

Episode 143 | Norlys bets big on Telia (Daniel Askeroth)
Released June 23, 2026

Daniel Askeroth: [00:0] The people aspect of things you can never underestimate because it takes longer. Having people with the same kind of goals is key for everything that we do. At the same time, simple tasks like connectivity is just more difficult than you expect. So don't underestimate the things that you know you will have troubles with and focus on the people.

Announcer: [00:25] This is "Telco in 20", a podcast that helps telco execs achieve a competitive advantage with AI and the public cloud. It is hosted by Danielle Rios, also known as DR. Today we're talking to Daniel Askeroth, Senior Vice President of Telco at Norlys.

Danielle Rios: [00:44] Hi guys, I'm DR. Telcos love acquisitions. According to Bain, last year they spent nearly \$70 billion on M&A. For example, in the UK, Vodafone merged with Three to dominate British mobile. In the US, Verizon bought Frontier to add fiber to its wireless space. And in Indonesia, XL Axiata merged with Smartfren, forming XLSmart an operator with more than 90 million subscribers. Then there's Norlys. In 2024, with more than 40 mergers behind it, the Danish energy and broadband co-op bought Telia Denmark to add mobile and complete its play for Danish consumers. But here's what no one talks about. The day the deal closes, the team throws a party. The very next day, the real work begins. Every acquisition brings its own baggage, its own culture, its own systems, its own tech debt, and someone has to make it all work. Today I'm joined by Daniel Askeroth, Senior Vice President of Telco at Norlys.

[01:48] Daniel spent 17 years at Telia Denmark. He's tasked with bringing his old company into Norlys and figuring out how to put the two together. We dig into how he runs the integration without breaking the customer experience, how to bring two workforces together without losing the people you need most. And what he would do differently if he had to do it all over again? So let's take 20. Daniel Askeroth is Senior Vice President of Telco at Norlys. Hi, Daniel. Welcome to "Telco in 20".

Daniel Askeroth: [02:19] Hi, DR. Great to be here.

Danielle Rios: [02:21] Yeah. This is going to be super exciting because we're going to talk about a very interesting topic. You spent 17 years at Telia Denmark and then fairly recently in 2024, Norlys, which is a Danish energy and broadband co-op bought you guys. And so we're going to talk about that whole process and bringing these

two organizations together. It's a carve-out which makes it extra interesting. And so let's start with why did Norlys decide to buy Telia?

Daniel Askeroth: [02:49] Well, I think the Norlys journey is a bit different. It's a cooperative, as you said, as well. So we are owned by our customers and the promise to our customers and our owners is very much to build a digital infrastructure. So how do we bring some value back to our owners? So it was all about how can we actually bring some mobile and improve the digital infrastructure for the Danes, our owners.

Danielle Rios: [03:12] Yeah. And so that was the missing piece. They had the energy and the broadband and they just were missing the mobile and so this completed the full picture for the people.

Daniel Askeroth: [03:19] Yeah, exactly.

Danielle Rios: [03:20] And so I've gone through a bunch of different acquisitions on software companies. I've done it over 25 times. And I always say that announcing the deal is the fun part and it lasts exactly five seconds. Nobody talks about how hard it is to actually merge two companies together. The people, the culture, and the systems. You're doing that and you're carving Telia Denmark out of its parent and you're stitching these two organizations together. And so let's start with the HR side. How are you bringing the people and the culture together?

Daniel Askeroth: [03:50] I think that is a very big thing to do. Yes, we are merging two companies, but actually Norlys is the product of 40 or 40 plus mergers.

Danielle Rios: [03:59] Wow.

Daniel Askeroth: [03:59] So we are really working hard on bringing the culture together. For me, it starts with mixing the teams that we have one goal for the team, but also to create clarity for the people so that people understand what are the roadmaps from here? How do we build something together and have the same targets and also removing uncertainties for the people and having that same goal that is key for everything that we do.

Danielle Rios: [04:24] Yeah. I mean, it's kind of interesting when you bring two cultures together because it rarely is a true blend. It's usually one will win out over the other and you can see it in something

as simple as LinkedIn profiles, how quickly people start identifying with a new identity or organization. And I've done acquisitions where I go look at people and they still have the company they came from and you're like, "Oh wow, you're not really integrated and identifying." So these little tiny signs really show how successful the integrations have been. Let's talk about bringing the systems together. Telco's famous for having multiple stacks and multiple systems that provide the same function but maybe for different pieces of the business, but in some cases they come from previous acquisitions. Are you taking the old Telia systems and then just bringing them over to Norlys? Are you buying new systems and merging them in a new system or are you building in some cases some new systems?

Daniel Askeroth:

[05:20] It's a mix of what we are doing. I mean, in the end it's about how do we disturb our customers as little as possible because we cannot afford losing the customers in this journey. And then of course the time aspect is key on this. But in some cases we built on something that was already available in the old Telia. Some cases it's a bit of what was available in the old Norlys and then sometimes we have to build everything from scratch because there wasn't those kind of systems available. So it is a mix, but it's always going to be taking an offset in what is the customer perception of doing things and how fast can we do things? Because having a long integration process is painful for both organizations and for cost and budgets.

Danielle Rios:

[06:03] I like the part where you're like, "We don't want to disturb our customers and disrupt them," but at the same time, do you guys end up in a situation where now you have two systems or four systems? Does that paralyze decision making at all because you don't want to disrupt the customer or do you find that your organization, "No, we're still able to move fast and communication is key with the customer?"

Daniel Askeroth:

[06:25] Yeah. I mean, the communication is going to be there and that is the key, as you say. But yes, to some extent there will always be a paralysis of the organization and making those decisions. But as long as you think through the process, then that is the way we need to do it. I mean, it's about the total picture because if you change both the networks and IT at the same time, there's just too many points where it can happen.

Danielle Rios:

[06:47] Too much change.

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Daniel Askeroth: [06:48] Yeah.

Danielle Rios: [06:49] Yeah. And then when you guys are building new stuff in your own organization, are you starting to code with AI or are you still doing it the old fashioned way where you're manually coding and your teams are writing every single line?

Daniel Askeroth: [07:01] I would say that there's a mix. Sometimes it is AI but also very much for the discovery parts of it. I mean, how do you connect systems and so on? But then we're also looking at the vendors, what is already available from the shelf when we buy something new, for example. But I think we could always do more on the AI side and AI coding parts, but it's also about critical infrastructure, understanding what are the implications and who's accountable for those choices, et cetera.

Danielle Rios: [07:26] Yeah. Do you feel like your team is receptive to using AI or do they see it as a threat to their job and so there's resistance?

Daniel Askeroth: [07:36] I think it varies. Some parts of the organization thinks it's great opportunity to try something new and be part of that. Some people are, well, change is hard. So some people will find it like there's a threat in the end, but I think it's about adopting or not being here in the end.

Danielle Rios: [07:52] Yeah, it's been kind of interesting. I think initially in my own organization, people were resistant and especially the software engineers, this purity, I know how to do it the old fashioned way and AI can't match me. And that was certainly true, I would say in 2023 and 2024. But I think 2025, and especially the very end around Q4, the models really had a big breakthrough on coding capability. And I think even the people who were very resistant even two years ago, now they would tell me, "Don't take AI away from me. It makes me better."

[08:26] And so to see that transformation in such a short period of time in the same individual has been very interesting for me as a leader to watch people on their own personal journeys. I haven't seen a change happen so fast. Usually people resist it, they hate it, they leave and then you get new people that like it and that's how your company changes. But I'm seeing that change within individuals and that's been kind of interesting. So you've been at this transformation and merging with Telia for

now two years. Knowing what you know now, is there anything you would do differently?

Daniel Askeroth:

[08:57] I think actually the people aspect of things, you can never underestimate that part because it takes longer. Having people with the same kind of goals, understanding the same picture, that is key for everything that we do. At the same time, I would say many of the things we know is going to be hard, the simple tasks like connectivity are similar. It's just more difficult than you expect when you have several systems, several processes, and also the people that I mentioned in that. So I think don't underestimate the things that you know you will have troubles with and focus on the people.

Danielle Rios:

[09:29] Yeah. I think again, being involved in M&A for so many years myself and no disparaging against the deal people, but the deal people are like, "Oh, we've worked so hard. Let's have a big party. Let's make a nice plaque for our desk and pat ourselves on the back." But it's the operational people. The minute the deal closes, that is real hard work and it's underappreciated. Like you said, I mean, there's all this decisions that you need to make. What are we going to keep? What are we going to kill? What are we going to merge? What are we going to buy? What are we going to build? Those are all difficult customer impacting decisions. But the real work is, like you said, bringing the people along.

[10:06] The new people who are joining an organization that don't understand the culture and are scared or fearful for what's going to happen to them, I think that's always top of mind. And then continuing to paint that vision of what the new organization's going to look like. And so what have been your tactics to make sure you're bringing people along? Is this one big town hall meeting and you walk out or you start with a big meeting and then you do a bunch of one-on-ones? How do you make sure that people are coming along on the journey and excited about the future?

Daniel Askeroth:

[10:33] I mean, culture takes time and believing that one town hall will solve it would probably be a fantastic miracle if that happened. It's about nudging a lot and ensuring that you actually see things the same way so that people can actually see that they have an identity in the new entity as well. And I would say that it's multiple travels. Even though Denmark is a very small country, we are spread on so many different offices

around the country. So it's about traveling around, meeting the people, talking to the people, but also having check-ins. I meet my staff normally every quarter and walk through what went well, what can we do better, what's the offset for the next quarter and so on, but also having the personal touch because I believe that having the personal touch removes so many of the barriers because we're all people in the end.

Danielle Rios:

[11:20] Oh, for sure. And I think a lot of times leaders really focus on why this is good for the company and that's wonderful. That's why you're doing it. It's the ROI and the whole idea. But leaders forget to connect back to why it's good for you as an individual. Just like with AI, right? I'm like, "Yes, I want you to use AI. We're going to be more efficient, we'll be faster, we'll be better," all those things. But I try to connect it back to the person of like, "This actually will help your career." People are looking for people with this talent.

[11:46] Yes, I'm changing the way that we do this, but you're going to get cloud skills or AI skills and like you said, making it personal. And then a lot of times people jump in and they're super excited to help. One thing that I think has been very interesting, I read that you and your leadership team did a role swap last month where you spent a couple of days running people and culture instead of telco. And so what did you learn through that lens spending time on the HR side that you don't normally see on the telco side?

Daniel Askeroth:

[12:16] Well, the differences in organizations is quite big. One organization is commercial people and engineers, PhDs, and so much focus on systems and so on. The other one is on the soft values, but on the same hand, it's the same things that trigger people. It is the culture, it's the relationships and I think it's the same kind of things we're all looking for. I think that is really valuable. Even an HR person or an engineer. Well, in the end we're people and we need to understand our role in all of this. So I think how we fit into this merger is key in this.

Danielle Rios:

[12:50] Would you recommend that for leaders to spend time in other parts of the business and see different sides to the same cube?

Daniel Askeroth:

[12:56] Definitely I would because you see some different perspectives. In the case of HR, for example, you typically make these employee surveys and so on. And this was actually the

time when they were analyzing that. So seeing that through the lens of the HR people is quite a different story than seeing that only from above more or less. So I think it's very valuable to do so.

Danielle Rios:

[13:16] Yeah. Well, I have a computer science degree and I must have been almost nearly 30. I switched and I spent time in HR and I was like, "I'm an engineer. What am I doing in HR?" And now that I'm a CEO, I rely more on that time than I do on my computer science time. I mean, I still rely on my technical knowledge and understanding what the engineers are talking about, but I rely more on performance management, promotion, identifying high potential, resolving issues between people on my team that are disagreeing. My job is change management. I go talk to telcos all over the world about approaching technology using cloud and AI, which is not what telco wants to do. So it is actually quite interesting to see a business through different functional lenses and you see the struggles and it gives you great perspective and I think makes people better leaders. So I read that when you travel with your family, you have a thing for photographing old buildings in historic Southern European cities. And so why do you love old buildings?

Daniel Askeroth:

[14:21] I really love looking at arts or buildings in general, but it started when the kids were quite small and the easiest way to get them to walk around on vacations in old cities was actually to find these old cathedrals because it was always a Pokémon stop. So that was the triggering point and then seeing new places, seeing cities that has been there for thousands of years and so on, it's just a fantastic thing to do. So I learned to enjoy it more and more. And now the kids are not playing in Pokémon any longer. They're 20 years old and 18. So they actually start enjoying also looking at the old buildings now, but also new buildings for that matter.

Danielle Rios:

[14:55] Well, I just looked this up. Pokémon is famous for really bringing AR to the mainstream on mobile phones, just bringing it back to telco. And that was 10 years ago, maybe more. But at its peak, it had 232 million active players. Today, 55 still are on Pokémon and it's a \$550 million business. It's half a billion dollar business. That is crazy. And you're right, they did put Pokémon stops around historic sites and really drew people to go kind of combine new technology, using your phones, looking at buildings and really bringing those two things together. And so

that sounds like a great time with your family, making them enjoy the history and also playing a fun game. So Daniel, it was really great talking to you about what you're working on at Norlys and bringing the Telia stuff together and I wish you the best of luck. Thanks so much for coming onto the podcast.

Daniel Askeroth:

[15:53] Thank you, DR.

Danielle Rios:

[16:00] Awesome. Stick around. We end each podcast with a "Telco in 20" takeaway. I've got two minutes to tell you something you need to know. Every telco is some version of Norlys, maybe not 40 mergers deep, but 10, 20, each with its own billing stack, CRM, and provisioning system bolted onto everything that came before it. Here's what that costs you. Not the maintenance budget, not the consulting invoices, not even the people. It's your speed. Every single thing you want to ship has to navigate decades of past decisions before it can reach a customer, every new product, every AI initiative, every customer experience improvement. This is exactly the problem that the Totogi Ontology was built to solve. Daniel described the constant tension, move fast but don't disturb the customer. Simplify the stack but keep the lights on. The ontology solves this. It's a unified business layer that sits over all these acquired systems so they speak the same language.

[17:00] Your customers don't see anything change, but underneath everything changes. Once the ontology is running the business, you can turn off systems, minimize customer impact, skip multi-year transformation lifts. This is the trifecta. Do you want the trifecta for your business? DM me on LinkedIn or X @TelcoDR and let me show you the Totogi Ontology. You can also catch Team Totogi at DTW Ignite, running today till June 25th in Copenhagen. In the meantime, tune into more "Telco in 20" episodes like and follow and leave us a five-star review. Don't forget to sign up for my killer email newsletter on TelcoDR.com and check out our awesome YouTube channel and hit that subscribe button. Later nerds.