**Future of Infrastructure podcast**

**Detail: Episode 9**

**Jeremy Goldberg [host]**

**Karin Kimbrough | LinkedIn [guest]**

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** Welcome to the *Future of Infrastructure*, a part of Microsoft’s Public Sector Future series. I’m Jeremy Goldberg, Worldwide Director of Critical Infrastructure at Microsoft. And I’m on a journey to learn more about how infrastructure is being built around the world by talking with public servants, philanthropists, artists and place-makers who have spent their lives working in the public interest. This is a series to help us build things and plan for the future while putting people first.

[TCR 00:00:00]

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** Today. I’m excited to welcome my colleague, Karin Kimbrough, chief economist at LinkedIn. She’s worked across sectors. She’s been educated at some of the world’s best universities. And in 2017, she was recognized by Black Enterprise as one of the most powerful black women in business.

Karin, welcome to the future of Infrastructure.

**KARIN KIMBROUGH:** Thank you so much for having me, and thanks for that really nice introduction.

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** Well, it’s – you know, it comes with the experience that you have, which is incredibly impressive.

But, you know, share with the audience a bit about yourself. Tell us a bit about your personal and professional pursuits and career.

**KARIN KIMBROUGH:** So, as you said, my name is Karin Kimbrough. I’m chief economist at LinkedIn, which is a really fun job. A lot of people actually ask me, including my mom at one point, was like, why does LinkedIn need an economist? What does an economist really do?

And so, what I usually say is that my job is essentially to try to understand the world of work, what the current trends are, what’s maybe coming around the corner. We have an amazing set of data here at LinkedIn. It’s – the platform, you know, covers 800 million members worldwide. There are 60 million companies as well on LinkedIn that are posting jobs and that have pages that will, you know, kind of showcase what they’re interested in and what they’re working on.

And so, all that data together, the people, the companies, the conversations that are happening and the engagement, all that kind of really gives us a unique perspective, really, if you will, a finger on the pulse of the labor market, both supply side, demand side. And so, I spend a lot of time looking through that data, looking for very interesting stories and trends, and that’s what I do on the professional side.

And then very quickly on the personal side, I’m coming to you right now from Northern California and with –

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** San Francisco or which part of northern California?

**KARIN KIMBROUGH:** A little south of that, Palo Alto. And I’m – I’m sitting in what they call the South Bay.

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** Silicon Valley, right?

**KARIN KIMBROUGH:** Silicon Valley, living – living the tech dream, as some might say.

But I don’t hail from California, so I’m a transplant, enjoying the weather. And I live here with my husband and my two sons and one peripatetic cat.

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** All right. And where – where are you a transplant from? Most people are when they come to Silicon Valley.

**KARIN KIMBROUGH:** Yeah, I’m a transplant from New York City.

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** Oh, wow.

**KARIN KIMBROUGH:** So, did my time.

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** – left New York City for the – for the West Coast. Okay. Okay.

So, Karin, tell us about why you got into your field, and if there’s a moment or an event that stands out to you as that motivating choice to pursue that profession and career path.

[TCR 00:03:13]

**KARIN KIMBROUGH:** So there was not necessarily one clear moment, but what I will say that drew me to economics was the fact that it really is about the intersection of people and data. And it’s, if you will, a framework for thinking about how people make decisions, what prompts them, the incentives to either do good or want more money, or how do they organize themselves in altruistic or selfish ways, and what kinds of outcomes does that generate? So I’m really interested in that, if you will, social science aspect.

I’ve been an economist my whole career, but if I had to pick one moment that really got me here to LinkedIn, which I will say is my dream job, is this – this opportunity here to understand how the labor market really works, because if you think about it, it’s an incredibly opaque market. People come in thinking, I’m going to go to school, I’m going to get experience, I’m going to get a job, but you don’t actually know what you need to know in order to get that job. You don’t easily figure out what are the right internships, what are the right starter roles for the career you want to have. You just have a sense of where you want to be, but the path to get there is really, really opaque.

And I think at LinkedIn, we have a chance to kind of create a little transparency in the – in the labor market and make it easier for people to figure out what’s the right skill, what’s the right opportunity, what’s the right networker issue or conversation I need to be involved in, in order to kind of access my dream job.

And so, I think we have an opportunity, LinkedIn, to help people figure that out, and that’s kind of what gets me jazzed up every morning to do this role.

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** I love it. And the point that you make about the framework for thinking how to solve problems and what this means for the workforce, you just nailed it, right? And there are two topics that I really want us to dive into today that, you know, I believe people in terms of internships and opportunities are really vital, because they’re very relevant, and the first being the skills needed for the green economy transition and then the changes to the workforce and the impact on women.

So let’s start with the skills needed on the green economy transition. So as governments around the world are putting billions of dollars of infrastructure spend to work in their communities, sustainability and the green transition are a major focus. So of course, all of that requires people with the skills and knowledge to do it. So tell us more about what kind of skills will be needed and where we’re facing gaps in the workforce that we will need to get all of this work done.

**KARIN KIMBROUGH:** So at LinkedIn, we’ve been looking a lot about what is a green job or a green skill. And if you start at the highest level, we can see that over time, hiring for green jobs actually is growing faster than hiring for, say, like non-green jobs.

So if you are a worker with a couple of sets of green skills, maybe something in sustainability or something, you know, even more explicitly in, you know, ecology, you have a much higher chance of getting hired faster than if you don’t have those green skills for the same role. So we’re seeing that hiring is faster when you have those skills and that’s exciting.

We’re also seeing, though, that it’s coming from a very low base. Like the total number of green jobs and the amount of green skills is still a fraction of like the entire set of skills and jobs out there. It’s very, very –

[06:58]

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** Yeah, what does that look like? Is there some number that you kind of – or percentage that you can point to?

**KARIN KIMBROUGH:** Yeah. I mean, I think we can say that we’re like within like 5%, you know, maybe 5% of all roles are really in that green space. They’re growing faster, but they’re growing from a very small base.

And we, you know, we think about jobs in terms of like are there actually explicitly green jobs like a solar technician, or are there jobs that are getting greener? So a civil engineer or someone in construction, those jobs are getting greener. And then there are jobs that, you know, far in the spectrum aren’t green at all, really. And it’s okay. You know, not everybody has to be doing the same thing. So I don’t know if an economist is a green job. I don’t think so. So I’ll use myself as that – as that scapegoat. Although I’m terribly interested in the issue and passionate about it, I don’t think I have a green job.

What we do see, though, is that the skills generally for any job, whether it’s a green job or a non-green job, are changing over time. And this is what’s really interesting. When you look at what the skills were required for a job back in, say 2015, and then you fast forward, you know, five or six years to 2021, you see there’s almost a 25% change in the skills that are needed for that same role. So over time, skills are rotating kind of in and out of favor, if you will.

And I think a lot of that is because we have this undercurrent of increased importance around sustainability. We have this undercurrent of increased importance around, say, the digital economy and technological transformation. And so, that’s causing a skill rotation in so many jobs.

And if you fast forward out, if I project forward, what I actually see is that there’s probably within, you know, ten years, there’s going to be maybe as much as a, you know, 40% or 50% rotation in the skills that are required for any particular job.

Now, it’s a really big headline. Let me just caveat that before I let you jump back in. But what that really means is sometimes it’s the skill is like it’s a different software. So imagine someone in construction is now using a new type of software that involves more digital knowledge, more sustainable materials, and that in itself is like a new skill. So you’re still building the same house, but you might be using different materials or different software to construct it, so that it’s more environmentally friendly.

[09:30]

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** So was there something or a confluence of events that were driving some of, you know, going back to 2015, that sort of kind of tipped the scale a bit, in a positive way, toward where we see ourselves as far as the change of those skills needed or some trends that you’ve identified that led up to that point?

**KARIN KIMBROUGH:** I think that the trend was already in place. I think the reason that we started with 2015 was, honestly, that was a good point for our data for us to kind of start evaluating. But I think it started probably well beyond that. It’s been kind of growing rapidly from a very slow base, but it’s picking up.

And at the same time, we’re seeing employers increasingly using skills as that kind of first litmus test, if you will, of what they’re looking for. And then when they do look at skills, as opposed to say, like just where I went to school or who I know, they have a 60% better chance of getting a good match, meaning they get a better candidate that’s better suited for the role.

So we know that skills really are this currency for the global workforce, and we know that when you have green skills, it’s accelerating that sustainable, green economy. When you have any kind of skill at all, it’s sort of powering or creating momentum in the labor market where it’s more dynamic because people can more easily talk to each other, more easily kind of convey what their experiences are through the skills that they have. So we’re seeing skills is a really powerful tool for improving that match between employers and employees.

[11:08]

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** And so that really does tie to what you’ve already shared about transparency, you know, in the labor market and taking something that is quite opaque and making it more widely available to communicate across the workforce and across the labor markets.

And now this is a global question, and we have a global audience. From your point of view, how are different and the data that you see, how are different regions approaching the problem?

**KARIN KIMBROUGH:** That’s such an interesting question because that’s one of the things I’ve noticed with our data is there’s really no single story. I always say, oh, I’m the chief economist at LinkedIn, I can tell this global story, and it’s really tough because everyone is starting from a different place in terms of where their economy is, what their policies are, the amount of support the government provides or doesn’t. And so there’s no one story.

And so, it’s exactly the case that when I look at what’s happening, say, in Europe, you know, imagine I’m just talking about the Eurozone or just continental Europe, I’m actually seeing a lot of advance work, a lot of commitment by municipalities, by regional public administrations to invest, say, in opportunities for like green cities, green workplaces, green construction. That has been going on a lot longer than what we’re seeing, you know, say in the U.S. U.S. it feels like a more – honestly, a more recent focus, which is gathering steam, but seems more recent, a little bit behind.

And then in Asia, again, you know, paraphrasing really loosely here, but when we look at some of the Asia-Pacific countries where we’ve got data, there’s obviously an equally important focus on, say, the sustainability movement but it’s kind of combined with this massive infrastructure spend that we see that’s been happening for a while, where they’re like modernizing cities and including a lot of green techniques in, say, buildings that are being erected. The way that they’re kind of handling all of their infrastructure is like almost automatically green because it’s new and it’s the first time. Whereas in America, it feels like we’re sort of retrofitting things and maybe our slate is not as blank, we’re not as open to it. So it feels like we’re still kind of catching up in some ways to other countries.

[13:35]

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** Great. And, you know, part of this, that – that retrofitting point really stands out to me, I think, related to this question, which is what can we do? And the “we” here means, you know, there’s an industry role, there’s a government role, there’s a nonprofit vocational training and workforce development role.

Maybe kind of speak to a couple of these areas you’re most comfortable around what we can do collectively to help ensure that the significant need for these skills is met in these coming years and decades, I guess.

**KARIN KIMBROUGH:** So I think one of the things that has been obviously the first – the big mover is governments, right. So when a government puts its stake down as like, this is critical, this is where we’re going, that kind of aligns all the incentives for the businesses in terms of whether there’s a favorable tax policy or whether there’s subsidies for hiring apprentices.

It’s like, you know, in Europe, there’s been a couple of countries have different sort of apprentice programs that actually subsidize companies that want to bring on young folks who may be, like, less skilled and give them a two-year stint in a company. And then at that point, they can decide, you know, the company can decide whether they keep the person, and the person has kind of built up a little bit of a resume of experience and learned a few skills. And that kind of government-led opportunity, I think, is one way we’re seeing, you know, how do we move forward.

The second way is when companies lead, and we see a lot of that with companies that are choosing to kind of take a moral stake and really lay out what’s important to them. And it could be by setting, you know, goals for the zero-carbon goal or, we’re going to green our supply chain in some way.

And by the way, that has been one of the most transformed areas in the workforce, is seeing the skills that are required for managing supply chains and transport. Those are some of the places that I’ve like really, I would say, seen some of the fastest accumulation of green skills by people working in that space and by the jobs that are being posted by employers. That’s really exciting. And a lot of that is being led by businesses just making a mindset shift from a decade ago.

[15:52]

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** Is there a place online that you would encourage folks that are listening to check out to get more details on these topics, around the skills needed for the green economy transition?

**KARIN KIMBROUGH:** Yeah, absolutely. We have produced a couple of different reports. Both of them can be found in the same place. So let me give you the link. It’s **EconomicGraph.Linkedin.com**.

And at EconomicGraph.Linkedin.com, you can find a report we’ve done pretty recently on just skills and how employers are using skills, what skills are most in demand. You can also find on that same site, information around transformations in the digital economy. You can find information around our green skills and our green report that we put out earlier this year. So everything is at EconomicGraph.LinkedIn.com.

And we also do monthly newsletters just talking about what we’re seeing in the world of work, you know, what are the trends for women or for young workers who are entry level?

[16:55]

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** That’s great, and we’ll make sure to drop those links into the podcast blog and commentary that we’ll be sharing with – with our audience, too.

All right, so let’s move into something that’s very vital, really important, and that’s changes to the workforce and the impact on women. And, you know, we’re connected on LinkedIn, and a couple of things that stood out to me on some recent posts that you’ve shared, I’m just going to read them from what I came across.

You know, you wrote, you know, “As a working mom, my career path to becoming LinkedIn’s chief economist has not followed a straight arrow. Everyone’s path and pace looks different, and that’s okay.”

So when we look at these infrastructure investments, which are very important and they impact everyone, yet we know that those in decision-making positions don’t always reflect a variety of perspectives and backgrounds.

So tell me a bit about the current state of women in the workforce and especially in leadership roles and what you’ve learned in your research.

[17:55]

**KARIN KIMBROUGH:** We’ve had the ability at LinkedIn to look at our data with that, I’ll call it a gender lens, where we can see where members who are, you know, identifying as women relative to members identified as men, and kind of to see how their career paths have differed. Even if they have, say, the same experience or the same education, same career path in terms of where they’ve worked, they may still end up in different places.

And what’s kind of depressing is that globally there’s no industry where there’s parity in leadership roles between men and women. Even in industries like education or wellness and fitness, where half, more than half the workforce is women, you still see this gap in leadership where they don’t have parity, where it’s more men are in leadership.

So that’s the industries that like hire a lot of women. Then there are the ones that traditionally are dominated by men, like construction and manufacturing, and you see the gap is even greater where you don’t even have two out of ten leaders that are women.

So it’s a pretty interesting question, like what’s going on? And so, I’m excited that you asked this question, and we’ve done a lot of work looking into it. And what we find is that at the beginning of anyone’s career, the group of potential workers is roughly 50/50 between men and women. And then for every ten years, you drop like 10 percentage points in terms of that balance. So if it starts 50/50, ten years later, it’s 40/60 in favor of men. And it just keeps going.

You get to the point where you’re at the leadership level where we classify that as, say, people who are directors or vice presidents or above, even C-suite, and you really have this huge imbalance. In some cases, it’s, you know, it’s really, really stark. It’s a little bit better in some of the Nordic countries. But by the time you get to the C-suite, it’s only about 25% of the C-suite is women globally. So the women are underrepresented, and we know that, and it’s across all industries, and we see that in our data, too.

And we also see that the way women present themselves on LinkedIn is different. So we see that, for example, for the same experience, same roles, will showcase different skills. So women are more likely to showcase their business skills. Men are more likely to showcase, say, their tech skills or specialized industry skills.

There’s nothing wrong with that, and I’m like loath to kind of say we need to do something different, women need to behave differently in order to achieve parity. Like, I hate being told that the women need to kind of fix the problem that they’re facing. We have to think about how are we evaluating women in some way that limits them, and what, by the way, to the point of this podcast, what aspects of infrastructure could be more supportive of women getting to leadership roles?

So I think that there’s no accident that women are dropping out so significantly during the time when they’re trying to both advance in their career and advance their families. And that, to me, speaks a lot to, you know, is childcare critical infrastructure?

[21:18]

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** That’s where I was hoping you’d go, because I mean, it is, you know, for working mothers, right, I think there’s some research that you’ve shared in the U.S. in particular in terms of those career paths and how they get further complicated by the shrinking pool of childcare workers.

What do we do? Like how are we – how are we – how are we going to solve some of these problems for that part of the population? But just overall, what are the things that organizations need to do to help solve these challenges?

**KARIN KIMBROUGH:** You’re right there where I am, which is that without some critical infrastructure, and I would say not even for women, but for families, because, you know, men are part of the equation, too, we would get a lot farther with equality.

I didn’t say this before, but I do want to make the point that when we’re looking at how women advance, if women don’t sprint in the – essentially in the first part of their career to get as far as possible, they have a much harder chance of making it to a leadership position later on.

It’s kind of like you need to sprint at the beginning of your race if you’re a woman, and if you’re a man, yeah, it would be great if you sprint, but if you don’t sprint, you can sprint a little later in the race and still make it. But for women, you absolutely need to sprint and get as far as possible in the first ten years of your career in order to have a shot at leadership, if that makes any sense.

So the race isn’t exactly fair, and I think a lot of it has to do with that critical infrastructure where we saw a lot of turnover, by the way, in the past year and a half, by workers in education and in what I would call that care infrastructure world, not just of daycare for children, but also for elder care, because these jobs are – they’re tough. They’re tough. They they didn’t feel safe during a pandemic. They don’t pay an extraordinary amount.

And so as an economist, I can say that as you face more risks and probably barriers and needs for public transport to get to these roles that you might have, and you’re not paid necessarily that much more, it doesn’t become worth it. And so, people start making that tradeoff and they ease out of those roles.

And we’ve seen a huge acceleration in people rotating generally across the workforce. Especially in America, a lot of rotation, almost 30% of the workforce that we see has like changed jobs in the last couple of years. But what we particularly see is that it’s really accelerated in education and health care because there’s a lot of stress there.

And the question is, how do we make sure that when the whole economy is going through stress, we’re not just shifting the burden into certain pockets of the economy, if it’s, say, on working parents, particularly working moms, or if it’s on people in education who are trying to juggle this need for like in-school education, but also folks that are wanting to work remote. And how do you teach and how do you handle kids who are having mental health stress?

And so, we’re seeing a lot of sort of transition in that space out, but not transition in, which suggests that there’s some issue that needs to be addressed in education, and in health care, particularly daycare, elder care.

[24:25]

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** So what kinds of things can organizations do to help solve these problems and challenges?

**KARIN KIMBROUGH:** So I think the number one thing is to recognize that everybody seems to really enjoy the increased flexibility in the workplace that they’ve had. So from our vantage, we can see that women, in particular, are 25% more likely to apply to a remote role. And that really underscores the importance of flexibility in making workplaces more equitable for them and accessible.

I think the other thing that would really help, apart from, by the way, universal daycare and, you know, guaranteed parental leave, those sort of things would be really, really helpful, but I’ll just stick to my knitting here in the workplace, and say, I think the second thing we’d love to see would be clearer paths to leadership.

When we see disproportionate numbers of women dropping out of like tracks at the managerial level, which is like that key stepping stone to leadership, then we need to be honest about whether or not that’s because they’re not cut out, which I don’t think is the case, or whether they’re facing internal barriers, that they just need a little bit more clarity around how can, in their particular industry, in their sector, in their role, can they make it without having to sprint in that first ten years? There has to be a way to say, we’re going to evaluate leadership potential, not just in the first decade, but through all the decades of your career. And I think that that’s something companies can do by just changing their mindset and their behaviors when they evaluate candidates.

[26:03]

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** All right. So one final question. What is one thing you’ve read, you’ve watched, or listened to lately that had an impact on how you think about this moment in infrastructure and the labor market?

**KARIN KIMBROUGH:** To continue our theme of like, critical infrastructure is not just bridges and tunnels, but maybe it’s also childcare, I would say I’ve been looking at some whitepapers that are put out by the Bennett Institute for Public Policy. It’s in the UK. And they talk a lot about the importance of social infrastructure, so the importance not just of making public transportation available to all, so people can get to those jobs, but also public libraries, public education, public daycare, all those things that let people get freed up to kind of access their best life, their best professional life, and let them play on an even playing field. And this public policy center has put out some really interesting white papers around social infrastructure.

[27:05]

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** Excellent. We’ll make sure to get that link as well, so that we can share that with our audience. Karin, thank you so much. We’d love to have you join us again and dive deeper into some of the other topics that are so important. And we’re thrilled, I’m thrilled that your dream job is at LinkedIn in this role, so that you can help us really understand how the labor market works in this green transition for women and for all people.

So thank you for your time today, and I look forward to following up with you and sharing all this great learning with our audience.

**KARIN KIMBROUGH:** Thank you, Jeremy. It was a pleasure.

[Music]

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** Thanks for listening to this episode and being a part of the Future of Infrastructure, and for joining me on this journey to meet and learn from the people improving life in their communities. If you liked today’s episode and want to help other people find it, please take a moment to share, rate and review the show. To learn more, visit us at **wwps.microsoft.com**, or find me on LinkedIn and Twitter at **JeremyMGoldberg**.

[28:15]

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