



Capturing the Past, Inspiring the Future

Rebecca George OBE

Interviewed by

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Welcome to the Archives of Information and Technology. It's the fifth of February 2019 and we're in the offices of the Worshipful Company of Information Technology in Smithfield, London. I'm Ian Symonds and I've been working in information technology and management consultancy since 1976, a period of enormous change in the industry. Today I'm talking to Rebecca George. Rebecca spent almost twenty years with IBM, as it transitioned from a hardware and software supplier to a services company. In 2006 she joined Deloitte and is now their lead partner for public sector. Rebecca received an OBE in 2006 for services to IT and for her work supporting the Egan Review on sustainable community skills. We'll be talking about Rebecca's background, influences and some key events that shaped her career and her views on the industry today.

So, Rebecca, where and when were you born?

I was born in Basingstoke in Hampshire in 1961 and sometimes I do refer to the fact that I was born in the 'Shrubbery' which was the name of the maternity hospital that I was born in.

Ok, and please describe your parents and their occupations.

Yes, my father who is about to be ninety-five, was born and brought up in South Africa and he'd come to England shortly after the war when apartheid started in South Africa. He was a nuclear physicist working at Aldermaston which was the reason that we lived in Basingstoke. My mother was, I suppose, what you might regard as a bit of a blue stocking; she was the first person in her family to go to university and she had trained as a social worker and she later became a teacher, when we were all very small. And then, later on again, was one of the first women to be ordained a priest in the Church of England. And I have two younger brothers, Matthew and Adam, who were born in 1963 and 1966.

Ok, so your parents were both educated people, so what influence do you think they had on you?

My parents thought education was hugely important. They had both been to university and they were both the first people in their families to go to university, although my grandfather on my father's side had been an auditor, an accountant. But they thought education was really important and I grew up in an environment where we didn't have very much money but we had a huge emphasis on reading, education, discussing things that were going on, as a family over the dinner table in a very kind of traditional way. And it was my mother's great ambition that all three of us should go to university. I think she felt that, if she managed to get us all through university then what happened after that would be fine.

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And were there any other important influences on you in your early life?

Yes, music. Music was an important influence from a very early age and still is a very, very important part of my life. I started learning the piano when I was seven and I had an amazing piano teacher who carried on teaching until she was ninety-seven. Then I took up the violin when I was ten and, really, from the time I went to secondary school which was a comprehensive school in Basingstoke, I played with groups in orchestras. I think that the most influential people, really, during my school days, were my music teachers who were passionate and very talented and extremely committed, especially to doing stuff outside of school hours which, of course, these days is much more difficult to get.

So, tell us a little bit more about your education, from your early schooling through secondary schooling, college and higher education, perhaps just set out the steps.

Yes, I went to a little primary school in Basingstoke called Fairfields. I was in co-education actually, from the age of three, when I went to nursery school, until I went to university. I'll come back to that in a bit, but I think it was a very traditional primary school with an emphasis on the three 'Rs' – I can remember us all sitting and chanting our times tables as a group. Then I went from there to Harriet Costello which is a comprehensive school in Basingstoke. It was actually very recently converted from being a girls' grammar school and my year was the first year with

boys in it, so it still had quite a lot of the ethos of a grammar school but was, you know, a comprehensive school. And I did pretty well up until the age of sixteen academically. I got a good set of nine O levels, I think something like five with As, managed to get maths which was my weak subject ... and maths and numeracy is something I might talk about a little bit, actually, because back in the 1970s there was something called the School Maths Project which was the kind of way to teach maths at the time, and I didn't get on with it at all. Many, many, many girls did not and some people have said, subsequently, that a whole generation of girls lost out on their ability to do maths because the School Maths Project was so alien, in a way, to the way that girls learn. Typically often, not always, but girls learn because they ... they learn better when they're not dealing with abstract concepts and that is certainly true of me, and I really struggled with maths. I did manage to get my O level but it was not until I was probably well into my twenties, and at IBM, that I realised I was perfectly numerate and I didn't have any problem with numbers at all. I really feel quite strongly that we were done quite a disservice, in a way, by that particular programme, but, you know, things go in and out of fashion and that was what was in fashion at the time. Anyway, a digression on maths but maths is very important.

So what did you go on to do at A level?

So I went on to do history, English and music at A level. I went to a sixth form college which I adored and I spent a huge amount of time doing music and drama there, much, much too much time as it turned out. I thought my innate intelligence would get me through my A levels, as it had done with my O levels, and that proved absolutely not to be the case. I also had my first long-term serious boyfriend in my sixth form years which probably didn't help my application to my academic studies. The upshot was that, at eighteen, I had three grade 8s, piano, violin and theory of music, but extremely poor A level results. So I got an A for English and then D and E for my other two and failed my S level. And this was a huge disaster because my sixth form college had entered me for the Oxbridge exams. , I mean, it was just devastating, I thought that my life had come to an end, my mother was completely distraught and it was awful. And I went back to college in the autumn to retake two of my A levels because, actually, I hadn't had offers from any of the universities that I'd applied to except my fifth choice. So I thought, well, I need to retake my A levels

and start all over again and apply myself properly. And I walked into – I remember this really clearly – I walked into college on the first day of term and the deputy head, Miss Hunt, was standing at the door and she said, ‘Rebecca George, to my office now.’ So I went up quaking and she said, ‘There is nothing wrong with your brain, it’s your application of it that is the problem. We’ve entered you for Oxbridge and you’re not letting the sixth form down, you will come to my office every day for the next term and I will personally coach you.’ Which she did. And she was one of the people in my life who has definitely made a big impact and turned things round because I worked really hard for my Oxford entrance exams - I was also studying to retake two of my A levels - but I got into Oxford on the exam and the interview and I wouldn’t have done that if it hadn’t been for Miss Hunt.

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Getting that fantastic personal attention must have been brilliant for you.

It was amazing. Now, years and years later I discovered that my college at Oxford, St Hughs College, did have what they called a wild card system, so they would take people who they weren’t sure about, could go either way, and I was a wild card, but they were happy enough with me, I think, in the end.

So she picked you out and saw your potential?

She did, and I have been blessed with people who have done that through my life and now I try my best to do it with other people.

And, apart from music, what other ... well, music and your boyfriend perhaps ... were there any other important influences on you during your school days?

So, it was drama really, at my sixth form college I got very involved with doing drama and it was there that I discovered that I preferred to be behind the scenes than on the stage. I preferred to be directing it, working out how things were going to work, orchestrating it. And, similarly in music, I loved performing but I liked to be part of an orchestra and I even more liked to be organising it. And so I got this, I

mean, it wasn't really conscious, but I sort of realised I was just more comfortable telling other people what to do than necessarily being in the limelight myself. But I did spend quite a lot of time on stage and I think that was quite important because it helps with confidence and presentation styles and all sorts of other things. But the other thing that happened during my school age years was, I started to work. So, you know, my parents didn't ever have very much money, they didn't give me very much money and so if I wanted money I had to go and earn it. I had my first jobs at the age of fifteen, so I was an extremely poor accompanist at a ballet school and I also worked as a Saturday girl in a local shop. But at sixteen, when I was allowed to do office work, I signed on with a local temping agency. The first job I got was doing medical records at a hospital, but the second job was with the Automobile Association which, at the time, was one of the biggest employers in Basingstoke. And I ended up working with the Automobile Association more or less every holiday from the age of sixteen to about the age of twenty-one. I started off in what they called 'new membership', opening envelopes and taking forms out of the envelopes and sort of processing them into piles, but I very quickly moved into typing the data onto computer screens, and I kept going back to the same team because I liked them and they liked me and every holiday they'd have work that I could do and I'd go in and do it. And pretty soon I got involved in a very big programme that the AA were doing, to train VDU operators, so to train the people who were putting the data into their screens, and I loved it. I loved that programme, I was extremely interested in how the system worked, in terms of inputting the data and the interaction between the person putting the data in and what was happening on the screen, and how quickly you could do things, and how you could repeat things, and how fantastic it was compared with trying to do it all by hand. I got very involved in that project and worked with it, on and off, for quite a long period of time and I suppose - you know, we're talking about 1979, 80, 81, so it was relatively early days for that sort of system - but I think that's where I first started thinking, 'This is really interesting, these computers'.

00:14:03

And by this time you'd gone up to St Hughs College in Oxford?

That's right, yes.

To study English language and literature?

Yes, I did. So what happened there, yes, so I went to Oxford in 1980 and St Hughs was an all-female college which I had very deliberately chosen. I'd been to see four other colleges and it's one of the very few times in my life where I was conscious of being discriminated against, because at those colleges people said things to me like, 'Well, we don't like comprehensive school people' or one of the tutors at one of the colleges said, 'I don't like teaching women, they cry when you criticise them then they go and have babies'. I'd never come across that kind of really quite overt commentary before, but when I went to St Hughs they were fantastic and very welcoming and I felt that I would be happy there and I was extremely happy there. I loved the system. The Oxford system is not for everyone, tutorial system, very, very self-study, it's not for everyone, but I really loved it. I had excellent tutors. I did discover then that I do tend to put more effort into the things that I like rather than things I should, so I never got on terribly well with Anglo-Saxon, and I did have to be reminded at the end of my second year that there was more to English language and literature than the eighteenth century novel, but I was extremely happy there and from the very first term I took over running the drama club at St Hughs College. Now, when I look back, that was an outrageous thing to do, only third-year students ran the drama club, and it was a privileged role which meant that you got a room in college, but I didn't know any of that, it was where angels fear to tread, I thought it needed doing better than it was, had been doing, so I took it over. [laughs] Nobody said 'Don't', you know, but I ended up running the drama club for three years and doing my degree, not playing as much in terms of music, but having a very good time and learning more about computers.

And it was this point about it being a women only college, you found that suited you. Is it something you'd recommend for women today who go to university? I mean, it's more difficult now, isn't it, I mean even St Hughs is no longer a women only college.

No. It was really interesting for me. I had never spent time in an all-female environment and I haven't since. At the time, there were very many fewer options for women from comprehensive schools at Oxford than there are now. Arguably, there aren't nearly enough now, but there are more opportunities. But, at the time, there

were huge numbers more places for men than for women and I felt, particularly given the comments I'd had from some of the other colleges I'd visited, that I would be on more of an even keel at St Hughs. You know, as is the way when you join big organisations, you do kind of find your level so mainly the long-term friends I kept from St Hughs are also girls that went through comprehensive schools or similar kinds of backgrounds. But there were lots and lots of girls there who'd been to very expensive private schools whom I met, and I mixed with those and found I had to learn how to be confident with them because they tended to have an innate confidence because of the kind of schools and backgrounds that they had, which I just didn't have as a comprehensive school girl from Basingstoke. So that was quite difficult but I think much, much easier than it would have been for me in a co-educational college where there would have been far, far more men than women. So I don't think it's for everyone, I thought it was fantastic for me, I really enjoyed it and have always really enjoyed the company of women. It's not to say that I don't enjoy the company of men, because I do and I've spent my entire life in male-dominated industries, but I'm very comfortable and I think the three years I spent in that environment was very useful because there are, you know, there are things that are interesting about large groups of women when they all live together. For example, their monthly cycles tend to coincide so you get hormones rising and falling and all sorts of stuff that you have to learn to deal with. Well, that's not a bad thing, it's a good thing to learn to deal with. So yeah, I loved it, and actually I did campaign for St Hughs to stay single sex for longer but it didn't, and I've been back many times and it's a great college with some fabulous male alumni so, you know ...

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You did pretty well in your degree, didn't you?

I did, yes, I got a good 2:1. I don't think there was very much danger of me getting a first but it was a good 2:1 and I was quite famous, briefly, because Oxford had a process at the time – I don't know whether they still do – if you weren't good at one of the subjects that you were taking, and in my case Anglo-Saxon, you could do an optional thesis in the summer of your second year which, if you did well with that, would offset your poorest mark. So I was offered this option by one of my tutors who

said, 'I don't think Anglo-Saxon is going to be your strongest point'. And I did a thesis on the origins of the two most famous swear words in the English language which, it turns out, had been part of our oral tradition for hundreds and hundreds of years, have never changed their meaning or their spelling but have really not been written down a lot. I did this piece of work and my tutor was very encouraging but after I got the marks – I did very well – I said to her, 'Oh, have you got a copy of my thesis?' and she said, 'My dear, it's doing the rounds, everybody loves it!' [laughs]. 'It's doing the rounds of all the colleges, I'm not sure you're going to get it back again'. And then later, I did another piece, another kind of separate piece which was on the rhetoric of news programmes and whether news programmes use old-fashioned rhetoric rules in the way the scripts were developed, so I spent quite a lot of time with television newsreaders with that one.

Ok. And after university, I don't know if this was immediately afterwards, but you kind of applied for a Rotary Foundation scholarship. Tell us a little bit about that.

Yes, that was fantastic.

Sounds like quite an interesting decision to have made, actually.

I was hugely fortunate and this was another intervention where somebody kind of said, 'You could do this'. This was my headmaster from my sixth form college and he popped out to see my parents, it was in my second year at Oxford, and he said to my parents, 'Look, the Rotary Club have been in touch, they have these international scholarships that they offer and I think Rebecca should think about applying for one if she's interested.' But he had to check that my parents didn't have any relationship with the Rotary Club because you had to be completely independent. So I applied for a scholarship and got it and, what it was, was funding to go anywhere in the world for a year but you had to be able to speak the language and, although my mother who'd been an au pair in France speaks perfect French, I don't. I speak very poor, hardly passable French, so I was limited to English-speaking countries and I decided that, if I was going to spend a year abroad, I wanted to get a qualification so I wanted to actually have a piece of paper to show for it. So I looked for post graduate courses that I could complete in a year in America and this piece that I mentioned earlier,

about I'd got interested in television news scripts and the language used in television, had made me think, well, maybe I'd be interested in something to do with broadcasting. So Boston University had a one-year Master of Science - it was actually a bit more than a year but you only had to be on the site for a year - in broadcasting. So I applied for that and was accepted and I went directly: I left Oxford in the summer and in September I started at Boston University. Now, I should say as an aside, apart from going to France I'd only really been any distance once before, when I moved to America, which was when I was seventeen I'd gone on a tour to Australia with the Hampshire County Youth Orchestra, which was the first time I'd ever been on an aeroplane. So moving to America at the age of 21 was quite a big deal but the Rotary Club were amazing and they provided a family who kept an eye on you when you were out there, so I had a family I went to most weekends who helped make sure I had my accommodation because, you know, the university system is very different in America, they helped me find my way around making sure I got my books and signed up for courses and all the rest of it and they were immensely helpful. Then I had the money, which was enough to pay for my accommodation and my fees, and my spending money I had to earn, so I worked while I was there, first in a snack bar and later for a cable television company - I'll come back to that. The modules I chose to specialise in at Boston were cable television and satellite systems and this is where I started really honing down on being very interested in the application of IT, what can IT do, what can you do with technology.

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Yes, how technical then was the course, was it more business orientated or both maybe?

It was both, yeah. It was one of those American degree courses which had something of everything so I did some sociology and I did some law and I did some physics around microwave systems. The most technical aspects of it were explaining how the technology, the architecture of cable television, microwave and satellite systems, fitted together. And I would say, ever since, if I have any technical bent at all, it's about the architecture of systems, it's how they fit together, and for me it's always been a fascination of how the data moves from one to another and how you join

different elements up to create systems across different organisations or different populations or different applications. It wasn't massively technical, but it was a bit technical in that the law course was a bit about law and the sociology was... but I also had to do stats, so traditional research statistics on a mainframe computer which was interesting.

And I guess, I think that as you briefly mentioned just now, you then started working for a consultancy company ...

I did.

...which focused on the industry?

Yes, I had a tutor who worked for a cable television company and I was looking for work – I was always looking for work – and I went to see him after class one day and said, 'I need a job', and I was a bit fed up with working in the snack bar from ten o'clock at night 'til two o'clock in the morning making fried dough for undergraduates. And he said, 'Yeah, I can give you an internship', four dollars twenty-five an hour or something, and so they had a little company over in Cambridge, Massachusetts, over the river near Harvard, and I started going over there and working for them. They did a combination of different things around the cable television industry which, in America, was very well-established. So they did applications for licences, system design and build - which was the bit he worked in and I worked with him - and service provision. And then, all the stuff around billing, billing and licensing and all the financial transaction management. So I got a pretty good overview, working with him, about how cable television companies worked, and when I finished at Boston he said, 'We'd quite like to work out what's happening in the market in England, why don't you work for us over there and do some research, basically on whether it's worth us making an incursion, if you like, into the UK cable television market.' This was 1983/4. Well, one of the reasons for doing cable television was because it was a huge industry in America and I thought it was going to be a huge industry in the UK and I thought, I'd be in it at the start, and that would be great, and it would be a real money-maker and very interesting. So I said Yes and I came back to the UK in 1983 and started working with him. That was a part-time role

and I very quickly got another part-time role with a data video company – kind of teletext sort of services – all in the very, very early days of how you presented data and video over networks as opposed to via the BBC. And that's where I got started in telecoms, I mean, I suppose it was telecoms.

So, one of the companies was Select TV, was that in the US?

No, and that was later. So I stopped working ... so the American cable television company looked at the UK market and thought, 'well, this wasn't going anywhere' which was right, it wasn't, because BBC was absolutely dominant and we didn't have the infrastructure on the ground to make cable television work and satellite delivery wasn't advanced enough at the time. So they pulled out, and the other company I left, and got a job with Select TV. Select TV was a cable television company owned by Robert Maxwell and the company was based in Milton Keynes but I was in their London office ... I always think I was the London office ... in the Pergamon Press building which was the building that Robert Maxwell had his big operations in, had been the factory, with Robert Maxwell having his huge suite on the ninth floor and the rest of us all downstairs in very primitive accommodation.

Did you meet him?

Yes, I did, I met him on a few occasions. Not to actually have a meeting with him but because he would be leaving the building roughly the same time as I did, sometimes in the evenings, and when he left the building they switched the electricity off so we all tended to try to leave before he did. [laughs] But I did meet him a few times and working for a company owned by him was very instructive for me because I learned quite a lot about the leadership style of a certain type. My learning from it was that there was only so far you could go by fear.

Tell us a little bit more about that leadership style, then, that's quite interesting.

Yes. He was a figure that people feared and he was enormously powerful, I mean, he had a second-in-command who was always around, the whole time, watching what

people were doing, who was also enormously powerful, and we were all pretty scared of him, to be honest with you.

Did that make for a good working environment?

No, it didn't, not really. I mean, we weren't very collegiate, we were lots of different companies, so there wasn't maybe the natural interaction that you might expect and my company was based in Milton Keynes and I did spend time up there. So I was kind of one step removed but the overall impression I'm left with, after all these years is, it was a pretty cold, dark place, both physically but also mentally, and everybody was more worried about doing things wrong than trying to get things right. And I think, in the end, from a leadership point of view, we weren't being inspired, there wasn't a vision for us to go and follow, it was much more about trying not to get into trouble. So I didn't stay there all that long, probably about a year I would think, and then I realised that I'd got myself potentially into a little bit of a cul-de-sac, because there I was, with quite a lot of specialist knowledge about cable television, satellite and microwave systems, in an industry that wasn't going anywhere at the time - satellite television was still a way off. And so I thought, well, I need to find a way of broadening out because I'm getting pigeon-holed into this particular, rather small area. So I applied for, and got, a job at Spicer and Pegler, which was a chartered accountancy firm. I was sitting in their management consultancy organisation. I went and joined a group of people who were telecoms specialists but I quite quickly started - because I was a very junior person, I was put on all kinds of different projects - working on other projects and I ended up, being there for three years, quite a generalist management consultant doing most of my work in a financial services sector. So that was my way of, you know, getting out of my little cul-de-sac.

00:34:33

Yeah, I mean, just to pause there, at this point, is it fair to say that you never really made a decision to move into IT, it kind of evolved from the sorts of opportunities that presented themselves to you?

Yes, it's absolutely right. So, a couple of things I probably ought to mention, because I forgot but they're relevant: one is, when I was at St Hughs, at Oxford, I found a computer. The geography department had bought a Honeywell computer and nobody knew how to use it at the time. I saw this as a money-making opportunity, and I think this is interesting because I've always really seen computers as enablers and technology as enablers, but I've always been massively interested in how you can stretch the use of them to do more interesting better. But at Oxford I set myself up, probably completely illegally, but I set myself up to type the theses of Fine Arts students cheaper than the regular service in Oxford. And I couldn't properly type so they had to come and read their theses to me overnight, very slowly, while I typed them. But I learned how to use this Honeywell computer and, more importantly at the time, I learned how to manage the printer and change the printer ribbon. And for quite a long time I was the only person in the college who knew how to change the printer ribbon. [laughs] People would come and knock on my door, the Dean would come and knock on my door, and say, 'When you've got a moment, do you think you could possibly come and change the printer ribbon.' So I've never had any issues with using technology, it's never been a problem to me and I've always loved it. And then later, at Select TV, I was in London, the rest of the office were in Milton Keynes, and I had an Epson laptop, which was not we would call a laptop today, and a modem. And, you know, this was unheard of. But I could attach to this modem and I could access the systems in Milton Keynes, the email systems and the databases and things. Well, in 1984 and 5 this was still pretty cutting edge technology – it seems very rudimentary today – but it didn't faze me in the least, and I was absolutely fine with using this *what-have-you* technology, making it work, working out if problems occurred how to fix it.

And knowing how to exploit it, for your advantage.

Yes, I was always pretty good at that. [laughs] So, whilst I didn't – and I never made any conscious decision to go into IT really - if I look back at my roots I always felt fascinated by technology and extremely comfortable with it. And I think the music helped, I really do, so I think being trained as a classical musician to a high level, especially on the theory side of things, those kind of logical thought processes you get

through classical music, the way that the theory of music is put together and being able to read the notes, is all very close to computers.

Ok. What about this sort of formative stage of your career – I'm thinking about some of the people who might listen to this interview – what role did your first managers have in setting you on your career path. Perhaps just talk about one or two, I don't know, maybe at Select TV or at Spicer and Offenheim?

Yeah. So, I actually think my more formative managers were at IBM but I'll come back to that in a bit, because IBM spent a huge amount of money on that. But I think, in my very early years, I had positive influences as well as the negative ones and I think the most important thing, early in my career, was that I was constantly surrounded by people who would be encouraging me to have a go. 'Yeah, we know you haven't done this before but that's ok, have a go, see how you get on. We're here if you need any help but there isn't any reason why you shouldn't go and do this'... I don't know, manage a programme or interview members of a board that was dysfunctional ... whatever it was that I was supposed to be going to do. And, looking back on it, the work I did at Select TV and the work I did at Spicer and Pegler was hugely varied. I worked with all sorts of different people, I did all kinds of different things, from cable television service, design and licence applications right through to working out how to sack somebody on the board of a Hungarian bank who was an alcoholic, and kind of all sorts of things in between. It was really helpful because it taught me that I could go into a lot of different environments and, provided I knew what the outcome was supposed to be and I knew that there was somebody who was keeping an eye on what I was doing, I was pretty comfortable going and doing lots of different things. However, I had mother – I still have a mother – and she said to me, after I'd been at Spicer and Pegler for three years, 'But this management consultancy thing isn't really a career, is it dear? What's your trade? What's your profession? What are you properly qualified, professionally, to do?'

00:40:34

And is that what prompted you, in 1988, to move across to IBM?

Absolutely. Because, the thing is, I thought, well what can I do? Jack of all trades, master of none kind of thing. What I didn't want to do was to go and do an MBA and all of my compatriots at Spicer and Pegler ... I mean, the way that industry worked was you would practise for two or three years and then you'd go and do an MBA and then you'd come back. Well, I had got two degrees and I didn't particularly want to go and do an MBA so I thought quite hard about what I could do and I decided, after a while, that probably I could sell if I put my mind to it. At the time there were two companies that had really, really good reputations for training sales reps in the UK, and that was IBM and Mars, so I applied for both of them and I got jobs with both of them. It was only a relatively narrow decision where I thought, selling computers is bound to be more interesting than selling chocolate, that I chose to go to IBM. I intended to just go for a couple of years, to get the training, get the IBM name on my cv and then move on but IBM, in 1988, were just moving into providing services and, because I'd been working in a management consultancy organisation for three years they thought, 'Well, she probably knows how to sell services'. And so I was one of a very, very, very early group of people recruited into IBM to focus on selling services as opposed to selling technology.

And that must have been a huge cultural shift in IBM at the time – what did that feel like on the inside?

[laughs] They were pretty useless at it because, what happened is, they'd recruited all these people as experienced hires – if they had five years work experience – but they didn't have any training for us at all except the graduate training, so we all went through the same training that all graduates went through, even though we'd been working for some time. And it was all about hardware/software, because that's what the training was about. So I spent nine months training to be a salesman with IBM, and going through sales training school, and I can still remember to this day: I spent three months studying the system 370, I learnt all about system 36 and system 38 and all the operating systems, the heritage of all IBM's products, how R and D worked, all the programming languages, all the software. I mean, it was fantastic training, it was a huge investment, nine months full-time. Between courses we would go and work on a client account but it was like going back and doing another degree course with a very, very important exam at the end, which was quite difficult to pass.

Ok, so if you failed that exam you were out, were you?

Yeah. Fortunately I didn't.

Interesting ...

But I did pass it, I passed IBM sales school, but I was told at the time 'You'll never be a very good IBM sales rep'. And I said, 'Why?' and they said, 'Well, your profile doesn't fit.' They were very keen on Myers Briggs and all the successful people at IBM had a particular profile and I didn't. That's a bit of a mistake with me, actually, telling me that I can't do something, it's happened a few times in my career, and it's quite a red flag for me and I was an extremely successful sales rep at IBM.

00:44:36

Well interestingly, given as you say, all the training that you got at IBM was around selling hardware and software, did that mean that you and your experienced hires, your colleagues, were having to develop the sort of marketing and sales strategy and process and techniques for selling services?

So, it wasn't quite like that because IBM is today, and was then, a truly global company in a way that, I think, very few other organisations really understand. And IBM, at that point in time, had a division called 'Federal Systems Division' in the US which sold big systems to the federal government, including NASA and, if you've watched Apollo 13 that is IBM doing all the computer stuff for that programme. What IBM did, which was extremely smart, was farm people out around the world from its Federal Systems Division who were used to running these enormous programmes. So, whilst they may not have been called systems integrators or programme engagement managers before, that's what they did. So I worked with an amazing guy, who'd been designing systems for NASA and implementing them as a programme manager, and that was back implementing a new customer accounting system and he was amazing, but he taught me an awful lot about what methodology is and what a proposition is and what people do on big programmes, what jobs you need.

So I didn't have formal training from IBM on that - because they didn't have it then, they do now, they did later – but I had this guy and four or five of his colleagues who he brought over, including a woman, from the Federal Systems Division, who set up this programme at NatWest, with people from NatWest, but very much along the lines of a huge programme implementation that they were used to doing for the federal government in the US.

Ok.

So we had quite a lot of structure.

And we're still talking about fairly, kind of, technical services, systems integration rather than pure business consultancy.

Well, it was an early business consultancy really, because that particular programme which I worked on for four years ... NatWest were a beta customer for DB2, which was IBM's big database product, so one of the real perks of the job, actually, was I had to take NatWest out to California twice a year. Because they were a beta tester of the product they met with the software developers twice a year, to talk about their requirements and make sure the product was going to deliver to their requirements. The actual business process engineering, and the business design, I didn't get involved with at that point at all. My job was entirely on the technical side, how do you get the hardware in and, much, much more critically, how do you get the software in. We were developing a customer accounting database which was big, I think at the time it was the biggest in the world, using DB2 in a way that it had never been used before. It was just fascinating. I got quite interested in relational databases for a bit but, actually, what I was more interested in was how you get the data out of the systems that they already had which were 'write your own' - and they still have the systems designers working for NatWest who built these systems in the late sixties and seventies - and how do you get from that to what was a very early off-the-shelf software product which was not designed by NatWest and for NatWest, and how do you integrate it and get it to work safely, transparently, to customers and knowing that the money is going to be in the right place at the right time. I loved it.

00:49:08

So, in 1992 you became UK skills and professions leader at IBM and that kind of, as I understand, it, sort of set your career within IBM along a particular route, which was to do with human resources, I think, if I can summarise it in two words. But tell us a bit more about how that happened.

So this is where ... I often say to people, when you're writing a cv, it's the only time in your life that your career looks like it was meant. The rest of the time, for most of us, it's all about happy accidents or being opportunistic. What happened was, I was working on NatWest and I was selling stuff and I was very, very successful, I loved it. But in my private life I met my husband. Now, strictly speaking, I re-met him because I'd been going out with him and, in fact, engaged to him at Oxford but we'd split up and I'd had a brief marriage with somebody else which didn't work out, and then I got back together again with Mark. In 1991 we got married and in early 1992 I had my first child, Gregory. My husband, Mark, was at that time a teacher of access courses at a college in Taunton, and also doing his PhD at Exeter University and teaching down there, and I went to live with him, not particularly unnaturally I think, as we were married, but I had been working in London, of course, since the early 1980s. IBM were brilliant and they gave me, for the period that I was pregnant ... NatWest had a number of subsidiaries in Bristol and Birmingham, so they gave me those accounts to look after and, actually, as an aside, that was when I'd just started selling straight hardware and software which was also really good experience for me, because I hadn't really done a lot of that at NatWest in the centre. So I had Gregory in May 1991 and, while I was on maternity leave, somebody who was on the board of IBM who I knew, rang me up and said, 'Rebecca, there's a new global initiative coming that we have to implement called "Expert Professions" and it's part of moving to a services environment. What we're going to do is, we're going to properly train people in things like project management and ITR protection and other stuff so that they have a kind of internally recognised certification. And when they go out to sell to clients we know that they're all of a good quality. We need someone to lead this initiative in the UK. It's just a kind of three month thing, when you come back would you be interested in doing this, and by the way you can do it largely from home.' So, a nanosecond later I said, 'Yes, that sounds great'. Knowing nothing

about it but thinking, brand new baby, living in Taunton, work from home, sounds like a really good plan to me. So IBM set me up with a huge old-fashioned computer screen at home and a dedicated telephone line into the IBM systems and, in October of 1992, I started working on this kind of Expert Professions initiative, initially not in HR, initially for this chap on the board. It very, very quickly became obvious that this was going to be much more than a three month job and could not possibly be done without HR, because we were changing all the job families and all the titles of people and the grading and how people got promoted, everything was changing.

It's what we now call a sort of major internal change programme presumably.

Absolutely. I can't quite remember when I formally moved into HR, it wasn't for a little while, and one of the reasons I can't quite remember is because, in 1992, IBM had a horrible financial shock and made the biggest loss, I think, in corporate history at the time. There are lots of books that have been written about that but, as an insider, I think what happened was, IBM got incredibly focused on these things called the Baldrige Quality Awards and started really focusing on doing process rather than doing the job, and the company crashed and went from, if I remember correctly, something like 470,000 people to 270,000 people globally in eighteen months which was horrendous. All around me, there were lots and lots and lots of people who were literally being laid off and Lou Gerstner came in as the new global CEO to restructure the company. There was a lot of conversation about selling it off and breaking it up and whether that should happen or not, but he said, 'No, we're stronger together. We'll make this work together.' And actually, for me and for other people like me – so I was more kind of like a first-line manager, I suppose, then – it was a huge opportunity because, suddenly, all the bureaucracy that had been around was gone, and all the people we used to have to go to to ask for permission to do things or to get sign off for things were gone, and if you wanted to just go and do something you could just go and do it, because they needed people who were prepared to roll their sleeves up and get things done. So what I did was, I'd started out looking at three technical professions, I'd then expanded and looked at three non-technical professions including what IBM called marketing but the rest of the world called sales, and got involved in the global community for developing those professions and rolling them out globally, which was very interesting because I got to meet all sorts of people from

all over the world, including a lady who was the HR partner for the IBM consulting group. And when I met her, I was having a conversation with her, and I said, 'Oh, no, I'd really love the opportunity to go back and live in America some time, you sound like you've got a really interesting job, that would be the kind of thing I'd be really interesting in doing', actually knowing very little about it, and, long story short, when she was moving on she recommended me to her boss and he said, 'You know, it would be good to have somebody who isn't American in a global role, I'll interview her.' He called me over for an interview and offered me the job, and of course the HR department in the UK went nuts, because I wasn't even a proper HR person. And to go on an international assignment is extremely expensive, and to go and be a first-line manager, an HR manager which I'd never done, in America, and be a line manager which I'd never done, you know, it was absolutely preposterous. And of course it was. And, by that time, I'd had my second child, so I had Felix, so we ended up moving out to America with a one-year old and a three-year old in the middle of the winter to do a job that I had absolutely no idea how to do. [laughs]

00:56:54

How long were you there for?

Two years.

Two years, and that was presumably a great experience for you, was it, working there?

It was, yeah. There were lots of things about being in America that were very good for me. One was that I, for the first time, met women, senior women, in a whole variety of different jobs who were authentically themselves. So they weren't trying to be like men, they didn't all wear a uniform, some were married, some weren't, some had children, some had working husbands, some didn't, but there were quite a lot of them and I'd never, ever experienced that before in the UK. That was really important. I learned how to be a manager, I learned how to be managed by my team, who had 120 years of combined experience – there were only four of them – when I took them over, I learned a lot about HR and I learned a lot about consulting because

the IBM consulting group had been set up by a group of very talented people from Booz Allen and it was a completely different type of a business inside IBM to all IBM's other services business. And it was properly global, there were 5,000 people at the time and it was a properly global organisation, so I learned about knowledge management, proposition development and how to make slides and tell stories and all sorts of things.

And, in 2001, you made a move into government business and into outwards facing consultancy. So tell us a bit about that.

Yes, so what happened then, a small miracle. A big disaster actually happened. So what happened was, I wanted to stay in America and my husband was keen, but IBM UK weren't and so they pulled me back very suddenly and I went into an HR job in the UK, and then I went on an international assignment to Paris, and that's when I was in charge of recruitment and resources for Europe, Middle East and Africa. By this time I was quite senior and that's when I managed a couple of very, very, very big internal IT programmes. So that's when I got my IT programme operational experience, implementing large multilingual systems across lots of countries. But in 2000 or 2001 I fell out in a bad way with my boss. My boss in Paris was a quite old-fashioned Spaniard who was used to being obeyed and I was a bit of a bolshy, mouthy Brit, female, and I'd had a very successful career at IBM, I'd thirteen years of being a top performer every year and I thought I was pretty good. We didn't get on, and it was my fault and his fault, there was fault on both sides, but we really didn't get on. Our relationship did eventually break down to the point that he fired me. It turned out, of course, that he couldn't fire me because I was an employee of IBM UK and we had some HR processes that one has to go through before somebody is fired that he hadn't followed. But I didn't have a job for three months, I didn't have a job, I didn't know what I was going to do, and I took a good hard look at myself and found I was in a sticky position, because I'd accidentally drifted into HR and I was in Paris in internal roles, I had no profile outside the company. If I'd had to leave I'd have had to go into an HR job and I didn't see myself as an HR person at all, but I had no credentials that would make me marketable for any other kind of job at that time ... I probably did but I didn't think so. Plus, when we went to America my husband gave up work, and when we came back, and our children were three and five when we came

back, I said to him, 'It's been lovely having you at home, could you stay at home for another year, 'cos it's just great having you looking after the children' and, of course, he never went back, I mean, he's always been incredibly busy but he never went back to paid work. So there I was, with children who were nine and seven or something, the only wage earner, with three dependants and a very large mortgage and no job. It was a real wake-up moment, actually, and it really came home to me that I didn't have a choice, I had to work this out.

1:01:54

So was this role as Director of UK Public Sector business, did you apply for it or ...

No, so what happened was, various people in the UK company were looking for jobs for me, except the HR department because I was obviously *persona non grata* there, and I got a call from the head of the government business one day, who I knew a bit but not very well from NatWest, and he said, 'Rebecca, the government have brought in somebody called Sir Peter Gershon and his sense of relationship with IBM isn't very good and we need to do better, but I keep sending him people who understand the public sector and he keeps saying that's not what we need, we need somebody who understands IBM,. Will you go and see him and have a chat with him and see if you get on with him.' Well, that was a turning point, absolute turning point. Within two weeks I realised that public sector was what I'd been waiting for all my life. I was, and remain, hugely passionate about doing work with the public sector, I find their problems most intellectually challenging, difficult, complex and, ultimately, affect the way people live their lives which, for me, is hugely important. I got on very well with Peter, he was fabulous in the role, in the government he was the first person who started to get the public sector to think like a market, so to have ...

So what was his role at the time?

He was, well ... what was he actually called? Whether he was Head of Procurement or ... I don't know, I mean, it was very early days, but he effectively set up what is now known as the Crown Commercial Service Organisation. But he worked with Andrew Pinder who was the e-Envoy, who was the e-government person, so there was

Peter, who was doing all the, trying to bring the public sector together around single contracts, so a single contract with Vodafone, or a single contract with electricity suppliers; and Andrew, who was working on, what does e-government look like, and how do you manage with your suppliers better, and how do you move the government to being more of an online base organisation, and there was me. And it was fantastic and I just loved it, both aspects of it, I found really fascinating.

1:04:22

You got involved in lots of work with sustainable communities and so on, around this time, didn't you, including the Egan Review which ...

Yes, I did. You know, a bit like when I'd been at Spicer and Pegler, I was popping in and out, doing all sorts of different things around government, and I met some people from what was called ODPM at the time, it's now the Ministry of Housing ...

It was John Prescott's department, wasn't it?

Yeah, John Prescott's department, and they'd set up an advisory board for Lambeth Council which had a huge loss – at the time it seemed huge, it wasn't by today's standards – and I was an HR person. I now badge myself as lots of different things, so I went into help with the HR side of things, got to know the people at ODPM and after that they said, so John Egan was doing a review of what sustainable community skills, what leadership skills are required for sustainable communities. Because I'd done all the professions work at IBM I knew a lot about leadership, and what leadership skills might be required in complex environments, so I went and did most of the work, actually, for John, on the leadership aspects for that government review. And it was a fantastic experience. I had five years at IBM, working initially just fixing the relationship, but very quickly I took on a P and L and I ended up manning the central government P and L for IBM. And then I was going to move into outsourcing, because public sector outsourcing is a big ticket item, but Deloitte had come knocking on the door.

Ah. I was going to say, yeah, that didn't happen. [laughs]

No.

We should mention at this point, of course, just before we move on, that you were awarded an OBE for your work on the Egan Review, I think.

I was. And I was honoured and still feel honoured. And I was astonished, absolutely astonished. When the letter arrived my secretary rang me up and she said, 'I think you better sit down', and I thought, I've been sacked. Because that's what women think, immediately that you get a call that something unusual has happened your immediate thought is there's a problem. Anyway, she said, 'No, it's good news' and she read me this letter, 'I am commanded by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II' and I thought, what on earth is this? But yes, I was thrilled and my parents were thrilled. I took them to Buckingham Palace, with me and my husband, and we had a great day and I'm still very proud.

So you demonstrated to them that you had a proper job! [laughs]

Yes, exactly, although when I first joined IBM my mother was a little bit, you know, unsure about it, 'Why are you going to them?' and then, when I said I was going to leave to go to Deloitte she said, 'Why would you leave IBM, they're so wonderful, they've been so wonderful to you.' And they had, I had an amazing time at IBM, I had a great career there and did loads of different things and, most importantly, they invested 'cos they invested hugely ...

So why ... yeah?

... in management training and leadership development and I did have a very, very good career there.

So what drew you to make the jump?

So I didn't want to be a lifer. I didn't want to just have one job in my life, one real big job, I didn't want to be there until I retired. I could have done, I could have stayed

but there was something inside me which said, 'Are you only good at IBM because you know IBM, or are you actually any good?' To be fair, the dislocation I'd had in 2001 did leave a long impression with me because it made me realise, at the time, I didn't have an external profile which was one of the reasons I worked very hard to improve my external profile and reputation which ultimately led to the OBE so was quite a successful strategy. I mean, people certainly knew who I was by the time I left. But it also made me think, I had to be really self-sufficient in my skills and in my job and in my professional life because you never can quite tell what might happen. So I'd been approached by Deloitte and asked whether I'd like to go and help them manage their relationship with central government, which they thought needed improving, and after a very, very long time, nineteen months of interviews and discussions, they offered me a job as an Equity Partner and I joined in 2006.

Ok, and you completed, as I understand it, a period at the Cabinet Office, you were seconded to the Efficiency and Reform Group, or how the thing was set up perhaps. Were you kind of influential in how that was ...?

Yes, well that was in 2010 ...

Ok, so a bit later ...

so I spent the first few years at Deloitte working with various central government departments and continuing on the work I'd been doing around IT, IT strategy, e-government if you like, the moving of services online. And in 2010 John Suffolk was the CIO and he wanted a government ICT strategy. There were various things going on in 2010, there'd been an election, there was a different approach in government to consultants and what consultants did, and Deloitte put in a team of people to help work through that *pro bono*. I went in for three months on secondment to the Cabinet Office, I worked for John Suffolk on this IT strategy, which was an absolutely amazing experience. I mean, you know, putting together an IT strategy for a government is an incredibly interesting thing to do. As I mentioned earlier, I've always been interested in architecture and systems architecture and I have always worked with very talented IT architects, and I was working with one then, a Deloitte guy who I still work with, who, from a technology point of view, is second to none in

how you build architect, complex, robust, safe systems which are also flexible to deal with bringing on new services and new technologies. So the two of us were part of a team working for John Suffolk on the strategy and working for John Suffolk was extremely interesting. I was a partner at Deloitte but, to him, I was just a junior in the office that needed to get a job done, and it was very instructional and I enjoyed it hugely, I liked working in the Cabinet Office. And although it was only a few months it gave me a bit of a tick in the box for having done a bit of time as a civil servant.

1:12:06

I'd be quite interested in what was different about the IT strategy that you came up with in 2010. I mean, there had been IT strategies before in government, hadn't there, all of the e-government stuff from about 2000 that you mentioned earlier. What was different this time?

So I think I'm probably putting hindsight on this, and my colleagues in GDS might throw their hands up in horror, but I think, my interpretation is, that we sort of began to realise then, you can't have an IT strategy for government but what you can have are sets of standards which underpin good IT practice across what is a huge variety of different organisations. I guess that what we now know of as the information governance toolkit maybe had its roots then, it may be that there were bits of it already around, but I think ... we did come up with a kind of overarching vision ... but, at the end of the day, it was nothing more than that, it was a vision. And the underpinnings of it were much more about, you had to allow departments to make their own choices because they have such vastly different things to do. So I think that what we were moving towards was standard components with flexibility on top.

Ok. The other thing that I think you focused on quite extensively, at this time, was health, the NHS, and I know this is something you're very passionate about. Tell us a little bit about that. I think you were involved in the national programme for IT, weren't you, in the early days, but that may have been with IBM?

It was, yes.

So there was a bit of continuity there as well.

There was. So I'd been involved in the national programme for IT for health when I was IBM, which was a whole other story and a disaster for IBM, but good learnings. Then, rolling forward a few years, after I'd been working with central government departments for a while at Deloitte, I was asked if I would take on the relationship management, the account management with the NHS which, at the time, wasn't doing particularly well in Deloitte. I did that job for five years and during that time I also had a global role designing Deloitte's global strategy around public sector health and social care. As you said, the NHS is an absolutely amazing organisation, it's not perfect but it is such a jewel in the crown for the UK, undervalued in many different ways. One of the reasons I've always been drawn to the public sector is because the problems are so complicated and everything you touch you have to scale huge. The NHS is the most complex of all of the public sector organisations I've worked with and I love the complexity, I love the intellectual challenge, I particularly love the fact that you need to get organisations and systems and processes to talk to each other across big populations, sometimes nationally but quite often regionally, in order to improve outcomes for patients and citizens. It's that very tangible link to improving outcomes for people that I think is, for me and for many of the people who work in the NHS obviously, so important. Still, the work I do with clients is mainly health work and it's mainly technology, and a lot of the work I do with the NHS is around 'How do you get an electronic patient records system into a hospital, why would you do it, how are you going to afford it, what will the benefits look like, how do you plan for it and how do you implement it?' But also how do you connect systems across organisations, across primary, mental, community, social and acute care, how do you gather the patient data to enable people to travel safely across all of these communities? How do you focus on the patients themselves? And then, how do you enable people to start being more self-determining in that system, understanding where their own data is, and how to own their own data and be more personally accountable for both their health and social care? I love it.

So you had a sort of over-arching vision for where the NHS should be going, was that something ...?

No, I don't think I'd describe it like that.

What that the Deloitte vision or something, the NHS vision?

No, I wouldn't describe it like that, I wouldn't be so presumptive to think that anybody can easily have an overarching vision for what IT should look like in the NHS and Deloitte certainly wouldn't own that proposition.

Which is probably where the national programme for IT went wrong.

Well partly, although I think it's more in the procurement than the vision, and there are organisations in the NHS, NHS England, NHS Digital who own the responsibility for coming up with those strategies and visions and do a very good job. But I think I did, and do, have passion for how can you affordably and safely use IT as an enabler to make health care more effective and safer and fit for the future. I have an absolute passion for that and I'm very, very interested in helping NHS organisations work out how to do that and the affordability thing is massively important. So you have to find a way, first, for things to be affordable and innovative and safe.

I'd be quite interested - you said, when you took over the Deloitte health practice that it needed turning round, what did you do to turn it round? It might be quite interesting for our listeners to hear that.

Primarily I provided a completely different type of leadership. This is something I've now done twice and I think that I've developed as a leader over the last few years in a way, so I'm very collaborative and consensual, I'm very focused on clients, what are the client problems, what are the client challenges? I like to work together around a business strategy with a team. I absolutely love bringing on people, one of my greatest joys is to put people in roles and then give them all the support I can to help them flourish and then watch them flourish. One of the best managers I ever had at IBM said to me, 'I will be behind you all the way, Rebecca, except when the bullets are flying and then I'll be in front.' And I've tried to take that on board as a kind of management style. I have some extraordinary talented people who work for me, and with me, and I think that if you can get groups of talented people together, feeling like

they're part of a team, working collaboratively on solving really difficult client problems, they enjoy it and the clients get good outcomes and you end up doing good business.

1:20:24

Ok. You've been involved, well, I think throughout your career, in diversity initiatives and promoting women, business and IT. Just tell us a little bit about that, just briefly.

Yes, so I got really interested in diversity in IBM in the mid 1990s when I was working in America. IBM were, and are, a leader in diversity and inclusion initiatives and, really, in 1997 when I came back to the UK, that's when I started. I joined the BTS, the Chartered Institute of IT, I started getting involved in a range of initiatives to encourage more women into IT. And, partly because I'd come to IT accidentally and I think quite a lot of people do, quite a lot of my earlier initiatives, and actually subsequently as well, have been about attracting people to the IT industry when they hadn't got a computer science, physics or maths background. Because, as you'll recognise from this discussion, I am not a deep technology person, I am hugely fascinated and interested in how IT works and the application of IT, I don't code programmes – I've done a little bit of coding but I'm not a coder by background – but I think there are so many different jobs and so many types of roles in what we call the IT sector, and so many jobs that women are so ideally suited to do, that I think it's always been part of, I've always had this feeling of wanting to explain that to women and to say, 'Come. Come and have a look, you can do very well, you can get very interesting jobs and you can earn a lot of money by coming into the IT sector. You don't have to necessarily have done a computer science, maths or physics degree.' Obviously you do for some jobs but not for all of them. And so I've done work with arts graduates and science graduates, I've done work with women in their early careers and what women need in their early careers in terms of support, development, work/life balance, you know, how you talk about, how you plan for having babies and having a career and how you manage all of that. I've talked a lot about alternative models. So, my husband stayed at home and looked after our children and that was very important to me, but I know lots of women whose husbands work full-time and they have children and it works for them, and I think talking about alternative models

and how you work it out is really important. I've worked on all sorts of programmes to introduce mentoring and sponsorship and agile working and home working, all sorts of different things to make women's lives easier as they develop their careers, and hopefully as much as possible keep them in work, at least part-time through their child-bearing years if they're going to have children, so that they don't have this difficulty of coming back to work after a long break. I've also, however, worked with women who've had long breaks and, you know, when they get back into the workforce they're fantastic and very successful. And then, you know, as I've got older and progressed, so my demographic groups I've worked with have got older and progressed. More recently, I've done a lot of work around women on boards and how you get women into the senior executive positions and a lot of coaching for women on how to present in interviews, how to manage yourself in a salary negotiation and things like that, because we're not particularly good at that generically. So yeah, it's hugely important to me and twenty years of work with the Chartered Institute of IT, now in the Worshipful Company as well. And diversity and inclusion, it's not just about women for me, it's about all types of diversity. In recent years I've been a mental health champion at Deloitte, I do a lot of work with ethnic minorities and I think we have a tremendous distance to go to understand the different sets of cultural and work/life pressures that our ethnic minorities have in order to make them successful in the workplace too.

1:25:01

Ok. Just reflecting on your career then, just for a few minutes, what do you think were the key decisions, positive or negative, that had a decisive influence on your career?

Well, I suppose from an early age, working out that I can make money by using computers was quite important. My mother saying I didn't have a trade was probably a key point and making the decision to go to IBM. Being opportunistic, saying I did want to go and work in America and then going. Not being particularly fearful of taking on new challenges and so then doing things which were vastly different from what I'd been doing before. Being a bit stubborn and ... I've never been particularly competitive with my peers but I've always been very competitive with myself, what's

the best I can be, how far could I go if I really wanted to, has been quite a motivator for me. Clearly, making the decision to come to Deloitte was a really, really big decision and one which I'm hugely pleased to have made, but it was a risk and I think, if you don't make mistakes and learn from them in your career, and you don't take risks, you're probably not going to really push yourself.

And would you say any particular people, apart from your parents, have influenced your career or perhaps inspired you?

Yes, absolutely, I've been blessed. I mean, my mother has probably been the most important role model, my husband's also been massively important though, in terms of supporting me in a myriad of different ways. But at work I have had amazing people who have spotted me and said, 'You can do this' and then given me the opportunity to do it. So, the guy that put me in the Expert Professions role, the guy that recruited me to public sector in IBM, the guy that recruited me to Deloitte who is still a manager of mine, and then at Deloitte I've had several people who have been hugely helpful and instrumental. Mainly men, because I work in an all-male environment, but not only men. And then, outside of work, I've had for many years Ken Olisa who was at IBM and at the Institute and here at the Worshipful Company, and is now Lord Lieutenant of London, who has said to me, 'Now it's time for you to do this' and pushed me along. So I've been lucky, I know I've had people who have pushed me and given me opportunities that I wouldn't probably have gone for myself.

What would you say was your proudest achievement?

My children - am I allowed to say that? I have these two amazing sons, who are 24 and 26. I mean, to be absolutely fair, they're probably more an achievement of my husband's than mine, but they are lovely, wonderful people I'm hugely proud of, so outside of work that's the thing. You know, at the end of the day, family is so important, isn't it, just so important to me. Inside work, well, I mean, in my professional life getting my OBE was a big deal, a really big deal, and I was very, very, very proud of that. Professionally I'm not sure it's over yet. Last week, I was announced as a managing partner at Deloitte. There are twenty managing partners out of 2,300 partners in North West Europe and I'm going to be sitting on the Exec,

effective June 1, managing public sector for North West Europe, which is fantastic and I'm proud and honoured to be offered the opportunity, really looking forward to it. And so I don't think it's over yet, which is great.

Well, congratulations and good luck in your new role.

Thank you.

Is there anything you would have done differently if you had your time again?

Yes. A couple of things. Early on in my career, if I was doing it again, I'd take a finance qualification. I wouldn't train as an accountant but I would take a bit of a qualification that would enable me to be better ... you see, I taught myself, over the years, to read profit and loss at balance sheets and understand the finances of running a business but I think basic financial accounting is really, really useful for virtually anybody in any business job, so I would do that. And I would probably have taken a course, or been formally taught, something about IT architecture. That's always been the bit about IT that I'm most fascinated with and, again, self taught, I've picked up lots of stuff over the years and, as I mentioned earlier, I've worked with some amazing IT architects, but I think a bit of formal training would have been helpful.

Ok. So you're obviously very busy in your career but, as I understand it, you've got a whole raft of outside interests as well. Just tell us, very, very briefly, what else you do.

I mentioned music earlier in the interview. Now I sing with two choirs; I sing with the Deloitte choir and I sing with a community choir down in Somerset where I live. I run a folk band where I play the fiddle, so I'm relearning how to play folk music on the fiddle. There are fifteen of us in the band and we're a combination of people who either haven't played an awful lot since we were young or who have never played before. We have great fun and we do things like play in the pub, Christmas carols before Christmas and barn dances and things, and have a good time. So then I have two dogs, I love photography, I'm a keen amateur gardener, I have three beehives, currently empty but I'm hoping to get more bees. And I like to body-board.

Ok. And you're a non-Exec director for the City Mental Health Alliance as well? Is that something particularly personal to you.

Absolutely. Deloitte were founder members of the City Mental Health Alliance and we set up a mental health champion programme several years ago which is a group of people – we're not clinically trained - but we're trained to signpost, to talk confidentially to people that have mental health problems and then signpost them to where they can go for further help. I think mental health and wellbeing is massively important, we don't talk about it enough in the workplace. If people feel safe talking about mental health problems early they're less likely to get into long-term difficulties and I think it's a really important thing to do. As an aside, I will say, my particular age group of women now, there's a lot of mental health and menopause discussions that need to happen which traditionally have not happened. It's been a quite taboo subject and so I do try to make sure that we get that dialogue into the open as well.

What do you think are the biggest challenges and opportunities for the IT industry in the next ten years, maybe in the public sector as it's your specialist area?

Where would you start with that? That's like saying, what's gonna happen with Brexit. So, immediately I would say, how the IT industry moves to global standards and regulation and interoperability, but particularly around personal data. I think this is being played out at the moment in a couple of different ways: firstly, with social media but also with AI, and AI and ethics. You know, I think it's very difficult. Technology's always going to move faster than regulation but most of what's happening in technology today is not bounded by national boundaries and if you look at cyber – we do a huge amount of work in cyber – there's no concept of a national or an organisational boundary. So I think, over the next ten years, it's not going to be so much on the technical interoperability standards, because I think we know how to do that, you can move technology coming along, but it's about the application of IT, it's about how you ... 'regulate' is a hard word but how you manage the international aspect of interoperability of data that I think is going to be the biggest challenge. I can never remember the numbers but most of the world's data was created in the last two years or something and that exponentially is going to keep moving on. So that's

one thing. The other thing I'll say is, for technology, and IT is part of this picture, we have to work out how to apply technology to solve the world's environmental issues. It's technology arguably that's got us into the trouble and we need, now, to work with technology to make technology help us get out of that problem, particularly with plastics but all sorts of other environmental challenges going forward. I think this again has to be an international endeavour and I think that the IT industry is best placed to take a leading role in that.

Ok. What advice would you give someone entering the IT industry today?

What advice would I give somebody ... be opportunistic, look for new experiences and new ways of doing things. At all times, at all times, be focused on the problem you're trying to solve. I guess that's probably the most important thing for IT people, don't try and implement the system, try and work out what the problem is that needs to be solved and work out how to solve the problem. IT will always be the enabler. It's not the solution and I think we do make a mistake if we start thinking that IT is the solution, so really focusing down on what your client or your end-user is trying to do, the outcome they want to achieve, that's the thing that's most important and, by the way, most interesting.

Rebecca, it's been fascinating hearing your life story and your insights into the working of major consultancy organisations like IBM and Deloitte. On behalf of Archives IT, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us.

Thank you.

[recording ends at 1:17:19]