most of your calls with such a small number of people are supposed to in the old days in versus commerce, where you hoped that something was going on, overheard something was going on that you could put yourself forward.

[00:17:13] **Natalie Seatter:** Well, hopefully you're working in a business where they've adopted something called Slack or Teams, and hopefully in that business, people have set up communities and channels. And you know what? If they haven't, you set one up, go in and start your own book club or start your own pictures, docs, channels or whatever it is that you want to do. But you know, this is where technology can really help you do that, I think.

And you don't you don't need to. I think maybe I'm trying to figure out what I'm trying to say is the technology's there, the mechanisms of that. Don't be afraid to seize it with both hands and create your own opportunities or to create your own community. Like, you can become a leader of the book club to attract other people in and to form relationships outside of your social sphere of calls that you're doing on a daily basis is so different. To be able to link, to have a presence, comment on what people are doing, show interest, get involved.

[00:18:02] **Natalie Probets:** And do you think that there's a role for leaders to play in that? Obviously, there's an onus on yourself to go out and make those connections that can lead to support in any way as well?

[00:18:11] **Natalie Seatter:** Yes. You as a leader, you've got to create an environment where that's okay to do that. And there isn't this kind of like, what are they doing? You know, they've just come into the business and they think they are setting up, you know. Well, because I have seen that. So you've got to make it okay and you've got to celebrate people who are doing that and culturally say, actually, you know, what? Does a good corporate citizen look like? A rogue, actually, someone who is present, engaged, is participating in community, is creative. So, I think, yes, there is a role for leaders to play and that's being really clear about what good looks like in your business and then celebrating people who do those things as role models within your business as well.

[00:18:54] **Bradley Howard:** One last question on the new digital environment. How do you handle messages coming in from email, WhatsApp, Teams, Slack and the never-ending variety of different platforms?

[00:19:08] **Natalie Seatter:** I, I would say that when my career is finished, I'll be like Katie in a warzone somewhere because I love chaos. I love chaos and I thrive. I have, you know, I'm addicted, soaring to that adrenaline rush you get when there's like a thousand different plates that need spinning at 600 miles an hour. I love that. So, if I'm in the middle of, you know, certainly from a work perspective, let's say that if I'm in a work situation and I've got all of these channels coming in and I've got this off fine, I'm happy I can manage it. It feels good.

What I don't like is being on WhatsApp groups where there are hundreds of messages coming through, particularly when it's outside of ours that I am being paid to handle that stuff. So, 9 to 5, I'm getting paid to do that. I'm all in. I can manage it all.

[00:20:00] **Bradley Howard:** Do you recommend that to your team as well?

[00:20:03] **Natalie Seatter:** Yes, I do. But sometimes I say it's to do as I say, not as I do. That was it. But no, I generally do, particularly in coverage. At the beginning, we were going through a massive, intense transformation. I mean, it was it was bonkers, but in the gloriously bonkers kind of way, which I love. And it was really hard. And I just used to say to my team, like 9 to 5, we're on that. We are focused. We all get back-to-back to back-to-back because that's how it was. But I'm not for nine. And after five you're off like you are off. And, you know, 90% of the time I'm going to be off as well. Five, ten years ago, that wouldn't have been me. Ought to be working 60 to 80 hours a week round the clock, burning me and everybody else around me out. But I have learned through bitter and repeated failure to change my ways.

[00:20:53] **Bradley Howard:** Well, that's half of how we got here. Through the, through the mistakes, isn't it? Yes. Can we talk a little bit about your career? How did you get to be head of products at OAG?

[00:21:03] **Natalie Seatter:** I joined OAG just literally weeks before it happened. So I joined them as a consultant, a contractor, to help them with a big program of work that they had. And I came in and started to help them kind of coordinate that and structure it and think about what it would look like. And then, of course, the whole world got through. And hello, we supply data. So, the whole travel ecosystem. And it's March 2020 and we know what happened next.

So, I actually thought: Oh, I'm toast! I thought these guys paid me a day, right? They're not going to need me around for it for much longer. But we'd already commenced this big tech transformation led by CTO Nick. And I wasn't on the exact obviously, at this point, but the executive a fantastic job pivoting at points of pivoting in terms of our strategy, what we were going to do, what we weren't going to do. I think I just started very early on and I've always been I if it was good at this, get comfortable with it, actually at this age and celebrate what you've got.

[00:22:07] **Bradley Howard:** I wish our listeners could see some of your hand gestures. It's very funny.

[00:22:12] **Natalie Seatter:** I love going into new businesses and I love observing what's going on and I saw this stack a few couple of months ago now and it's something like nothing's wrong. 85% of people are followers, maybe that's not true, I don't know. 10% of people are leaders possibly and 5% of people are like prolific observers. And I am an observer.

So, I mean, I'm doing everything else as well. I'm also really observing and people might not sometimes realise I am, but I'm observing everything, everything about the business, the people, the processes, the systems, the organisational structure, the customer interactions, all of it. And I absolutely love immersing myself in that. And so, I did that for the first 2 to 3 months every day. And from that I could just see that there was opportunity in terms of some of the gaps that we had. From a products perspective, there was opportunity there for us to kind of drive more of a customer-led product strategy and to really build on what we were doing in that space. And, you know, I think one of my well, some people might say it's massive for me. It's had it's been a double-edged sword, right. But I've never been shy in saying, well, I think that has sometimes been to my really. I know, I know. But that has sometimes been to my absolute detriment. And I've made enemies quickly doing that. And I've had to learn to develop more of a filter as time has gone on or be really mindful about who you speak to and when timing is everything as well. Right?

So, but luckily enough, you know the exact area where we're very what's the word? The sway register is going to come in. The exact OAG were very open to hearing my thoughts and observations on what we could do differently and better, and that's what I did. I just shared kind of what I saw, what I was experiencing, what I saw we could do differently and constructed kind of my thoughts around that. And as a result of doing that, I became the CPO at the end of 2020.

[00:24:17] **Bradley Howard:** Well done. Very well deserved!

[00:24:18] **Natalie Seatter:** Thank you.

[00:25:36] **Bradley Howard:** So to wrap this up, one more question. You mentioned your son is a climate change activist. What's your view of sustainable air travel? Because you obviously work in an industry that isn't the most sustainable at the moment.

[00:24:31] **Natalie Seatter:** It isn't. But let's not forget that, you know...

[00:24:35] **Bradley Howard:** The fingers just come up.

[00:24:38] **Natalie Seatter:** Just finger wagging in your face. It's not. But I think, you know, we're talking about it and I know we spoke we've there's a lot of talk and not much action, but at least we're talking about it a lot.

Every event I go to is 90% sustainability focused at the moment in travel space. And we're talking about in a way that we were 5 to 10 years ago. So, I think the industry has made a commitment to be net carbon zero by 2050. That feels right now like a real stretch goal. Working at OAG, We're a data business. I'm going to say this, but I think it's I do absolutely believe that data will be at the heart of our success with this. You know, if we've got good consistent data, if we've got clear standards across the industry, if we're all measuring carbon emissions in a consistent way, if we can be transparent about where we're at, the progress that we're making or not making, then we stand a chance of making the improvements that we need to.

So, I think, yeah, it's happening, but you know, whether it's okay to say this or not, I'm going to say it. Look, we do much better for the environment if we all stopped eating beef, which is a much bigger emitter of carbon emissions than if we stopped flying by air travel. So, I'm just going to defend just going to defend the industry.

[00:26:03] **Bradley Howard:** Thank you so much, Natalie, for joining us and spending some time with us and sharing some of those insights about career and also how to behave in digital channels and the real world – is really inspiring. As always, if our listeners want to get in touch with you and might have some more questions about how to go vegan or how to set up Slack channels, what's the best way of contacting you?

[00:26:25] **Natalie Seatter:** Just reach out on LinkedIn. I'm always happy to make new connections and to speak to you, to speak to everyone. I can't guarantee I'll like them all and vice versa. But, you know, let's make the connection and see.

[00:26:35] **Bradley Howard:** I'm sure! To all of our listeners - I really hope that you enjoyed this episode of Tech Reimagined. You know where you can find us on all the major podcast platforms. Until next time.