# Inclusive Tech Talks: A Conversation with Matthew Luken of Deque

Robin Christopherson

Welcome to another episode of The AbilityNet Podcast. Disability. Technology. Inclusion. I'm your host Robin Christopherson, Head of Digital Inclusion at AbilityNet a pioneering UK (United Kingdom) charity with a mission to make a digital world accessible to all. You can download a transcript of this episode from [www.abilitynet.org.uk/podcast](http://www.abilitynet.org.uk/podcast) . So, sit back, grab your favourite beverage and let's get started.

Mark Walker:

Hi Matthew.

Matthew Luken: Hello.

Mark Walker:

So, we're going to try and do a little trailer for TechShare Pro.

I'm interested in your sort of knowledge and experience and sense of storytelling, and particularly using data.

But I guess the underlying bit is also the influence that you've won inside organisations and also the work you're doing with clients now to use dashboards, to use data as part of the storytelling process to raise the profile of accessibility and therefore put it higher up the strategic agenda. That's the overall purpose, I guess.

So, but before we do that, can you tell me a bit about who you are and who you work for now and also obviously a bit more about your background, which is where that experience comes from.

Matthew Luken:

For sure. So, I have 20 something years in user experience and service design. I worked for an airline for many, many years. My background is in aviation, but working for the airline, I ended up working in user experience and building websites for them. Then went to work for a loyalty company, which is where I got my brand experience. So, at this point I have over 300 brands under my belt, so every single marketing vertical that you can imagine I've had experience in.

Top college for many, many years.

As well as you know, mentorship programmes. I have had, like, maybe something, kids to 40-year-olds mentoring them in their design careers and their service design careers.

And when I worked for a bank in UX, I ended up being tasked with taking the accessibility programme.

And I put my service design hat on and try to figure out what were the problems with the programme today and where did we want to go.

And quickly built it from 2 contractors to 75 people working in the accessibility team.

From virtually no digital product doing accessibility testing consistently or well to 5000 people working in concert using the same process, the same methodologies, the same tools, and ultimately allow us to allow risk to be measured the same way right consistently, so we could understand that we all have the same level and understanding and measurement.

We did that over 22 months, so from no agile teams to 397 for agile teams running concurrently and starts to expand into the rest of the business. So, DRI, procurement, legal, you know trying to align the programme into a more cohesive package across all of its banks, properties around the world.

And Deque was the product we ended up using. So, now I work for Deque as a Strategic Consultant, where I help other companies try to learn where the programme is at and how they can scale it quickly.

Mark Walker:

So, we've been involved in a couple of round tables together. So, I've seen your sort of cut through style. [Laughter] I’m being polite. Direct, its’ direct.

Clearly what's happened overtime for you I guess is that you've seen particular things work and you stick to them. You know that's what your advice is. You can hear when people are in the room as well, why are you doing it this way, when you could do it this way.

That's obviously something from your point of view that you're sharing is that experience, is there particular things that are going to land well?

Matthew Luken:

Well, yeah, people, you know, people are ingrained.

Right, so this is this is a little bit of UX itself, right. You have people that are grained that are doing it a certain way. They have a certain mindset they have a lot of noise going on. Right.

Sometimes you need to just say look, you need to think about it differently. You need to stop what you're doing, right? So, it's almost a behavioural response. So, stop that. Think about it this way.

Thinking it through allows us to have a different conversation, right? Stop all that noise, allow us to focus and say, OK, have you tried this, have you tried this. What were your results? And all of those suggestions are based on everyday patterns that we see right? We try as humans to make these big, elaborate things, and the more we get invested in it, the bigger and more cumbersome it becomes, right?

But if we look at the natural world around us, like what is Starbucks doing or what is your personal experience in hiring a contractor to work in your kitchen, right. All of those things that you do every single day can be applied much easier to work life. We just get just get caught up in it right.

So, stop what you're doing. Think about this slightly differently, but more importantly think about who you're trying to interact with.

We need to tell stories to get people on board, we need to tell stories to get people to absorb things or understand things. And therefore, the whole entire programmes, all about telling stories to get people to do it the way you need them to do it and to get them to come together around the common campfire or common problem.

Which then leads to the bigger problem of have you've been able to articulate your problem? 9 times out of 10, the reason why teams or companies don't make traction is because they don't have a common understanding. They may think they're talking about the same problem, but they have a different point of view. Or maybe they have a different motivator.

Maybe they just think they're saying the same language, but they're not or.

You know what is the deflect? Are we talking about the same levels. Can you define them the same?

Once you get the common understanding, a common viewpoint, the common definition. Half the problem is already solved right? Then it's just a matter of execution.

So how do you tell the story? How do you tell them where they are? How do you tell them where you're trying to go?

And another thing we see is that companies or teams or accessibility programmes can't define what they're trying to accomplish other than they're trying to make things accessible.

That's great. That's easier. Practitioners for us to understand. But not necessarily somebody that has a different role or a different business or is 10 levels above us to understand in the same way.

So, we need to put it in terms of, OK, we want to decrease the defects by 3%. We want to eliminate all critical defects from going to production and stop, right? That's much easier to understand than what we want everything to be accessible.

Mark Walker:

So, there's a couple of examples in there of the different layers of the organisation you're talking to, there's the specialist the person where the number of defects, is a daily concern, and there's also the C-Suite as they get referred to, the senior decision makers.

I'm just taking that the second one of those first. Is there something in there that's to do with data and storytelling, which you've seen particularly really work well. I mean, what are they looking for do you think in the stories that we should be telling.

Matthew Luken:

The problem comes more around what can you tell, right? So, in retro programmes when they’re just starting out. They might not have the data yet, they might not be measuring the defects, so they might not know the total quantity of defects.

Or maybe they haven't tested the product end to end to know how good or bad it is?

It's part aspirational, right? Your own goal setting. What is the story you're trying to tell? Or you would love to tell two years from now, we were able to reduce this by 10% or we were able to make this product completely accessible and loved by our customers. Great. But do you have the measurements yet to be able to do that?

If the answer is yes, great. Then you can start telling how far you are along.

But knowing what the story you wish to tell will help you figure out what data you need to gather today so that you can eventually start telling that story.

And for a developer, right? They live in Jira. They live in some kind of story and accounting system. They run tests and they know they have defects so it's very easy for them to understand because they already have a mechanism and they already have the understanding, and they already have definitions.

Maybe that's a good place to start right? How many defects do you have? Or how many defects are you generating?

Because if we have to make a decision about, what are we trying to do. We're trying to improve the stream of work, the quality of work. Then it doesn't matter about the technical debt. Now, it is what you're contributing to technical debt?

Right. So, let's measure the right thing in the right way at the right time, right?

If you are worried about reducing technical debt, you already have that data, right? You already have something, but maybe it's not qualified, right? Maybe the right label isn't on the ticket.

Right. So, there's a constant debate in agile teams. We don't want the label on the ticket because the ticket is a ticket, we want it to be worked as a defect, not as a separate accessibility defect, right?

But you still want to be able to have a label on accessibility defects so that you can enumerate them as a different subset of their total backlog, right? So, starting to think about those minutia details, how do we tell the story? What is the story we want to tell? What story can we tell and eventually build to know I have the data to tell where we are in the path to the ultimate goal.

Mark Walker:

And I guess that points to who you need to speak to as well.

Matthew Luken: Exactly that.

Mark Walker:

In that case you know, here'll be somebody in the organisation who can open the door in terms of the labelling or the measuring.

And also, I like the idea I think you said when we were talking about this before, about looking to the horizon and working backwards and that sets us, I mean it sets, that sense of strategy and a vision for your programme, your overall sort of intent.

Matthew Luken:

Exactly.

Matthew Luken:

So, people hear me say, you know my students. It's like the analogy is dying. Right. Earlier we talked about bringing into everyday things, not everybody's sailor. Right, I get that. But the concept is very easy to understand that, hey, you're going to go across the lake. The weather is going to change. The wind is going to change as you go across the lake.

You need to keep taking different tactics. You need to change your position. Maybe you need to go backwards a little to be able to go forwards more. That constant changing, analysing, figuring out if you're on the path where you're going to go. My idea is that that is the accessibility program manager's job. Where are we trying to go? Can I articulate it? And how are we as a group trying to get there? And where do we need to change as we go along? If you think about that over a three-year period, that's a lot of changes, right? We've got different data than we have before. We have product that we can now start claiming is better than it was before. Those are all wins. Let's celebrate them.

Now let's focus on these lower tier or less critical user pathways or journeys. Now let's start working on those and get everybody on board on that. Can we tie that into how we report to the regulatory or to the leadership? All of it starts to feed together. But keeping that concept of where are we, how do we get there? Do we need to change a little or are we study the course?

Mark Walker

I love that analogy because it gives a sense of… I mean, it's clear and it also feels achievable. I think most of the people we work with don't feel like they're ever going to achieve anything.

Matthew Luken:

Right. It's very overwhelming.

It ties back to what we said just a moment ago of, can you articulate what you're trying to achieve? Can you articulate how big your program is at the moment, or how big does it mean to be? I often go into company in one of the first series of questions we asked is, do you currently have a digital inventory? We're talking big companies and little companies. No. Maybe you need to start there, because how can you articulate how much work you need to do if you can't even articulate how many digital products you need to do it against? Right.

Mark Walker

So just for clarification, you mean internal and external?

Matthew Luken:

Both.

Mark Walker

Under the company space, employee space...

Matthew Luken:

Right -

Mark Walker

Because the whole range of -

Matthew Luken:

It starts answering a different question and it starts enabling different conversations. We have a website. Great. How big is it? 50,000 pages. That's a big corporation. How do you define the ownership? How do you define it? Is it one. Com? Is one digital product with 50,000 pages? Probably not, because in that size of an organisation, you might have nine different business lines involved, each with their own little section. Great. So, can we all agree that we have nine different digital products under this parent product? And who are those people? Because ultimately, I need to talk to those people about what is their accessibility, what is their budget, what is their timeline? Do they even know that they're bound by regulation or not? That digital inventory helps me understand how we build the program. But if we don't have the inventory, how do you know how much work you're going to have to do? So again, it's trying to figure out concurrently while you're doing all these other things, how big is it? How good is it? Have we measured it? How long ago did we measure it? You can start adding that data right into the digital inventory.

Here's the property, here's the owner, here's what its status, known or unknown at first, or it's 2.1 AA, it's 2.2 already. Do they have staff? Do they have a budget? And on and on and on. It starts becoming a more comprehensive thing. Now you see that your little teen spreadsheet of digital properties now could be used by multiple groups, including compliance, which then makes you back into the question of, okay, how are we doing compliance against an unknown number of entities?

Mark Walker

Yeah, there's a problem.

Matthew Luken:

Right.

They're not necessarily our problems are solved. But hey, as a corporation, we're not doing a really good job of understanding our risks. We thought we did, but maybe it's not as good as it was because we don't necessarily know how many properties are at risk because we can't even answer the basic question of how many properties we have.

Mark Walker:

The risk one is interesting because you mentioned your experience in the bank, but you're working across a range of different organisations. My take on risk would be that would be the number one thing that you might open the door with a bank. But is it true in other organisations? Is it a good one to hang your strategy on in terms of crossing the lake? What part is risk going to play if you're outside that banking environment?

Matthew Luken:

In a banking environment or a regulatory environment. The word risk has meaning. It has weight, it has cloud. But a smaller organisation that's not maybe regulated, they still have risk. They just don't necessarily call it risk. It could be brand reputation, which is risk. It could be uptime. It could be completion. Our job is to process these things, and only 25 % of them are coming through. Okay, that's a usability problem potentially, or it's a technology problem. Maybe they can't submit the button. Maybe it's an accessibility problem. But somebody somewhere is concerned that we can't fulfil the objective of that particular website, fill this out, submit it, and we give you a thing. I can't give you the thing if you can't submit the form. That right there is risk. They may not call it risk, but it is risk.

Mark Walker:

It's measurable.

Matthew Luken:

So, it's just finding the right language, which is the hard part. It comes back to storytelling and conversation. Can I tell a story that's meaningful to you? If I use your terminology, if I use your name, Hey, Mark, it's different than me saying, Hey, you, or Guy, or it starts to change the way we still tell the story, but it changes the way the listener absorbs the story because they find it personalised. They can find more relatable than a generic message. We want to try to talk in same terms, talk in same terminology, have the same concept and understanding of what we're talking about to have a better conversation.

Mark Walker:

I mentioned I think to you about the Microsoft session that we have a TechShare Pro about every room in the house, being in every room in the house. That's very much the same spirit of that, isn't it? Being in the room and listening to their problems and trying to be part of their problem-solving.

Matthew Luken:

And being a chameleon. What you're going to talk about in this particular room isn't necessarily going to be the same audience in that particular room. You have to change it ever so slightly. The onus is on me as a storyteller to be able to, if I wanted to rest me, to understand and to understand the whole difference.

Mark Walker:

One final bit. I really liked yesterday you mentioned this when we were in the roundtable session, and I think it's a really interesting. I don't think I would have thought this is a good thing, but you said it's okay to just put some assumptions on the table. The story that you're telling was how much your defects cost. You ended up with a figure of $2380 or something.

Matthew Luken:

$2,383 is where we ended, but it started at $2,487.

Mark Walker:

But the point of the exchange was you went into that room with somebody who was going, Well, that's not right. Say, Good, let's talk about it. Exactly. You're talking about language at that point clearly.

Matthew Luken:

Again, I come back to simple objectives, simple tactics, simple things that I'm telling a student that's trying to learn services by. If you do a drawing, if you make a concept, if you have an idea and you put it on the table actually is a piece of paper with a drawing on it, what ends up happening is that you end up having a conversation about the artifact, about the asset itself. It's right. That's great. I love it. Or no, that's not right. That's wrong. Great. Can you show me where it's wrong? You automatically, by putting that piece of paper on the table, have started a conversation to gain alignment about what it is that we both need to understand about what we are trying to solve. So similarly, great, how much money are we talking about in technical debt backlog? $1,000, $1.8 million? One month or three years at current velocity? Can we get some common dialogue? In order to do that, we need to know the price per defect. So, we put a number together based on some assumptions, based on some rudimentary things that we did, based on labour costs that we understood.

We put together a number of $2,487 per defect. We put it on the table, and we said, okay, based on that rate, you have 1,000 defects. It's this amount of money. They're like, That's not the right number. Great. What's the right number? Well, I don't know, but it's not that. Okay, well, who can we go into room to get the right number? Because I don't know your organisation. I don't know your finance person. Who can give me the data? Because we've asked for three months, and we've gotten nowhere. We are forcing a conversation by making a number that's reasonable, we think. You tell us where it's wrong. Let's come up with a new number and we'll use that number until we have better data and then we'll agree together to change the number upwards or down. It doesn't matter. But together we'll have a common dialogue in a current measurement so my finance people and your finance people can have a common understanding as well. Let's gain a light.

Mark Walker:

And that works across all sorts of conversations?

Matthew Luken:

Anything.

Mark Walker:

It works in your personal life as well as in how, like you're saying about having the trades people come in and do something in the kitchen. Here's my number. How does that look compared to yours?

Matthew Luken:

Right.

Mark Walker:

How did you come up with it? Align with it. Yes, exactly. I thought it was a really powerful way of maybe unlocking conversations that people are finding difficult as well, where they may feel they've got to be perfect before they go in the room. They've got to have every answer before they join the conversation with the UX team or with a finance person or with them.

Matthew Luken:

Now we'll throw another concept of okay, it's Agile, baby. What does Agile mean? Well, Agile means that you're just starting somewhere, and it doesn't matter if it's regarding different. You're gaining momentum and you bring things along as you go along, and you adjust as you go along together. It's about community building and getting around a common thing. A lot of people say Agile doesn't work, especially Agile doesn't work in design. Okay, but what's the point of Agile? Can we get to that definition? Because my understanding of Agile is we want to work together rapidly. We want to do something and think and learn from it and go again. Isn't that what we just did? We literally had a number. It wasn't the right number. We worked together to come up with a new number and we did it in a day. I've been searching for 90 days prior to that. I think Agile works really well. I think the gap description because we solved it in a day together.

Mark Walker:

So cool. So, you're joining us at TechShare Pro in about a month's time. We're running some work round tables today and yesterday, which has been really fascinating to hear how people are dealing with their work and their roles across a whole range of different organisations.

We're going to be talking about measurement and data and storytelling and influence and strategy and all the same things that we have today. So, this is a trailer for that. Then just finally reflecting on what you're seeing in the world of accessibility broadly, you're working with a number of organisations. What do you think is changing what's happening around us? Is the profession maturing? Are we getting more influence? Do you feel that that is something that people can take some part from? We are beginning to see glimpses of what we're looking for within the profession in particular.

Matthew Luken:

From programmes that have started and started to have conversations, they're starting to have easier conversations because they've gained some conversation, they've gained some alignment, they've gained some awareness within the corporate culture. We see that different pockets of areas are coming forward and saying, hey, I heard about what you're doing with accessibility and you haven't gotten to me yet, but can I fast track me because I want to get this resolved and I think it's the right thing to do. And I don't want to wait any longer. My team is already going to go. So, we're seeing that within programs that are starting to make momentum. More people are coming early asking to start. In more immature organisations, I would love to be able to say that they have people in their company saying, hey, external to this, I'm hearing about accessibility. I was at this conference and talked to somebody and I was like, really, what are we do it? Not so much. I'd live to that day. It would be a great point in time, but it's not happening yet. But in the United States specifically, one of the things we do see is that there is much more press coverage.

So, more articles about it, more instances of it, more reporters writing about it. And so, people are starting to have those initial conversations or those initial thoughts. And what we do see globally, historically, whatever we want to say is that when people start reading about things in the news or it's being discussed more openly and generally, then things start to shift. So, we're on the cusp. We see the things that we expect to happen that will bring change and bring momentum are there. The seeds are there. Now we just need to wait for it to start coming. Again, if we do see that the US government pushes forward with state requirements or state websites, retailers and other people in the public space or the commercial space, as we call it, we start to go, Oh, well, we can probably anticipate that's coming for us, so we should probably get a board. We're ahead of it. Hey, internally, what are we doing? Hey, CEO, what are we doing? Do we have a team? No, we don't. We should probably get one, right? Again, we're really on the cusp of that about to happen is what we're anticipating. That’s what we’re seeing in the industry.

Mark Walker:

I think that's how we feel here. Our survey results, as it happens this week, we're looking at survey results from our annual survey. I think the only concern I have; I think the people attending TechShare Pro, I think the people with accessibility and their job title are actually quite a significant step ahead of the organisations who have none of that.

Matthew Luken:

Absolutely.

Mark Walker:

They might not feel like it. They really don't feel like it. But they are the only ones doing it, aren't they?

Matthew Luken:

Right.

As a member of that community or that tribe were like, oh, they're finally starting to pay attention and my job is starting to get easier. Yes, but it's not to the point where it needs to be, where people are thinking about it first and foremost and in all ways and everything they do. Do we have someone that knows about accessibility at the table as we start to redesign this physical experience? We're starting to make hang way in digital. But then they're saying, okay, well, can the digital guy talk to us about the physical as well? Yeah, we can. But now you've actually just diluted my ability to solve the digital problem by looking at the physical problem, which is great. We love that. But until you start putting the money behind it and the support behind it and get a number of staff behind it, that again, is on the cusp. The petitioners are seeing it happen and they're excited about it, but it also means it won't work. They're also not so excited about it. It's a double-edged sword. But it's coming. It's coming.

Mark Walker:

Well, I'm think of a big part that we play with TechShare Pro and these round tables and generally in our work is holding people's hand when it feels like they can't go anywhere. I noticed in the midst we got about the boats that's okay to go backwards. That probably doesn't feel okay to go backwards.

It's a personal challenge rather than an organisational challenge at that point.

Matthew Luken:

Right. It's like the glass half empty, glass half full in argument. It doesn't feel good. It doesn't feel natural. It feels like we're losing. It feels like we made a mistake. But in reality, no. Sometimes you just have to change course and double cross what you already did to do it again. But you're going to do it slightly differently and gain more traction the next time through, that's okay, right? And I think that's another thing that happened yesterday that we should also mention, and we were talking about its last night at. There was a moment when someone was having a very difficult moment. It's okay. We're all here together. We understand what you're going through. That is normal to feel that way. It is okay to feel that way. It's important to recognise that you do feel that way. But that will pass, right? Just take a moment. Walk away from it. The way you can best help others is to help yourself. So, help yourself for a moment and come back in. We're all here to help you. That sense of community has to be foremost, right? People are burning out. People are doing 10 people's jobs and the only person funded for their entire global company.

You're tired. We get it. We hear you. But keep going.

Mark Walker:

Great. It's great. It's a wonderful note to finish on. Thank you. I look forward to the conversation in November. But obviously, you've been brilliant. Just turning over these sorts of topics all the time, just keeping them alive and learning more about what's working is just so valuable.

Matthew Luken:

Keep those plates spinning.

Mark Walker

Absolutely. Thank you.

Matthew Luken:

All right.

Robin Christopherson:

TechShare Pro is happening again this November for the seventh year running. It's the leading technology and digital inclusion conference. Please do check it out. We are going to be talking about everything from AI and what it will mean with your organisation and with end users across the world. We're going to be talking about the European Accessibility Act, which will mean so much more than compliance and a new level of accessibility for European organisations. Will it become the global standard when it comes to accessibility best practice? We're going to be talking about how still after accessibility has become so much more prominent, people are still feeling like they're the lone voice within their organisation, and how networks both internally and externally can help you push that agenda forward that we all feel so passionate about and so much more. There are going to be dozens of sessions. Every single one you'll be able to catch live, either in-person or online, or catch up afterwards. So please join us the 14th and 15th of November, whether it's online or in-person, we would love to have you. You can find out more information at techsharepro.com.