

## **Kenneth Francis**

### **Digital Transition**

Alteglofsheim, Germany

**Hello, Kenny. Thank you very much for taking the time to do this interview today. I asked you if you would be willing to answer a few questions about our Smart Age Project so that you could help us with your opinions and thoughts on how we can continue working on the project. I would like to ask you to briefly introduce yourself so that our colleagues know who you are.**

Yes, my name is Kenneth Francis. I am retired. I was most recently employed by Continental, working in various roles around the world. Most of the time, I was responsible for profit and loss. In my last role, I was Head of Operations for Continental's production, plants, and logistics in China, Lithuania, Czechia, and Mexico, so I was responsible worldwide.

**Yes, I know you also lived in Japan for three years, which means you certainly learned a lot there. You have now chosen the topic of digital inclusion for this interview, and I would now like to ask you the questions that we ask in all countries in our guidebooks. Are you familiar with the Ikigai principles?**

I am familiar with the Ikigai principles in the Japanese sense, which is well-being, the holistic structure of being completely satisfied with one's environment and situation. So, as I said, I am familiar with the principle, and I am curious to see how it is viewed in the study.

**In the study, we essentially took these three or four positions, namely the topics of health, digital inclusion, civic engagement, but also perhaps: To what extent am I still involved in politics, am I informed and integrated? Of course, you're right, the topic is holistic. But in this project, we focused on these four questions. Yes, and that means you know your way around ikigai. As you said, you yourself lived in Japan for three years. How can the concept of ikigai be integrated into the digital transformation for older people? How do you think we can make integration possible in the first place?**

Well, by breaking down barriers. When I look at the purely digital world, I notice that everything related to the digital world is being designed primarily by very young people. What we need to pay attention to is guiding these young people in designing solutions that can be used by all generations. We always did it this way: when the students had finished the task, I sent them off with the system to their own families and said, "Let your mothers and grandmothers work with it so

that it can also be used by the older generation, and they can see how the different generations think and work."

**I think that's a great approach. I think you're right, younger generations take far too much for granted. Everything is clear to them, but not to someone older.**

It starts with that. How older people or other generations think. But it goes further than that. What handicaps develop over time? Hearing deteriorates. Eyesight deteriorates. Mobility declines. And then it's also a question of which colours to choose, what font sizes to use. How quickly do I display texts, which warning symbols do I use? As I said, I see how well this works in Japan. I see it hardly at all here. I still see it strongly in the Baltic countries. But in Germany, we are really far behind with these solutions.

**So, a digital desert, as they often say in Germany.**

Yes, a digital desert, basically, or a digital desert for older people in particular.

**Absolutely. That means digital skills are important for people to find meaning in their lives, to find fulfilment, to be able to say that they are doing well. So you think it's important to have digital skills.**

I absolutely believe so, because access to all media simply gives people the opportunity to inform themselves. These are very simple things like browsers, online newspapers, YouTube, and various channels that enable everyone to stay informed in their daily lives.

**But there are also dangers behind this.**

Yes, advertisements that always pop up.

**And, of course, the fears and worries that you might do something wrong. That means you stick to the areas you know and are really familiar with, and avoid everything else because it could be dangerous or you could do something wrong.**

Communication with the German pension insurance system. Everything is done via the ID app, online access only with a digital ID card. How complicated access

must be for people who don't have this and are afraid to use these systems. And these access options are also being offered more and more. But unfortunately, they are not as easy to use as they should be!

**Exactly. Well, I sometimes feel that I'm well equipped digitally, but sometimes I think it's really complex. So, you have to read up on it intensively in some cases. What do you think about the current political situation in the European Union, and particularly in Germany, when it comes to issues such as accessibility and inclusion, i.e. enabling people to participate? We are talking about older people, but inclusion is another matter altogether.**

That's right. I think we're doing a very poor job, whether it's our Ministry of Economics or other authorities. Our colleagues simply don't have the opportunity and keep referring to other offices and authorities, which is why digitization is not progressing here. I think we have a lot of catching up to do in Germany.

**The political promises of the last few weeks are there. Let's see what happens in the coming weeks and months.**

Here's another comparison. When I arrive in Lithuania and drive from Vilnius to Kaunas, I don't have a single moment of interruption in the 5G network and I have good reception. Continental sells vehicle connectivity to the 5G network in Regensburg, but is no longer able to get comprehensive 5G coverage in Regensburg. Even its own factory doesn't have a 5G connection. How can this be explained? And it's not available to ordinary citizens either.

**Yes, that's frustrating, of course. So, we can only hope for the next few years. Do you know of any measures or initiatives in Germany that could serve as a model?**

No

**Me neither. I've thought about it, and to be honest, I don't know of any at the moment.**

No, I don't know of any, and I think that discussions like this, which is why I'm happy to participate, serve to draw attention to the issue. I believe that personal commitment plays an important role in this. So, I try to help everyone in my circle who I notice is having problems with digital media.

### **That's great.**

Thank you very much. But you can't always expect the state to regulate everything. In my view, there is no real initiative to do so. When I compare it with other countries, such as Japan or the US, they actually involve their citizens much more in such programs and offer opportunities for further education.

**I know that the Bavarian government has released €5,000 in project funds over the last two years for senior citizens' councils or older communities to organize training courses. That's the only one I know of; our senior citizens' advisory board did that too. They brought in a specialist who trained them in 10 meetings. That's the only project I know of; I don't know of any others. I also believe that the involvement of the people affected is far too low- . As you said at the beginning: "If I don't know what people's needs are and how they are structured, then I can't design anything for them.**

**Okay, what are the most difficult things to learn when you start using a computer? What about a smartphone? So, what do you think is the most difficult thing when you start out?**

How passwords are created, so that I only have to rely on password generators, and how these passwords are then stored appropriately and made available to relatives or descendants. That's a big issue.

### **On a PC?**

Right after that comes security when accessing the internet. How do I protect my PC from unauthorized access on public networks? So, what VPN systems are available, what DSL networks? How do I set up my network so that it is sufficiently secure? And there is no one-size-fits-all solution. It's easier with phones. Ultimately, there are only Android or Apple phones. And Apple has built a very secure system that, in my opinion, protects against attacks. And all the things I just mentioned are absolutely guaranteed in an Apple network. So basically, a computer, a MacBook, an iPad, or a phone user is all supported and connected, and things like estate contacts and emergency contacts are offered in their entirety. Attention! We are currently in the process of opening up these systems in the European Union in order to abolish monopolies. In my opinion, this will result in Apple no longer providing certain functions in Europe. The EU has simply come down hard on Apple to take away this monopoly. As a customer, I have never complained about Apple's costs and prices. I knew I was entering a high-priced segment, and in return I got all these benefits. If all of that is now being dismantled, I think that as a society we are taking risks in addition to the benefits, which should definitely be weighed up. Is what the EU

is doing bad? I can't judge that. Do I personally like what the EU is doing today?  
No!

**Thank you very much. If, for example, you want to help people with digital inclusion, where should you start if you want to learn how to use new technologies? How and where? What do you think could be done?**

Well, something like repair cafés. As I said, I'm absolutely convinced of that. Unfortunately, they don't exist yet, but I don't think repair cafés will be around for much longer anyway, because most products are designed in such a way that they can no longer be repaired. That will disappear in the next 10 to 15 years, and then we can switch to digitalization.

**Okay. That's such a smooth transition. I have to say, it's a really great idea, I think it's fantastic. Yes, then my question is: Some older adults have difficulty with the differences between mobile applications and websites. How would you simplify it?**

So, applications in connection with websites?

**Yes**

I don't know anyone who has serious problems with it. Because, as I said, there are hardly any applications that offer both. I have one that helps me in a smart home environment at home. But that's only for remote access to the house. Then I use a web-based application. Otherwise, I use the app. I would say that the German pension insurance is a purely web-based application.

But if you want to access the data from your PC, you have to use an app-based ID card reader function. If you could integrate something like that and read it, we wouldn't have to worry about it. Specifically, I've now come to terms with it, but that would of course be a simplification. But that's more about integrating these systems so that they can be used easily.

**Okay, good. If you had to create a guide for new computer and smartphone users, where would you start? Probably exactly what you said earlier, right?**

Yes, I would say so. Where it would be worthwhile is if, once someone has set up their computer, the setup information is actually stored somewhere, and I can use biometric data.

## **The camera?**

For facial recognition, the camera could potentially be used for iris recognition and fingerprint recognition in conjunction with digital keys to install everything from one computer to a new computer. And then, as I said, back to mobile phones. That would be a significant improvement, because reinstalling a computer over and over again is actually a problem for older people. So, I already spend a lot of time helping others, and then when a stranger sets up a computer, you also have to provide confidential data that you typically don't want to hand over.

**Okay. Well, sure. If you say a guide, someone would come to you and say, "I've never had a smartphone." Or "I've never had a computer," or "I'd like to have an iPad," or "I'd like to use this, but I've never used it before." How would you proceed in that case? If the person trusted you and said, "Can you teach me how to do this?" What would you do?**

Get advice where you buy it and have it set up completely right away. The staff there have all the privacy policies and everything else they need to do that. That's the safest way to do it. I wouldn't want to do it myself privately because I would have to access data, confidential data from people with . It would have to be someone I know very well personally for me to do that, otherwise I wouldn't do it.

**But basically, you're addressing the issue that you're saying, regardless of whether there's an app store for Apple or if you're buying Android devices now, you're actually saying, "Buy it from an expert, buy it from a reputable store where there are people behind it who know what they're doing and who will also set things up for you, right? So that would be the approach. Okay, or then just volunteer instead of repair cafés. Just, "I'll help you get digital!" Something like that.**

As I said, the main problem is the people who help you. How are they qualified and trained, and how can I be sure that my confidential data won't be misused by these people?

**Okay. But you've already touched on issues such as online security. How do I navigate the internet, how do I deal with emails, etc.? This goes even further in**

**terms of actual usage, and perhaps help is needed there too. So, I'm thinking, for example: How do I store my photos? How does that work? Do I store them on my PC or do I back them up in the cloud? These are personal applications that everyone has. I want to book my vacation through a travel portal. How secure or insecure is that, and which portals should I use? So, I think one thing is the technical setup, which is what you mentioned, but the other is also how to use it. So how do I use all these devices? How can I use them? I'm certainly not going to learn that in the store.**

They definitely don't teach you that. And when I think about how many online shops there are that conjure up offers and promise you all sorts of things and then don't deliver. And where money may already have been spent. Whether via PayPal, credit cards, SEPA, or bank transfers. Regardless, you would actually have to provide ongoing advice because the world is constantly changing. There are always new channels. If someone uses Instagram now, they are constantly confronted with new topics, and then this great button always appears: Buy now. Where you are directed somewhere.

**Yes.**

And WhatsApp is now starting to incorporate advertising and these links. So, you would have to provide regular refresher training on this. One training session is not enough. The digital world is constantly changing. The question is: How do I reach people to do this?

**This increasing commercialization is simply a problem. Even in terms of communication channels, as you just mentioned. WhatsApp was originally always a communication channel. Now it's commercialized. It's on Facebook, on Instagram, everywhere. It's really only about sales now.**

A lot of nonsense can happen there.

**Yes. As you mentioned at the beginning, people are still afraid and say to themselves: I'd rather do nothing than do something wrong. Another question is: What is the most important thing for you when using a laptop, and what is the most important thing for you when using a smartphone? We actually discussed this a little earlier when we talked about security.**

When it comes to security, I try to make sure that it is a company that is neutral. If possible, actually in Scandinavia. This is to ensure that the data is protected to a reasonable extent. And the same applies to the telephone. Restrict access yourself. Give appropriate warnings when accessing it. I'm convinced of that.

For example, the email I received from you with the questionnaires. I was warned not to open the attachments.

Okay, that's fine.

Yes

**It's also very dangerous these days. Honestly, here's a practical example. We recently received a phishing email where someone had actually written to my accountant asking her to check the accounts to see if there were sufficient funds. It was about paying a €35,000 bill, and they wanted it transferred to this and that account, and then with a nice note: Best regards. Jana.**

We know that too. Unfortunately, a lot of our data was stolen as well.

Okay.

And this kind of thing happens everywhere. You can't assume that only large companies are targeted. Small companies are too. Every little bit counts.

**That actually happened in my previous job at the bank, and a colleague actually transferred the requested amount. There's nothing you can do about it because the money goes to some account and you can't get it back. So, it's very dangerous.**

Security is the most important thing. But as I said, it's closely followed. I don't want to forget it from the beginning of the conversation. I like to repeat it over and over again: "Design access to the computer and applications in such a way that it is optimally usable for people depending on the situation.

**Yes. A good example, because you mentioned it, is poor eyesight in old age. I've had to increase the font size on WhatsApp and in my messages. That's an actual response to realizing, "Okay, I can't read as well anymore!" So that means that the ability to see the numbers or see these things may be difficult for older people. Maybe different cell phones need to be produced for older people. I sometimes think about that, typing and voice functions with writing functions, everything that comes with it.**

Well, it's actually the case that these applications change depending on the situation. You have different disabilities as you get older. There are purely visual ones. Issues surrounding hearing. But you also have diseases associated with old age, such as dementia, which cause you to do things you really shouldn't. And when it comes to visual impairments.

How often do you see websites that use multi-coloured, slanted text to confirm that you are not a robot? This is difficult for a normal person to recognize. If someone has an impairment, perhaps even a certain degree of colour blindness, then it is almost impossible to fill in this filter. There are other ways to do this. As I said, adaptation is the key. Other countries are actually doing more in this area, especially Japan. They have simply understood how to involve older people in everything. And that's also what it's about: Sony, for example, offers everything from a small digital dog to walking aids that allow people, even in old age, to get to the bus or train to go to the doctor. Navigation systems that use the last mile approach so that a person with a disability is actually able to find their way to their destination.

**Okay. Yes, that's actually a point. It always seems to me that things are actually different in Germany. When it comes to physical disabilities, for example, Italy is much, much further ahead than Germany. Much, much, much further ahead, you have to say. I don't know why we are like that. But that's why we're here, to learn from each other. I have another question here: How can we develop technologies that are more accessible and intuitive for older people?**

It's quite simple. Involve all the people we are now sending into retirement due to our economic situation in the development of the systems of the future.

**Great.**

There are plenty of people who are now in early retirement or retirement who can and want to continue to contribute.

**That would then be the point about social engagement, which is also part of these principles. Okay, how can cybersecurity be simplified for older people?**

There is no such thing as protection in cybersecurity because as soon as I have a protective mechanism, there are enough resourceful people who find alternative workarounds. Always stay on the ball. As I said, everyone will choose their own. Which, of course, conflicts with these security packages because it's also a business for them. They earn their money with it. But maybe there are

also certificates for this, to tell citizens, " , okay, these two or three packages are the right ones for me, and I can install them with peace of mind." You have to, because things are changing so quickly that there won't be one solution.

**Well, sure, that's a general issue. To be honest, it doesn't just affect older people, it certainly also affects many young people who fall for one thing or another. One more question: How can users become safer on the internet?**

It's like driving a car. DO IT.

**Maybe it would also be a good idea to meet in communities where you can bring questions with you. Maybe older people for older people. Sometimes I think that too, because I remember when our son explained the internet to my father back then, it was always difficult. He was always impatient and couldn't understand why my father was asking the same question for the third time and just didn't feel confident about it. Maybe, as you say, we really need socially engaged people like you, who are forward-thinking and still fully knowledgeable, to simply stand up for older people.**

Yes, things like internet cafes. I also believe that very young people actually have more patience with seniors than teenagers do. I wouldn't make it a meeting place exclusively for seniors. There was actually a trend toward internet cafes for a while. With the spread of the internet, that has now changed again. But meeting places where you can also use the internet are definitely useful.

**Okay, would you like to add anything else to what you've said?**

We've now talked about all the improvements. Personally, I think we've discussed the whole thing at a very high level. Ultimately, criminal activities are often behind it. When systems cannot be used or are used incorrectly, or when apps are developed that have an ID card reading function or other features. Caution is simply required here.

**The recording is now over. Thank you very much**

Alright.