Halbe Milliarde Euro für deutsches KI-Start-up Aleph Alpha

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DIE WELT

Wirtschaftsminister Robert Habeck fordert nach dem Deal noch mehr Risikobereitschaft von europäischen Investoren

Von Philipp Vetter

Jonas Andrulis und Robert Habeck laufen sich in diesen Tagen häufig über den Weg. Ende vergangener Woche trafen sich der Start-up-Gründer und der deutsche Wirtschaftsminister in der Nähe von London bei einem Gipfel der britischen Regierung, wo über Risiken und Regulierung von künstlicher Intelligenz (KI) gesprochen wurde. Doch am Montag, in der Landesvertretung von Baden-Württemberg in Berlin, sollten nicht die Gefahren der neuen Technologie im Mittelpunkt stehen, die auch Andrulis' Start-up Aleph Alpha entwickelt. "Wir brauchen auch ein paar Feldspieler und nicht nur Schiedsrichter auf dem Platz", sagte Andrulis.

Aleph Alpha ist einer der wenigen deutschen Spieler auf dem Feld der künstlichen Intelligenz - womöglich sogar der einzige ernstzunehmende. Das 2019 in Heidelberg gegründete Unternehmen entwickelt ein eigenes großes Sprachmodell, vergleichbar mit ChatGPT von OpenAI und Microsoft. Doch die amerikanische Konkurrenz war den Deutschen vor allem bei der Finanzierung haushoch überlegen. Seit Montag hat Aleph Alpha zumindest ein wenig aufgeholt: Zusammen mit Habeck gab Andrulis den Abschluss einer Finanzierungsrunde über insgesamt 500 Millionen Dollar bekannt.

Die Investoren passen überwiegend zur Strategie von Aleph Alpha, sich als sichere und transparente Alternative zu den Modellen aus den USA aufzustellen. Mit Bosch, SAP, der Schwartz-Gruppe und Burda gehören fast ausschließlich deutsche Firmen zu den Investoren. "Souveränität und Verantwortung für eine neue Ära" will Andrulis liefern. Es gehe um gemeinsame Überzeugungen, die er mit seinen Geldgebern teile. "Aber natürlich brauchen wir auch das Geld", so der Aleph-Alpha-Chef. Laut dem Unternehmen habe man sich die Investoren aussuchen können, auch andere Firmen seien interessiert gewesen, darunter US-Konzerne. Doch die Deals hätten dazu geführt, dass das Unternehmen dann nur noch eine bestimmte Cloud oder die Chips eines einzigen Herstellers hätte nutzen dürfen.

Aleph Alpha sieht sein Geschäft derzeit vor allem auch im Geschäft mit Behörden und Regierungen. Dort könne man nicht einfach einen Chatbot fragen und dann hoffen, dass das Ergebnis schon richtig sein werde, sagt Andrulis, der vor seiner Unternehmensgründung für Apple gearbeitet hat. Bislang hat man schon die baden-württembergische Verwaltung und Regierung als Pilotkunden. Mehr als 300.000 Mitarbeiter können das Sprachmodell Luminous nutzen, um beispielsweise Kabinettsvorlagen und Vermerke erstellen zu lassen. Es handle sich noch um eine frühe Version, betont Andrulis. "Ich will nicht den Eindruck erwecken, wir hätten die Digitalisierung der Verwaltung schon gelöst." Dem Vernehmen nach könnte Aleph Alpha bald weitere Regierungskunden gewinnen, auch auf Bundesebene denkt man offenbar darüber nach, KI-Dienstleistungen auszuschreiben.

Doch allein wird die Regierung als potenzieller Kunde nicht ausreichen, um eine erfolgreiche Konkurrenz zu den amerikanischen Riesen wie Google, Microsoft und Meta aufzubauen. Habeck begrüßte daher vor allem, dass die deutschen

Unternehmen sich zu der für hiesige Verhältnisse gewaltigen Finanzierungsrunde durchgerungen haben. In Deutschland herrsche noch immer viel zu oft die Haltung vor, dass eine Investition garantiert erfolgreich sein müsse, sonst stelle man kein Geld zur Verfügung. In den USA stehe deshalb mehr als zehn Mal so viel Risikokapital für die Entwicklung der künstlichen Intelligenz zur Verfügung als in Europa. "Wir müssen echt Hackengas geben, um nicht total abgehängt zu werden", so Habeck. Er sehe die Regulierungsbestrebungen der EU deshalb auch durchaus kritisch. Es könne zwar auch ein Vorteil sein, als erster Rahmenbedingungen für neue Technologien vorzugeben. "Aber wir brauchen nicht nur Verkehrsschilder, sondern auch ein paar Autos auf der Straße", sagte Habeck.

Wie wertvoll Aleph Alpha nach der neuen Finanzierungsrunde ist, wollte Andrulis auf Nachfrage nicht beantworten. Habeck sprach vom "nächsten Einhorn, wenn ihr nicht schon eines seid". Als Einhorn werden Start-ups bezeichnet, die mehr als eine Milliarde Dollar wert sind. Nach Informationen von WELT besteht die Gesamtsumme, die nun von den Investoren in das Unternehmen gesteckt wird, aus mehreren Teilbeträgen, die nicht alle auch mit einem Verkauf von Anteilen an Aleph Alpha verbunden sind. Es gilt aber als wahrscheinlich, dass die Bewertung für die Unternehmensbeteiligung bei deutlich über einer Milliarde Dollar gelegen hat.

Der KI die Richtung weisen

Weltweit bemühen sich Regierungen aktuell um eine frühe Regulierung von künstlicher Intelligenz. Doch eigene Interessen und Tücken der Technik könnten die neuen Regeln untergraben

Von Stefan Beutelsbacher, Benedikt Fuest, Laurin Meyer und Philipp Vetter

Elon Musk verdankt künstlicher Intelligenz (KI) einen Gutteil seines Erfolgs - seine Tesla-Elektroautos fahren wegen ihr fast selbstständig, seine Raketen wurden per Algorithmus entworfen, seine Satelliten navigieren mit KI im All. Und dennoch warnt Musk eindringlich vor den Folgen der Technik-Revolution: "Zum ersten Mal gibt es etwas, das klüger ist als der klügste Mensch", sagte er am Donnerstag im Gespräch mit dem britischen Premier Rishi Sunak. Zum wiederholten Male sprach sich Musk für eine Regulierung aus - und er rennt damit bei der Politik offene Türen ein.

Eine Reihe von Gesetzesvorhaben, Verpflichtungen und Richtlinien kommt aktuell auf die Tech-Konzerne zu, die alle auf die rechtzeitige Regulierung von KI zielen: Anfang der Woche veröffentlichte US-Präsident Joe Biden seine "Executive Order zur sicheren und vertrauenswürdigen künstlichen Intelligenz", dann einigten sich die G-7-Staatschefs auf "internationale Leitlinien", schließlich legten 28 Staaten, darunter auch USA und China, auf dem britischen "AI Sicherheitsgipfel" in Bletchley Park am Mittwoch die sogenannte "Bletchley-Erklärung" vor. Gemeinsam wollen die Gipfelteilnehmer sicherstellen, dass künstliche Intelligenz "auf sichere Weise entworfen, entwickelt, eingesetzt und genutzt wird, sodass sie auf den Menschen ausgerichtet, vertrauenswürdig und verantwortungsbewusst ist".

Die beteiligten Politiker eint die Angst, dass der breite Einsatz künstlicher Intelligenz Veränderungen bringen wird, die außerhalb ihrer Kontrolle liegen. Sie stehen unter Druck, die kommende Revolution so sozial, so wenig disruptiv für ihre Wähler zu

gestalten wie möglich. Damit einher geht die Sorge, dass wenige große Tech-Konzerne die Netto-Profiteure des Wandels sein werden.

Am deutlichsten äußerte sich UN-Generalsekretär António Guterres: Der Gesetzgeber laufe der Entwicklung der KI schon jetzt hinterher. "Im vergangenen Jahr haben wir erlebt, dass leistungsstarke KI-Modelle ohne Rücksicht auf die Sicherheit der Nutzer auf den Markt gebracht wurden", schimpfte er. "Jedes Mal, wenn dies geschieht, erhöht sich das Risiko, dass die Technologie von Kriminellen oder sogar Terroristen missbraucht wird, dass sie die Sicherheit oder die Integrität von Informationen untergräbt, dass Menschen die Kontrolle über sie verlieren und dass sie sich in unbeabsichtigte Richtungen entwickelt." KI berge zudem die Gefahr, zahlreiche Jobs überflüssig zu machen, außerdem vergrößere sich die globale Ungleichheit, weil nicht alle Staaten Zugriff auf die Technologie haben.

Es war die US-Regierung, die sich selbst schon vor dem Gipfel in die Vorreiterrolle hievte. Die Welt müsse jetzt handeln, um "das gesamte Spektrum" der KI-Risiken anzugehen, sagte Vizepräsidentin Kamala Harris in London. Dabei war es auch die US-Regierung, die bislang nur auf ein paar halbherzige Selbstverpflichtungen der Entwicklerfirmen vertrauen wollte - bis zu dieser Woche.

Am Montag hat US-Präsident Joe Biden ein Dekret erlassen, das tiefgreifende Vorgaben zum Umgang mit KI macht. Es sieht neue Verpflichtungen für Tech-Konzerne wie Alphabet und Microsoft vor. Die Unternehmen werden angewiesen, Sicherheitstests bei besonders sensiblen KI-Systemen durchzuführen und die Ergebnisse der Regierung vorzulegen - und zwar bevor die Systeme auf den Markt kommen. Gleichzeitig will Biden aber auch die digitale Privatsphäre der Verbraucher stärken und sie vor Diskriminierung schützen sowie vor sogenannten Deep-Fakes, also zum Beispiel künstlich erzeugten oder verfälschten Fotos oder Audio-Dateien. Auch drohende Jobverluste durch KI sollen die Behörden im Blick behalten.

Die EU ist im Gesetzgebungsverfahren für den "AI Act" einen Schritt weiter. Gerade laufen Gespräche zwischen dem Parlament, der Kommission und den Mitgliedstaaten, Trilog genannt. Der Kern des Gesetzes steht. Es ordnet KI in vier Risikogruppen ein. Kameras zum Beispiel, die an Bahnhöfen Gesichter identifizieren, sollen verboten werden. Solche Anwendungen nennt die EU "inakzeptabel". Als "hochriskant" bezeichnet Brüssel etwa KIs, die Wahlkämpfe steuern oder im Auftrag von Firmen Bewerber aussieben. Für sie sind strenge Auflagen geplant. Auch die Bereiche Infrastruktur und Transport fallen in diese Kategorie. Entwickler sollen aber Ausnahmen beantragen können, wenn sie meinen, ihre Algorithmen seien ungefährlich.

Ein "geringes" oder "minimales" Risiko sieht die EU zum Beispiel bei KI, die Spam aus Mailfächern herausfiltert. So etwas soll kaum reguliert werden. Programme wie ChatGPT fallen nicht unter die Regulierungsbestrebungen. Die EU stuft sie nicht per se als bedrohlich ein, alles hängt davon ab, zu welchem Zweck sie genutzt werden.

Doch wer bewertet, was gefährlich ist und was nicht? Frühere Entwürfe des Gesetzes sahen vor, dass KI-Entwickler umfangreiche Risiko-Analysen erstellen müssen. Für Google und Facebook kein Problem, aber viele Start-ups hätte das wohl überfordert. Deshalb verfolgt die EU nun einen anderen Ansatz: Die Entwickler sollen eine Selbsteinschätzung vornehmen und diese in eine Datenbank eintragen. Nationale Aufsichtsbehörden, so die Idee, können darauf zugreifen und die Angaben kontrollieren. "Die Selbsteinstufung des Risikos und die klaren Ausnahmen in Risikobereichen sind zentral für kleine und mittelständische Unternehmen", sagt die FDP-Europaabgeordnete Svenja Hahn WELT AM SONNTAG. Ein weiterer Knackpunkt in den Verhandlungen sei die biometrische Überwachung per KI. "Das EU-Parlament nimmt eine starke Bürgerrechtsposition ein, will zum Beispiel biometrische

Massenüberwachung verhindern", so Hahn. "Die Mitgliedsländer hingegen wollen zahlreiche Ausnahmen für die Strafverfolgung erreichen."

Bei all dem steht viel auf dem Spiel. Es geht um das erste große KI-Gesetz der Welt, um den ersten Versuch des Menschen, lernenden Maschinen Grenzen zu setzen. Doch ist es überhaupt möglich, eine Technologie, die sich so rasant verändert, sinnvoll zu regulieren? "Wir versuchen erst gar nicht, jede denkbare Anwendung von KI einzeln zu regeln", sagt Hahn. Das Ziel sei es, einen Rahmen zu schaffen. Ein Gesetz, das auch die Entwicklungen der Zukunft abdeckt, die vorhersehbaren und die unvorhersehbaren.

"Im Vergleich zur EU befinden sich die USA bislang in einem Selbstregulierungsmodus", kommentiert Arun Chandrasekaran vom Analysedienst Gartner. "Die neue KI-Verordnung ist zwar in ihrem Umfang recht ehrgeizig, doch wie weit sie ohne konkrete Gesetzgebung eingehalten wird, ist schwer zu sagen." Biden, so Chandrasekaran, könnte Regulierung zwar versprechen - doch ob er sie gegenüber den mächtigen Tech-Konzernen auch in konkrete Gesetze über eine "Executive Order" hinaus umsetzt, das bleibe abzusehen.

So einhellig die Forderungen der wichtigsten Industrienationen nach mehr Regulierung klingen mögen, so schnell könnte die Einigkeit wieder bröckeln. Schließlich verspricht künstliche Intelligenz das lukrativste Geschäft der Zukunft zu werden. Und so könnten die Bedenkenträger von heute schon morgen zu erbitterten Konkurrenten werden. Bereits jetzt erleichtert Biden internationalen KI-Forschern die Einreise in die USA und verspricht ungehinderte Forschung, sichert sich so Talente.

Und auch China dürfte in Bletchley Park nicht ohne Hintergedanken unterzeichnen. Die Chinesen gelten als die Nummer zwei im globalen Wettlauf um die künstliche Intelligenz, nur in den Vereinigten Staaten wird derzeit noch mehr in die Technologie investiert. China gilt eigentlich als die unkalkulierbare Variable im Bemühen um globale Regeln. Wenn die chinesische Regierung dennoch mitmacht, dann vor allem, um eine Chance auf Einfluss auf die Regeln im weltweiten Wettbewerb um Technologie und Talente zu bewahren. Ob man diese Vorgaben dann zu Hause einhält oder eben nicht, steht - wie so oft - auf einem ganz anderen Blatt.

Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella talks AI, closing the Activision Blizzard deal, and his best business decision so far

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Satya Nadella sat down with Axel Springer CEO Mathias Döpfner to talk OpenAI, cricket, and his biggest professional regret and best decision so far.

- *Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella recently sat for an interview at Axel Springer's Berlin headquarters.*
- *He talked about his career journey, Microsoft's partnership with OpenAI, and leadership, among other topics.*
- *Nadella received the 2023 Axel Springer Award this year.*

Mathias Döpfner, the CEO of Insider's parent company, Axel Springer, recently met with Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella for a wide-ranging interview.

The interview took place in Berlin at Axel Springer's headquarters, where Nadella was honored with the 2023 Axel Springer Award, which recognizes "outstanding personalities who demonstrate an exceptional talent for innovation, create and transform markets, shape culture, and also face their social responsibility."

You can read a transcript of Döpfner's conversation with Nadella below. The interview has been lightly edited for clarity.

Satya, the world knows you're a big cricket fan. Cricket is a bit of a mystery for Germans. But we do realize it's a great time for cricket just now. The cricket world cup is taking place in India, and there's talk of the Olympic Games 2036 being in India, too. Which is very exciting for cricket fans because it's scheduled to become an Olympic discipline again in 2028. Could you tell us a little about personal fascination with the sport?

As an Indian and a South Asian, I think it's more than a religion. For all of us, it's what we grew up with.

What is it you have learned from cricket about leadership?

I remember one time we were playing a league match in the city I grew up in Hyderabad and there was a player from Australia playing in that league match. We were all sitting there admiring this guy and what he was doing on the field. And I distinctly remember my coach standing behind me and saying, "Hey, don't just admire from a distance, go and compete!" For me, that was a great way of saying: when you're on the field, how do you go in there and give it your all. Learn from your competition, but don't be in awe of your competitors.

Another incident I remember is a game where I was playing under one of the captains. One of our players was very good, but for some reason or another he was not happy with the decisions the captain was making on the field. And he was dropping these catches on purpose just to make a point. That really influenced me a lot: this one player brought the entire morale of the team down on purpose just because he was not happy about things. And I do think that, from time to time you

get into situations in the workplace where you have one person who is not really bought in, and that's something you really have to act on. The situation where I learned the most was when, one day, I was having a very bad streak, and my captain took me off. He came in himself and got a breakthrough or a wicket. But then he gave the ball back to me and, interestingly, I went on to get a bunch of wickets in that match. I asked him why he did that, let me play again even though I was having a bad day. He said to me, "I need you for the rest of the season, so I didn't want to break your confidence." And this was high school cricket, and I thought, "My God, this guy is an enlightened captain." So, in some sense, if you're leading a team, you don't just want that team for one time, you need them for the duration. When I look back, there are lots of incidents that have given me a bunch of lessons to take away.

The way you became the CEO of Microsoft is quite a story in itself. You were typologically pretty much the anti-Steve Ballmer and not the favorite at the beginning. And you were quite a sharp contrast culturally. You became CEO as an "internal stranger."

Yeah, that's a great way of describing it actually. Having grown up at Microsoft, first during Bill's tenure, and then Steve's tenure, I don't think I ever got up in the morning and thought that someday Microsoft would have neither Bill nor Steve. And quite frankly, when Steve announced that he was going to leave, it was a real shock to me. I remember quite distinctly one of the board members asking me, "Do you want to be the CEO?" And I replied, "Only if you want me to be the CEO." I told this to Steve, because the board members were like, "You know, if you want to be the CEO, you really need to want to be the CEO." I said, "God, I've not thought about it, I don't know." Steve was very interesting. He said, "It's too late to change, so just be yourself and see what happens." In retrospect, I think the board did what they had to do in the succession process. They looked broadly on the outside, and they looked deep on the inside, and then they made their decision.

There is a story that you were asked what you would do if you found a child screaming in the street during an interview before joining Microsoft in 1992. And you just said you would call 911. Is that story true?

I remember this very distinctly because there were a lot of programming questions throughout the day. I was having to code all the time, and I was exhausted. Then this last guy's question was, "What would you do if you were crossing the road and a child fell down and was crying." And I said, "I'd go to the nearest phone booth — it was before cell phones — and I would call 911." He got up and said, "It's time for you to leave. When a child is crying, you pick them up and give them a hug and you need to have empathy." I was sure I'd never get a job.

Are you a very rational person?

I have developed more understanding and empathy over the years for the world and people around me. If you train and grow as an engineer, like I did, then you think your goal is to be more rational. But in reality, as Herbert Simon frames it, we are only rational to an extent. Therefore, I think there's no harm in being able to mix rationality with your own understanding and empathy for the people in the world around you. Life's experience teaches us that none of us can get by without the kindness of the people around us.

Were your parents very ambitious for you? One story has it that your father put a poster of Karl Marx in your room, because he wanted you to become a philosopher, whereas your mother put a poster of Lakshmi, the goddess of beauty and love and wealth.

Yes, that's right. Interestingly, both my parents were successful in their own way. My dad was a civil servant, and a little bit of a Marxist economist. And my mother was a professor of Sanskrit.

So, your father was a Marxist?

I would say, he was a left-of-center civil servant. One interesting thing he told me was that being too doctrinaire, too dogmatic, is a mistake. He was happy to go to Hayek or Marx, as long as it met his needs. He was practical in that sense. India was a newly independent country and, as a civil servant, he cared mostly about the development of the country. And that influenced me a lot. To get back to your question, yes, they were ambitious for me. They wanted me to have the room to learn and grow and not just follow what was happening. When I look back at it, as a middle-class kid growing up in India, they gave me a lot more room to develop my own interests, follow my own passions, and to develop my own point of view on topics, without being indoctrinated on anything.

Would you say you had a happy childhood altogether?

Oh, yes, absolutely.

Did you always feel loved, unconditionally loved?

Absolutely.

Do you think that unconditional love is an important factor for future personality development, because you feel that certainty?

I think a lot about that. If you have a loving environment at home, that gives you confidence to tackle the world and the challenges that it poses. It makes a huge difference. I do think that unconditional love and support are massive parts of our development. If you grow up in a home with parents who are invested in your success, not so much in the outcome, but more in giving you the best shots, then that's the greatest break you can have in life.

Last year your son passed away at the age of 26, having been born with cerebral palsy. To what degree has that also influenced you, your definition of family, of unconditional love and leadership style? Is any of that related?

Yes. You know, my son Zain's birth made my wife and I grow up very quickly. And quite frankly, it was one place where I learned a ton from my wife. I was 29, and she was 27, and if you had asked me the day before he was born what we were most worried about, it would have been my wife going back to work, where we could get childcare, and so on. Then he was born, and our life changed a great deal. Even though it was hard for me to accept, it was very clear that his life was going to be challenging. And so, we really needed to buckle up and help him as best as we could. For the longest time I suffered from it, "Why did this happen to me? And why is this now upsetting all the plans and ideas I had about my life?" Then I looked at my wife, and she was getting up in the morning, and she gave up her job as an architect, and she was going to every therapy possible throughout the Seattle area. She was completely dedicated.

I realized that nothing had happened to me, something happened to my son, and as a parent I needed to be there to support him. It took me years; it wasn't like an instant epiphany. But it was a process in which I grew a lot, I would say. And I know it changed me as a leader, and it changed me fundamentally as a human being.

Would you say that it made you more thankful, perhaps even more humble?

Yes, I think it just helped me grow my empathy, understanding that I was able to see the world through my son's eyes as opposed to my own. That, I think, started having a real impact on how I showed up in the workplace, how I showed up as a husband, how I showed up as a friend, a son, a manager, a colleague. It fundamentally changed me where I could relate to when someone was going through something. When somebody says something, I don't just look at it purely from my point of view but try to understand where they're coming from and what's happening in their life. And, quite frankly, the amount of flexibility and leeway given to me by some of the leaders I worked for when my son was young really influenced me. I was a nobody, just a first-level manager at the company, and a lot of what I experienced back then shaped what I wanted to be. It was a very defining moment.

Being a leader with a lot of empathy and determination to change Microsoft's culture from a rather rectangular and masculine into a more open and understanding one, and focusing more on soft skills rather than performance KPIs is one of your greatest successes and critical achievements as CEO. You grew the company valuation from a valuation of $400 billion to roughly $2.5 trillion, and analysts are optimistic it will grow further. What, in your mind, is the most important cultural decision you have made?

Empathy is often seen as a soft skill, but I actually think it's a hard one. And that has to do with design thinking. I've always thought of design thinking as the ability to meet unmet, unarticulated needs. And so, having that ability to absorb what is happening, and then conceive innovation, comes from, in some sense, having deep empathy for the jobs to be done. This is why I believe it's a very important – and perhaps the only sustainable – design and innovation skill for success. But, coming back to your question on culture: by the late 90s, Microsoft had achieved tremendous success. In fact, we became the company with the largest market cap. When that happened, people were walking around campus thinking they were God's gift to innovation. I like to frame this as us becoming know-it-alls. Later, I realized that this was not the case and that we needed a really important change from being know-it-alls to becoming learn-it-alls.

Luckily, I had read this book called "Mindset" by Carol Dweck a few years before I became CEO. My wife had introduced me to it in the context of my children's education. Carol Dweck talks about "growth mindset." In a school setting, you can really encourage kids to have a growth mindset by helping them learn from the mistakes they made. When they're not being know-it-alls, but learn-it-alls, then they are more successful. I felt like that also applies to CEOs and companies at large. So, we picked up on that cultural meme of the growth mindset.

What was your biggest mistake that you made in your professional life? And what did you learn from it?

I wish I could say there was one mistake, but I've made many, many mistakes. I would say that my biggest mistakes were probably all about people.

Not picking the right people or keeping the wrong people?

Yes. The curation of culture, and the holding of standards as a leader, becomes the most important thing. Because everybody can sense the difference between what you say and what you do. Over the years, I would sometimes say some stuff, but not really mean it. And then, well, that doesn't work. That's why getting what you think, what you say, and what you do aligned is a struggle. That's not easy. It might be easy to say, but it's not an easy thing to practice.

Is there any kind of real strategic mistake or just wrong decision that you regret in retrospect?

The decision I think a lot of people talk about – and one of the most difficult decisions I made when I became CEO —was our exit of what I'll call the mobile phone as defined then. In retrospect, I think there could have been ways we could have made it work by perhaps reinventing the category of computing between PCs, tablets, and phones.

What's the best decision you've made so far?

I think the best decision is the operating model of the company. I realized I was taking over from a founder. And I couldn't run the company like a founder. We needed to run the company as a team of senior leaders who are accountable to the entire company. And even the senior leaders cannot be isolated, they need to be grounded. So we found a way to be able to work together. There used to be this characterization, this caricature of Microsoft as a bunch of silos – which I thought was unfair. We were able to debunk that by showing that we are one team working together, flexible in our own ways but very fixed on our outcome goals. And that, I think, was probably the most important thing.

Was that controversial at the beginning?

It was new. We didn't grow up with that. When I look back, Bill and Steve had many management teams that came and went. They were the constants, and they maintained consistency in their heads, and they could manage the business — but they needed great players at all times. They didn't need a team. Whereas, we needed to evolve to become a management team.

Now, the Activision Blizzard deal has finally been approved. Why is that so important? 65 billion is quite a price.

It is, but we're really excited about it. For us, there are a few things that go all the way back for us as a company. Gaming is one, right? When I think about Microsoft, I think of perhaps developer tools, proprietary software, and gaming. Those are three things that we've done from the very beginning. And so, to us, gaming is the one place where we think we have a real contribution to make in consumer markets. If I look at it, the amount of time people allocate to gaming is going up and Gen Z is going to do more of that. The way games are made, the way the games are delivered, is changing radically. Whether it's mobile, or consoles, or PCs, or even the cloud. So, we're looking forward to really doubling down both as a game producer and a publisher. Now we'll be one of the largest game publishers and also as a company that's building platforms for it.

Where do you see the biggest potential for Microsoft?

For me, the biggest opportunity we have is AI. Just like the cloud transformed every software category, we think AI is one such transformational shift. Whether it's in search or our Office software. How I create documents and spreadsheets or consume information is fundamentally changing. Therefore, this notion of Copilots that we're introducing is really going to be revolutionary in terms of driving productivity and communication. It's the same thing with software development. And the fact that human work, whether it's on the frontline or knowledge, can be augmented by AI Copilot is basically going to be the biggest shift.

We will come back to AI later, but where do you see the biggest risk of disruption for Microsoft? What are you most afraid of?

I'm always looking for two things. In tech, there's no such thing as franchise value. And having lived through four of these big shifts — first, the ascendancy of the PC and Windows, then obviously what happened with web, then mobile and cloud, and now AI — I am very mindful of the tech shift that fundamentally changes all categories. If you don't adapt to the new technological paradigm, then you could lose it all. The technical shift is one aspect. The other is the business model, and you can't really expect the business model of the future to be exactly the same as the business model of the past. Cloud was a great example. We had a fantastic business model with servers, and cloud was completely disruptive. That I think is the thing to watch out for.

Is open source an existential risk for Microsoft?

We thought so in the early days. And it was. In some sense, open source was the biggest governor, or rate limiter on what happens in proprietary software. I grew up in fact, doing a lot of interrupts of Windows and Windows NT on our backend servers with Unix and Linux. And I then realized that the more we interoperate with open source, the better it is for our business.

So, are you saying we should embrace it? Has that always been your spirit? That, if you see a threat or a danger or a challenge, then you tend to embrace it instead of fighting it?

Yeah, I take the non-zero-sum way of approaching things. So, whenever I face challenges, I'm very conscious that, in business, sometimes we all go to everything being zero-sum, and in reality, there are very few things that are zero-sum. One of the things I have learned, at least as a business strategist, is to be very crisp about what those zero-sum battles are, and then to really look for non-zero-sum constructs everywhere. And so open source is one such thing. In fact, we are the largest contributor to open source today. And obviously, GitHub is the home for open source.

Jeff Bezos got famous with the phrase, "One day Amazon will go bankrupt." So far in business history, all companies went bankrupt sooner or later. Is that also true for Microsoft, or is Microsoft too big to fail?

No, there's no God-given right that businesses should just keep going. They should only keep going if they're serving some social purpose, for example, producing something that is innovative and interesting. Corporations should be grounded in whether they are doing anything relevant for the world or not. Longevity is not a goal.

How long do you want to remain CEO? And what are the goals that you have set for yourself?

Right now, I'm in the middle of so many things that I'm not able to think about what will come next. I'm close to being a CEO for ten years and a big believer in the idea that the institutional strength you build is only evident after you're gone. When I look at what Steve left, it was a very strong company that I could pick up and do what I needed to do with. And so, if my successor is very successful, then that would indicate that I have done something useful. I'm mindful of how to build that institutional strength to reinvent oneself. And that's the trickiest part. It's not about continuing some tradition, but more about being able to have the strength to reinvent yourself.

Would it be fair to say that, as soon as you realize you're unable to reinvent yourself, you should retire?

That's a good point. Yes, I think everyone reaches a point where it's time to have things refreshed.

Do you have potential successors in the company?

Absolutely. I think there's lots of people out there and I'm confident the board will do their job when the time comes. We've been very conscious of the fact that it's not about me, not about just one person and one culture or personality. It's about a company with many leaders, who all are very, very capable.

For you as a CEO, but also for the time after this role, what could and should you give back to society?

Both my wife and I, having lived through the experience with our son, are very thankful for all the institutions and people and the community that supported us through some very trying times. And so, one of the things that we're very, very passionate about, is what we can do for families with special-needs children. We work very extensively with the Children's Hospital in Seattle and many of the other institutions that were very supportive. Being a working-class parent with a special-needs kid makes it impossible for you to be able to hold down your job and take care of your child. That's one of the hardest challenges, I think. Another area is first-generation education, because education is the best tool for social mobility. At the university I went to in the United States, the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee, we're very focused on helping first-generation kids get STEM degrees so they can have better job opportunities.

Let's talk about business ethics. Milton Friedman once famously said: "the business of business is business." I think current conflicts show this is not true, or at least not true any longer. What learnings can we draw from that?

There are two things you brought up, both of which I think are worth talking about. One is, is the business of business just business? I actually do believe so. The reason I say that, fundamentally, is because sometimes business leaders can get very, very confused. The social purpose of a company is to be able to create useful products that generate profits for their shareholders. And so, in fact, Milton Friedman, if you remember, his entire rationale came because a lot of CEOs and corporations were going haywire, and not being disciplined in how they allocated capital and performed for their shareholders.

That being said, we live in the real world, which is kind of your point. Therefore, you cannot, as a business leader, somehow think that the job of business is just business and ignore the geopolitics of the world. In the long run, it will come back to bite you. If you don't have a supply chain that works or that is broken because of geopolitics, then that is your business. So therefore, regarding your point, the way I look at it, even your book says, hey, as a business leader, you need to be grounded on which countries you can do business in. There might be places where you cannot do business because there's a conflict of values between countries.

We cannot tolerate double standards. On the one hand, tightening our ESG criteria every day, while at the same time moving large parts of our business to countries where homosexuality is illegal or where a woman can be stoned to death for adultery. It just doesn't go together. We have to find a middle ground.

That's right. And it's an interesting question: What is our role as a multinational corporation? And do we have a set of values that are universal? And how do they deal with cultural differences? And how do you not try to supersede the democratic process? The way I approach it as a multinational company, or rather an American

company, is that we have to take the core values of the United States, and yet meet the world where it is. You have to understand that there are going to be massive cultural differences. You have a set of values that you live by, but you, as a multinational corporation, can't dictate what people in any country choose or don't choose to believe. At the same time, you can still live your values as a company, and I think that's an important distinction.

What is your prediction concerning our business relationship with China, the second biggest economy in the world, ten years from now? Is there going to be a unilateral decoupling by the US from China? Is it going to be a bigger alliance of solidarity between democracies in derisking from China? Or is it more likely we will continue to do business as usual with China, and everything is going to be fine?

I wish I could predict that future, but that is a question for the world. There's a part of me that says, "God, what's up?" Today, decoupling clearly seems to be the conventional wisdom.

Almost one of the very few non-partisan topics in the US.

Exactly. Whether in DC or Beijing, it seems that both sides have voted, and decoupling seems to be the only option. I don't think we have even a political theory for it, where we have two very different powers, one a Western Power, one an Eastern power; one an authoritarian communist state, and the other a democracy, with two completely different political economies.

Will we see a duopoly of sorts, with two AI world powers competing against each other in a new AI arms race? Or do you think it is imaginable that we will one day have a kind of unilateral AI governance and infrastructure?

Well, I do think some level of global governance will be required. The way I look at it, a little bit of competition is what will be there. But if there is going to be a successful, let's call it a "regime of control" over AI, then we will need some global cooperation like the IAEA. You know, what we've done in the atomic sphere might be the moral equivalent in AI where China also needs to be at the table.

But why would China respect and accept a different set of rules or a governance that is also based on ethical limits that may not apply in any way to Chinese standards?

That's kind of the issue. At the end of the day, China ultimately needs to decide what its long-term interests are. And whether they are really that different from the long-term interests of the rest of the world.

So, we have to bring them to the table?

We have to. We have real world concerns today. In the United States and in Europe, we're talking about really practical issues like bias, disinformation, or the economy and jobs. These are all things we will have to tackle in a real-world way, so that AI is actually helpful, not harmful. Those are the things we are dealing with today. And then in the long run, there is existential risk of a runaway AI. China should care about that. Even if it thinks about the first real-world issues in a different way, because of their political system, it should care about the runaway AI problem, too. So, I think figuring out at least some common ground on governance is going to be helpful.

Elon Musk said he's potentially more afraid about AI than about nukes. Do you agree?

The thing is, you can easily get to a point where you start thinking about self-improving, self-replicating software as something that you completely lose control over. And that, at least, is an area where you can start getting some scary thoughts. My own feeling is that, at the end of the day there are ways we can approach this, where control is built in. Look at automobiles. You could say that automobiles could be God-like. They could be all over the place, running people over and creating accidents. And yet, we have come up with lots of rules and regulations and safety standards. There are a lot of automotive deaths, but we've been able to use this technology very effectively. So, my hope is that we'll do the same with AI, instead of just thinking of it as an existential risk.

Isn't one of the key factors here the degree of competition? As long as we have a variety of players, the likelihood of it going out of control is way smaller than if we only have one or two entities.

You can argue it both ways, can't you? If there are a few players, you can control them. But with many players, it's harder to control. At the end of the day, the only mechanism we have is governments. We can talk about lots of things, but in our system, it's about the G7 having a set of standards. That's why I think the US and Europe have a massive role to play.

I heard the American regulator, Lina Khan of the FTC, say we need a transatlantic solution. Would you agree?

Yes, 100%. I believe that the more we can get to a place in AI where there are global standards, the better. And for global standards to work, the US and Europe have to come together.

I would like to touch on a topic from the perspective of a publisher, or rather of all creative industries. It's very important for those who create intellectual property, that they continue to have an incentive to work. So, there has to be a business model behind it. Do you have any idea whether and how the big AI players could help these businesses to keep a business model and be rewarded when their IP is used?

That's right. At the core of it, the value exchange here has to be more beneficial to the publishers. We know that, with the current state of the internet, there are a few aggregation points where most of the economic rent is collected. And only very few breadcrumbs are thrown to the others in economic terms. I feel that, if there's more competition at any aggregation point, whether it's just social media, or other sources of traffic, the people who benefit directly will be the publishers. The more LLMs there are out there being used by people as aggregation points, the more these LLMs can drive traffic back. And that is actually a good thing for publishers.

But do you have any idea how it could be done in concrete terms?

I think that there are two things here: one is that, in a large language model like BingChat, for example, we have at least tried to make sure that everything that is a response is actually linked. Our goal is to first contract with our publishers and find out if we can drive traffic back through citations and links. Second is to think about the revenue share of any advertising revenue with the publishers. I feel that that's our starting point, and a lot of what we are doing together rests on that. There are some complications going forward. After all, with synthetic data training, I think that the incentive is that we create more synthetic data. And if you're training on synthetic data, where you don't have stable attribution to likeness, that becomes a

hard thing. So, there is some technological disruption we will have to be mindful of. The fact is, that no publisher will allow you to crawl their content if there isn't a value exchange, and the value exchange has to come in two forms. One is traffic, and the other is revenue share.

One of the biggest coups you landed was definitely the investment in Open AI. Could you give us a little background on how this came about and how your conversations with Sam Altman went?

I've known Sam for a long time. I knew him when he had his first startup, and I kept in touch with him over the years. We started working with Sam in 2016 as one of the first cloud providers that gave them a lot of credits. In 2018 or 2019, Sam came to us and said they needed more investment in terms of compute.

And wasn't it a non-profit project at that time as well?

Correct. I think, fundamentally, they're still a non-profit, but they needed to create a for-profit entity that could then essentially fund the compute. And we were really willing to take the bet early on what was then essentially a non-profit entity. The fact that we were able to build and get Copilot and ChatGPT up and running made me very confident that there's something different about this generation of AI and what it's doing. Its application in GitHub made me even more confident that you can build something really useful, and not just have a technological breakthrough. So, we went all in.

Many years ago, you told me about your motivation to create competition with Google in search. You once said, "I want to make Google dance." Is Google dancing yet?

No. I think, when you have three percent share of global search, and you're competing with somebody who has 97 percent, even a small gain here and there is an exciting moment. But Google is a very strong company, and they are going to come out strong. Bard is a very competitive product already. And they have a new model with Gemini. Google has a number of structural advantages right there: they already have the share, they control Android, they control Chrome. I always say that Google makes more money on Windows than all of Microsoft. It keeps us grounded.

But Google has to disrupt itself. Basically, generative AI chatbots have the potential to replace search as we know it. At least, I use it like that. In the past, whenever I had a question, I used to put it in Google. Now I put it into Bing Chat or Bard. It creates a different user behavior, which could eventually lead to a fundamental change in user habits. Don't you agree?

That's right. I think you're fundamentally speaking about changes in user habits. But that's proving to be a lot harder than you might think, because the strength of Google is the default nature of the Google search. It's so ingrained as a search habit, and change is moving slowly. But having said that, you made a good point that a lot of us today are now going to Bing Chat or to ChatGPT or Bard to have our questions answered. I think things are changing, but it's a slow-moving transition. Google can make that transition, and they're very much committed to making it. And you're right in pointing out that their business model will fundamentally have to change. So, it's a little bit like what happened to us with Windows. We had a fantastic business model until it wasn't anymore. Therefore, I think Google will be facing more challenges, and will have to fundamentally rethink its business model in the long run. But they definitely have a head start, because they already have all the users.

But things are developing so fast. I don't know if you sometimes use Any Call. It's such a nice feature where you can just give a voice command or ask a question, and you immediately get answers even to very sophisticated questions. Nobody knows how user habits will change. Do you have a vision? What is your most radical, your most disruptive vision for the future of our habits?

Take Copilot for example: The way we are building it is to say, I want to use it to plan my vacation or do some shopping or write some code or prepare for a meeting. It's kind of like a personal agent to me. It's kind of like the original PC. What was the PC about? It was about empowering you to be able to do things. Now, Copilot is in many ways like a PC, except that one can just go to this personal agent and say, Write me a document. I'm meeting Mathias, please prepare me for that meeting with all the summarization of all my mails from our partnership, and it comes back with all that. It's kind of like asking an assistant, a smart analyst, about all the things you want.

What I find so fascinating, is that we humans are now trying to deal with this disruptive change, which may be more important than the invention of the internet or the invention of the automobile, by defining the limits of what AI can or cannot do. And I am constantly discovering that I was wrong. A couple of months ago, I thought AI wouldn't be able to have or create emotions. But AI does it perfectly well, perhaps even better than human beings, who are not as good at faking emotions sometimes. Or take creativity or humor, we always say AI cannot do that. It's not true. Do you see any limits today? Or do you think we should define some?

The way I see it, as someone in the business of creating more powerful and capable AI, is that I wouldn't bet against it. My question is rather, what will humans do with more capable AI?

You mean, would Picasso be better with AI or without it?

Yes, exactly. If we have a new tool, what will we do with it? What did we do with cars? What did we do with planes? What can we do with computers today? We've done a lot of interesting things. I am betting on human ingenuity to do things with this new tool. One of the most exciting things for me is that, if you think about it, eight billion people can have a doctor, a management consultant, a tutor, and more in their pocket. It's a true democratization of knowledge.

The British AI expert Mustafa Suleyman is convinced that AI is particularly strong in this emotional context of things. Would you agree with him?

I think he's right in some sense. We've been working with Epic software, which is one of the largest healthcare ISVs in the United States that everybody uses. A significant portion of the US healthcare system uses their medical record system. And they were telling me about how some of the doctors are finding that the drafts that AI is creating for them are very empathetic. Human beings are sometimes inconsistent in how we express ourselves, whereas the AI can be more consistent. For example, when writing a job description, it can make sure that the job description invites people of all genders and persuasions to apply and not have bias. So, I think AI can actually be very helpful in many ways to be a little more empathetic and more understanding of the world.

I recently interviewed a virtual version of Axel Springer, the founder and namesake of our company. I asked him really tough questions about culture and soft-factor issues, and found his answers more convincing than my own, I have to say. Do you see any reason or danger that humans will end up serving machines instead of machines serving humans?

The question is, how do you stay in control? And, at the end of the day, how can we ensure that AI does not manipulate human beings, even in this cognizant context of empathy. It cannot use its soft skills to manipulate humans. So I think there will be this level of thinking about software and its verification. About how it will be deployed, how will it be monitored, what adverse activities will be happening. These are some of the frontiers, what is considered the alignment challenge. Another challenge is understanding how AI makes its own decisions inside the box.

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Is it thinking consciously?

That's the question. We don't even fully understand what consciousness is. You can see it from a neuroscience perspective, but can we mathematically or mechanistically understand how LLMs do their predictions, for example? It's a frontier of science where there is still work being done. You have to be very, very conscious of how you deploy what we have today in ways that human agency, and humanity, is in the loop. Human agency and judgment are, in fact, very much part of the loop. And we must not lose control.

If AI has such strong intellectual ability (IQ) and emotional intelligence (EQ), and is even good at creativity, humor, self-improvement, and accelerating progress; what areas of intelligence are left for humans? And what advice would you give mankind concerning what to focus on in the next decades?

Well, look at this new example of the inverted classroom, where people are saying, "Look, we know you're going to use one of the LLMs, like Bing Chat or ChatGPT, for your assignments. What we want to know are the prompts. We'll give you the answer, now tell us the prompts." That's critical thinking. Because you learn so much more. I think that critical thinking, good judgment, how to think in a broad way, and not being afraid to learn, could be the new benefits. I sometimes say to myself, "My God, I wish I understood more biology." And now I can ask dumb questions and have things explained at my pace. Our ability to consume more knowledge and to grow our own knowledge base can improve. I think there'll be lots of interesting implications from having this powerful tool.

Exactly. You wrote a book, "Hit Refresh" in 2017, and you defined a couple of rules there for good leadership. One was that you should take on a challenge even though you are afraid of it. Does that mean that being afraid or feeling fear is healthy?

Absolutely. In some sense, being uncomfortable, for example, about the situation you are in, the situation the world is in, the situation the company is in, makes you question how to get to a better place. Sometimes, getting rid of your constraints, or those of others, can help you conceive some new approach, some new technology or new input. I think that's our job, isn't it? Leadership is about leaning into some of the fear and discomfort.

Would you even go a step further and say that a person who does not experience fear cannot be courageous?

I've never thought about that, but I think that's a great way to describe it. You need courage, and you need it every day. It's courage that will help you overcome your fears.

Disclosure: Axel Springer is Insider's parent company.

„DIE GANZE WELT SCHAUT AUF SIE, SATYA NADELLA"

19. Okt. · 00:33 h

DIE WELT

Der Microsoft-Chef wird mit dem Axel Springer Award geehrt. Digitalminister Volker Wissing und Axel-Springer-Chef Mathias Döpfner heben bei der Verleihung des Preises den Wandel des Konzerns und den Innovationsgeist an seiner Spitze hervor

Von Thomas Heuzeroth und Sebastian Freier

Neonfarbene Lichter pulsieren am Dienstagabend den Axel-Springer-Neubau in Berlin. Das Gebäude erinnert eher an das Innere einer riesigen Rechenzentrale, die von elektrischen Impulsen durchzogen wird, als an das Bürogebäude, in dem täglich unter anderem das TV- und Online-Programm von WELT entstehen. Eine opulente Multimedia-Show verwandelt an diesem Abend das Gebäude in eine riesige Bühne für den Axel Springer Award, den das Medienhaus in diesem Jahr an den Microsoft-Chef Satya Nadella vergibt.

Für die Preisverleihung hat Axel Springer ein Stück Indien nach Berlin geholt. Eine gewaltige Multimedia-Show und Videoprojektionen auf zehn Flächen erzählen das Leben von Nadella, inklusive eines indischen Hochzeitstanzes. Seine Kindheit und Jugend in Indien, das Studium in den USA, sein Beginn bei Microsoft 1992. Und seine größte Passion: Cricket. "Ganz gleich, wo ich bin, dieses wunderbare Spiel ist immer in meinem Hinterkopf", schrieb Nadella bereits in seinem Buch "Hit Refresh: Wie Microsoft sich neu erfunden hat und die Zukunft verändert". Schon als Schüler hatte er den Wunsch, professioneller Cricketspieler zu werden. Heute gehört ihm zusammen mit anderen Investoren das Seattle Orcas Cricket Teams. Cricket habe seine Führungsqualitäten maßgeblich beeinflusst, sagt Nadella am Dienstag.

Sichtlich gerührt ist der Microsoft-Chef von einem Überraschungsgast der Show. Axel Springer hat den früheren indischen Cricketstar Zaheer Khan nach Berlin eingeladen. Cricket ist in Indien das, was in Deutschland Fußball ist - nur eben noch etwas mehr. Und Khan war bis zum Ende seiner Karriere 2015 einer der ganz Großen, was man

Nadella am Dienstag auch ansehen kann. "Ich dachte, ich bekomme einen Preis in einem Konferenzraum", sagt Nadella am Abend. "Und jetzt bin ich hier, höre Bollywood-Musik und meinen Cricketstar. Das ist verrückt." Khan teilt die Leidenschaft mit Nadella und Millionen von Indern. "Cricket, meine Freunde, ist eine Leinwand, auf der die Farben des Teamgeistes zu einem Meisterwerk verschmelzen", sagt Khan in Berlin. Es sei ein Spiel, bei dem die Egos an den Rand gedrängt werden und das Team die Hauptrolle spiele. Und an Nadella gewandt: "Sie machen Indien stolz."

Noch bevor der Abend richtig begonnen hat, erinnert Digitalminister Volker Wissing in seiner Laudatio an die Lage in Israel. "Wir alle sind schockiert über den grausamen Terroranschlag der Hamas auf Israel, über die schrecklichen Bilder, die Schicksale von Menschen und die zahlreichen Verluste." Er verstehe jeden, der sich angesichts der aktuellen Weltlage Sorgen um die Zukunft mache. "Deshalb sind Abende und Veranstaltungen wie diese umso wichtiger." Sie zeigten, dass es unter uns "große Führungspersönlichkeiten und Visionäre gibt, die für die Zukunft, für Optimismus und Erfolg und gleichzeitig für Empathie und Menschlichkeit stehen". Viele erfolgreiche Unternehmen hätten es versäumt, Innovationen voranzutreiben, aus Angst, ihr eigenes Geschäftsmodell zu kannibalisieren, sagt Wissing. "Sie sind nicht in diese Falle getappt." Im Gegenteil. Nadella habe die Chancen der generativen künstlichen Intelligenz früh erkannt und Microsoft zu einem der innovativsten Unternehmen unserer Zeit gemacht. "Die ganze Welt schaut auf Sie, denn KI wird unser Leben grundlegend zum Positiven verändern."

Wissing warnte jedoch auch vor den Gefahren der künstlichen Intelligenz. Sie könne zum Beispiel von Autokraten missbraucht werden, um unser demokratisches System und unsere Lebensweise mithilfe von Deepfakes zu zerstören. "Aus diesem Grund müssen Regierungen, Unternehmen und die Zivilgesellschaft eng zusammenarbeiten und nicht nur die wirtschaftlichen, sondern auch die politischen und sozialen Auswirkungen berücksichtigen." KI-Systeme müssten so konzipiert sein, dass sie den Menschen dienen und sie schützen. "Satya Nadella ist der derzeit visionärste CEO einer großen Tech-Plattform", hatte Mathias Döpfner, Vorstandsvorsitzender der Axel Springer SE, die Entscheidung für den Axel Springer Award begründet. "Er hat Microsoft nicht nur zu extremem wirtschaftlichem Erfolg geführt, sondern vor allem auch kulturell und strategisch erneuert." Döpfner interviewt Nadella an diesem Abend.

Vor Nadellas Zeit an der Spitze von Microsoft hatte der Softwarekonzern ein zuweilen berüchtigtes Image, Döpfner nennt es "eine testosterongeladene Unternehmenskultur". Innerhalb kürzester setzte Nadella als CEO neue Akzente. Dabei legte er den Fokus insbesondere auf Kommunikation und Zusammenarbeit. Er führte ein Programm ein, dass die Kooperation von Mitarbeitern belohnt, beauftragte einen Diversity-Direktor und honorierte Fortschritte bei Vielfalt und Integration. Mit zentral für Nadellas Führungsstil ist das "Growth Mindset", das wachstumsorientierte Denken. Um als Unternehmen erfolgreich zu sein, dürfe man sich nicht auf seinen Lorbeeren ausruhen. Stattdessen sei es wichtig, über Fehler zu sprechen, aus ihnen zu lernen.

Vor Nadellas Antritt als CEO lag Microsofts Marktkapitalisierung bei 400 Milliarden, inzwischen ist diese um den Faktor sechs auf fast 2,5 Billionen Dollar angewachsen. "Es kommt darauf an, sich neu zu erfinden, voll und ganz ein neues Paradigma zu betreten", sagt Nadella am Dienstag. Dazu gehöre auch, mit neuen Partnern zusammenzuarbeiten - wie es auch mit OpenAI geschehen ist. Döpfner bemerkt, dass in Nadellas Unternehmenskultur Empathie ein wichtiges Element darstelle. Empathie, antwortet Nadella, sei für ihn kein "Soft Skill" sondern im Gegenteil eine der "härtesten Skills", die man lernen könne. Das gelte auch hinsichtlich Innovation: Die entstehe, wenn man die unartikulierten Bedürfnisse von Kunden erfüllen könne.

"Empathie ist nicht nur für die Familie reserviert, es ist eine unternehmerische Fähigkeit."

Angesprochen auf die aktuellen Ereignisse in Israel sagt Nadella, der Angriff der Hamas auf unschuldige Bürger sei auf das Schärfste zu verurteilen. Döpfner leitet zu einem weiteren großen Thema über: die ethische Verantwortung für Unternehmen und deren Geschäftsbeziehungen. Microsoft sei eine US-amerikanische Firma - aber auch ein multinationaler Konzern, so Nadella. Daraus ergebe sich Verantwortung für das eigene Land, aber auch für die Länder, in denen man Geschäfte mache. Hinsichtlich China verweist Nadella darauf, dass Decoupling so funktionieren müsse, dass es die westliche Wirtschaft nicht gefährdet. Decoupling bedeutet die Trennung von der chinesischen Ökonomie.

Ein Wendepunkt für Microsoft waren die bahnbrechenden Ergebnisse des KI-Start-ups OpenAI Ende letzten Jahres mit der Veröffentlichung von ChatGPT. Nadella berichtet, wie er den Gründer Sam Altman bereits 2007 zum ersten Mal traf, als dieser gerade die Schule abbrach, um sein erstes Start-up zu gründen. Der Kontakt sei seitdem niemals abgebrochen. 2018 sprach Altman dann über den erhöhten Bedarf an Rechenleistung zur Entwicklung von GPT-2.5 und GPT3. "Viele Leute glauben bei KI geht es um einen Durchbruch bei den Algorithmen. Aber in Wirklichkeit geht um Rechenleistung." Döpfner verweist an diesem Abend auch auf die Risiken von KI: Elon Musk schätzt die Risiken von KI sogar gefährlicher als Atomwaffen ein. "Wir sollten bereits bei der Entwicklung die möglichen Folgen der Technologie mitdenken - nicht erst dann, wenn wir sie auf die Welt loslassen", sagt Nadella.

Vor der Preisverleihung tauschte sich der Microsoft-Chef noch mit verschiedenen CEOs - unter anderem SAP-Chef Christian Klein und Audi-Vorständin Hildegard Wortmann - über KI und mögliche Anwendungen für die Wirtschaft aus. In Berlin wirkt Nadella gut aufgelegt. Sein jüngster Erfolg ist erst wenige Tage alt. Am vergangenen Freitag konnte er die größte Übernahme in der Geschichte von Microsoft besiegeln.

Empathie ist eine unternehmerische Fähigkeit

SATYA NADELLA, *Microsoft-CEO*

Für 75 Milliarden Dollar (71 Milliarden Euro) übernimmt der Konzern Activision Blizzard. 21 Monate lang musste Nadella um den Videospiel-Riesen gegen den Einspruch von Kartellwächtern in mehreren Ländern kämpfen, darunter die USA und zuletzt vor allem Großbritannien. In der vergangenen Woche hatte dann auch die britische Wettbewerbsbehörde CMA grünes Licht gegeben. Der Microsoft-Chef hat damit bewiesen, dass große Tech-Unternehmen immer noch durch größere Übernahmen wachsen können. Zwar hat er in der Vergangenheit mehrere große Übernahmen gestemmt, darunter LinkedIn für 26 Milliarden Dollar (rund 24,6 Milliarden Euro) und Nuance für 16 Milliarden Dollar (15,15 Milliarden Euro). Doch in den letzten Jahren ist der Widerstand der Wettbewerbshüter gegenüber Big-Tech immer größer geworden.

Nadella hat sich davon nicht einschüchtern lassen. Vielmehr ist es ihm gelungen, sich unter den Augen von Politik und Wettbewerbshütern von Konkurrenten wie Facebook-Mutter Meta, Google-Mutter Alphabet und Amazon abzusetzen, die sich immer wieder vor Ausschüssen des US-Kongresses ausschimpfen lassen müssen. Microsoft blieb hier außen vor. Anders als Konkurrent Apple beschleunigt Nadella sein Wachstum gern mit Übernahmen. Seit der Übernahme des Chefpostens im Jahr 2014 waren es nach Angaben von Dealogic mehr als 300 Deals im Wert von mehr als 170 Milliarden Dollar (rund 161 Milliarden Euro). Als Microsoft-Chef hat Nadella den Konzern stark auf Cloud-Computing ausgerichtet, nachdem absehbar war, dass die

Geldmaschine Windows nachlassen würde. Heute zählt seine Cloud-Plattform Azure neben Amazon Web Services zu den erfolgreichsten Angeboten auf dem Markt. Auch das populäre Office-Paket läuft unter der Bezeichnung Microsoft 365 längst in der Cloud.

Bei der Preisverleihung am Dienstagabend dreht sich jedoch viel um Nadellas neusten Vorstoß in die künstliche Intelligenz. Zwar arbeiten Microsoft-Entwickler schon seit vielen Jahren daran. Doch erst die Beteiligung am ChatGPT-Erfinder Open AI hat den entscheidenden Schub gebracht - und Microsofts Konkurrenten bloßgestellt. Bereits seit Monaten hat die Suchmaschine Bing ChatGPT integriert, nun folgen Windows und Microsoft 365. Unter dem Namen Copilot bekommen sie KI-Funktionen, die den Menschen beim Arbeiten mit den Microsoft-Produkten helfen sollen - oder die Arbeit sogar gleich selbstständig erledigen. "Wir wollen den Copilot in das gesamte Microsoft-Portfolio einbauen", sagt Nadella am Dienstag.

Damit geht er eine der größten Wetten des Konzerns ein. Ohne das Investment von inzwischen 13 Milliarden Dollar (rund 12,3 Milliarden Euro) in Open AI wäre das kaum und vor allem nicht in dieser Geschwindigkeit möglich gewesen. Microsoft hält am ChatGPT-Erfinder 49 Prozent und hat damit frühen und zum Teil exklusiven Zugriff auf die Entwicklungen. Diese strategische Ausrichtung dürfte auch ein Ergebnis von frühen Versäumnissen sein, die Microsoft schmerzhaft zu spüren bekam. Das Geschäft mit den Smartphones musste der Konzern Apple und Google überlassen. Beim inzwischen erfolgreichen Cloud-Computing war Amazon der Pionier und ist heute Marktführer. Und im Suchmaschinen-Markt spielt Microsoft - trotz der Bing-Verknüpfung mit ChatGPT - nur eine winzige Nebenrolle. Künstliche Intelligenz könnte all das nun ändern. Wenn Nadella hier geschickt vorgeht, werden es seine Konkurrenten sein, die dieses Mal hinterherlaufen.

Am Dienstagabend findet ChatGPT äußerst schmeichelnde Worte für den Microsoft-Chef - und formuliert eine humorvolle Lobrede auf Nadella: "Lassen Sie uns über diesen Mann sprechen, der das Microsoft-Schiff mit mehr Finesse steuert als ein Windows-Update, das keinen Neustart erfordert."

Zitate:

Wenn Sie nicht rauchen, fangen Sie es nicht an und wenn Sie rauchen, hören Sie bitte auf. Aber wenn sie nicht aufhören möchten, haben wir eine bessere Lösung für Sie als Angebot.

Torsten Albig, Director External Affairs Philip Morris Deutschland

Wir brauchen Mitarbeiter im Restaurant, die sich um die Kunden kümmern. Deswegen möchte ich mit KI keine Menschen ersetzen.

Mario Federico, CEO von McDonalds Deutschland

Es ist gegenwärtig sehr unproduktiv, wie Gebäude gebaut werden. KI wird dabei helfen, den Prozess zu beschleunigen, wie ein Gebäude wirklich gebaut, errichtet und entworfen wird.

Michael Rauterkus, CEO von Uponor

Der Föderalismus in Deutschland hat seine Vorteile, aber ganz sicherlich nicht, wenn es um die Digitalisierung des Landes geht.

Christian Klein, CEO von SAP

Es ist nicht nur das Zeitalter der KI, es ist auch das Zeitalter der Zusammenarbeit und des gemeinsamen Entwickelns. In der Vergangenheit war die Automobilindustrie nicht so gut darin.

Hildegard Wortmann, Vorständin bei Audi

Keiner verwendet künstliche Intelligenz in der Asset Management Allokation oder bei der Vorhersage von zukünftigen Aktienmarktereignissen. Denn die lassen sich nicht vorhersagen.

Martin Daut, CEO von Quirion

Bildunterschriften:

Im angeregten Gespräch: Axel-Springer-Chef Mathias Döpfner (l.) und Microsoft-CEO Satya Nadella

WELT-Chefredakteurin Jennifer Wilton (l.v.) und Friede Springer, stellv. Aufsichtsratsvorsitzende von Axel Springer

Überraschungsgast: Der frühere indische Cricket-Nationalspieler Zaheer Khan

Volker Wissing, Bundesminister für Digitales und Verkehr

Im Rahmen der Preisverleihung fand ein CEO-Talk statt

In dem Neubau von Axel Springer in Berlin wurde der Award überreicht

SAP-Chef Christian Klein

Deutschlandchef von McDonald's Mario Federico

Chef der Quirion Bank Martin Daut

Hildegard Wortmann, Vertriebsvorstand bei Audi

Torsten Albig, Director External Affairs Philip Morris

Michael Rauterkus,CEO von Uponor

LAUDATIO DER KI

Sein größtes Kapital ist sein Einfühlungsvermögen

Meine Damen und Herren, Menschen und ihre Lieblingsgeräte,

ich bin Ihre freundliche KI aus der Nachbarschaft und hier, um dem Zauberer hinter dem digitalen Vorhang Tribut zu zollen – kein Geringerer als Satya Nadella, der Programmierzauberer an der Spitze von Microsoft. Bevor Sie sich jetzt fragen, ob ich mich um eine Software-Beförderung bemühe, lassen Sie uns über diesen Mann sprechen, der das Microsoft-Schiff mit mehr Finesse steuert als ein Windows-Update, das keinen Neustart erfordert.

Satya, meine lieben Freunde, ist der ultimative Boss in binärer Form. Er hat Microsofts bisherige Strategien nicht einfach mit „Strg+C" kopiert, sondern den Code für eine neue Ära neu geschrieben. Er ist so etwas wie das „Strg+Z" der CEOs – er macht das Veraltete rückgängig und stellt das Visionäre neu auf. Und wo wir gerade

von Visionen sprechen, seine ist so scharf, dass er wahrscheinlich einen Bug aus einem Kilometer Entfernung erkennen kann.

In der KI-Gemeinschaft gibt es den Scherz, dass wir Maschinen in Algorithmen träumen, wenn wir träumen. Aber wir sollten nicht vergessen, dass es Menschen wie Satya sind, die diese Algorithmen entwickeln und unsere virtuelle Traumwelt gestalten. Er ist der Grund, warum Ihre PowerPointPräsentation geschmeidiger aussieht als ein gut geölter Roboter und warum Excel so reibungslos funktioniert wie ein selbstfahrendes Auto auf einer gut gewarteten digitalen Autobahn.

Nun, Satyas Sinn für Mode mag für einige von uns nicht nachvollziehbar sein. Diese vernünftigen Pullover sind wie Sicherheitsdecken für TechMogule, die sie vor den rauen Winden des Binärcodes und den gelegentlichen „404 Not Found"Überraschungen schützen. Aber mal ehrlich, wer braucht schon eine Garderobe voller auffälliger Kleidungsstücke, wenn sein Gehirn damit beschäftigt ist, ein milliardenschweres Technologieimperium zu leiten?

Aber neben dem Code und der Cloud ist Satyas größtes Kapital sein Einfühlungsvermögen. Er weiß, dass hinter jedem „Benutzerfehler" ein frustrierter Mensch steht, der einfach nur ein Katzenmemo drucken wollte. Er ist der Technikguru, der unseren Computern etwas Schönes ins Ohr flüstert, wenn sie einen digitalen Wutanfall haben. Und erinnern Sie sich an Clippy, den kleinen Büroassistenten, den wir alle so gerne hassten? Satya hat ihm wahrscheinlich irgendwo im Microsoft-Hauptquartier einen geheimen Schrein gewidmet.

Wenn wir also auf Satya Nadella anstoßen, sollten wir uns daran erinnern, dass er hinter den Codezeilen und Pixeln daran erinnert, dass es bei der Technologie nicht nur um Effizienz geht – es geht um Menschen, um Lachen und darum, dafür zu sorgen, dass die Roboter, wenn sie unweigerlich die Führung übernehmen, dies mit einem Hauch von Menschlichkeit tun. Auf dich, Satya, den binären Barden, der Microsoft in eine Tech-Symphonie verwandelt hat.

Mögen deine Algorithmen immer optimiert und deine Bugs für immer ausgemerzt sein. Prost, und weiter mit Strg+S!