

Finding my Place in Porsche Coming From Deep Tech and Research

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26/07/2019 I believe that today is one of the most exciting times to have a deep tech and research background in the automotive industry. Why? Because research and deep tech are the bedrocks of progress and the foundation on which the next disruption of the automotive industry, and mobility in general, is built.

By driving advances in hardware, software, and services, research and deep tech constantly redefine the cutting edge of how we can positively influence the lives of millions of people — and this has always fascinated me.

After I revised my childhood dream of becoming an apple and potato farmer at the age of six, I quickly chose a career path in electrical engineering and computer science culminating in studying a combination of both subjects at Technical University Darmstadt. My professional journey began as a

researcher at Fraunhofer Institute for Computer Graphics Research, where I first developed a smart floor, designed to detect emergency situations, such as falls. After finishing my Ph.D. I had the great opportunity to join Microsoft AI & Research in Cambridge, UK. As part of the lab, I directly worked on the future of connected devices and, e.g., the development of the secure IoT solution Azure Sphere.

If you ever felt like you are a great coder, try working with a Windows developer

I was coding and programming a lot back then in my daily work, being surrounded by incredibly talented and experienced people in a distributed team between Cambridge and Redmond. If you think you're a capable coder (which I did back then), you haven't worked alongside someone who has been developing operating systems for 20 or 30 years. I was constantly reminded of how much of a greenhorn I was — but learned something new every day and always loved to have a direct link and impact on the solution. It was a truly inspiring experience!

After spending two wonderful years somewhere between Cambridge and Paris, my wife and I decided to merge our two paths again. This led me back to Germany to take up a new challenge and position as Innovation Manager at Porsche.

New personal challenges meet a transforming automotive industry

When I joined Porsche in 2017, my primary task was to optimize processes and coordinate innovation projects in the electronics division. The new job in Weissach was quite different from my job in Cambridge, where I did a lot of research-driven coding, designing electronics, developing and testing — and it demanded a different kind of skill set and another approach. I have always been very interested in developing new products and have a strong hands-on mentality. Not being directly involved in research and development was new territory for me and sparked my interest. Changing over from a big international tech company to a premium sports car manufacturer from Germany was a tough decision — but just like research, the automotive industry and especially Porsche has always fascinated me.

The other thing that fascinates me about the automotive industry, and is one of the main reasons I joined Porsche, is the creation of a holistic user experience. Considering let's say a home automation system, there are infinite ways of combining hardware and software. What intrigued me about this new job was the opportunity to orchestrate a small but incredibly powerful set of hardware, software and services around the user to create a fully tailored and engaging user experience — sparking excitement and joy.

Becoming an "Innovation Enabler"

Quickly after starting at Porsche, I realized that the term "Innovation Management" does not really

describe my role well, I rather see myself as an “Innovation Enabler”. The most important thing I learned is that humans are more important than anything else. You may have heard of the saying “Culture eats strategy for breakfast”, which I quickly took to heart. My focus was always to promote new perspectives and deeply engage with the innovators in our company and outside to poke the innovation fire. Last but not least, support in working out the contributing values of innovations for our customers stood in the center of my activities. However, the biggest struggle for me was between getting engaged in the projects — especially as a person with a deep interest in tech — and working on the broader picture of enabling innovations in the electronics division.

From integrator to developer

Porsche built the first sports car and developed its own high-performance engines, setting new standards in the premium car sector. When it comes to functions and components however that are non-differentiating, Porsche is a major integrator with many Tier-1 cooperations and reliance on technology from outside the company. But as digitization continues to transform the automotive industry and our perspective on mobility is disrupted, previously non-differentiating functions have the potential to be transformed to core Porsche DNA which truly makes a difference to our customers — and this is where my new role at Porsche comes in.

Deep tech innovations: Combining the best of two worlds

Being an Innovation Enabler at Porsche gave me the possibility to see the ongoing topics from a broader perspective. Now, I am now taking on a new role inside Porsche with a switch to the IT division, which allows me to combine my passion for deep tech and research with the fascination of delivering values to our internal and external customers. In this position, I am connecting emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence with new business opportunities at Porsche. In order to do that, we are setting up cross-functional product groups which focus on a single thing — constantly delivering a product or a platform which our customers love. Our products range from small improvements to major innovations: extending the reach of electric vehicles, crafting engaging Porsche moments on the road, or creating smart, lean and green production facilities.

I am happy that so many colleagues within Porsche go on this journey together — for example in our new company-wide AI@Porsche initiative. The goal is to establish Porsche as a leading automotive tech player — and I am more than happy to contribute towards this ambitious plan in our newly formed “Emerging Technologies” team with Jochen Gross, Thorsten Heuberger, Johannes Immel, Katerina Kourti, and Tim Laudahn.

As we always say: Wherever dream cars are built, dream jobs are never too far away. If you'd like to experience the fascination of Porsche as well, have a look at our job offers on jobs.porsche.com.

Looking forward to this!

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