

Transcript of ‘Sustainability Inspiration, Optimism – and the Edmonton Oilers!’

[Season 2, Episode 40, Transforming Tomorrow](#)

[Theme music]

Paul: Hello and welcome to Transforming Tomorrow, the podcast from the Pentland Centre for Sustainability in Business. I'm Paul Turner.

Jan: And I'm Professor Jan Bebbington.

Folks, the end is near. [laughs]

No, I'm not about to murder Paul, but it is the end of this season, and boy, oh boy, am I ready for a break.

But, my gosh, it's been such a season from asteroid mining and Thai prawns to night trains and Eiffel Towers worth of waste. There is so much to reflect on.

So what are the moments that inspired us the most? And will Paul and I make it to season three?

Welcome to the season finale of Transforming Tomorrow...

Paul: ...woo...

Jan: ...woohoo! [laughs]

[Theme music]

Paul: Jan, just like Frank Sinatra, the end is near and we face our final curtain.

Jan: [laughs] Hopefully it won't be quite as tragic as that, because there is gonna be a series three, but we'll come back to that at the end of this podcast, I think

Paul: Yeah, it's the final curtain for this series, you know, I'm not killing you in the interim.

Jan: [laughing] Good, good.

Paul: I know it always worries you. Although I'm not the one who recently became into possession of a very sharp sword.

Jan: Oh, I knew this was gonna come up so, so dear gentle listeners, I had the, the pleasure of an honorary degree from, uh, University of Tampere in Finland, where you get a hat and a sword.

I even managed to get the sword home safely in, in luggage, I'm pleased to say and...

Paul: ...labelled as sporting goods, I believe...

Jan: ...it was sporting goods. So Emma from the World Federation of the Sporting Goods industry will be very proud of me, of getting it in the country.

Paul: So I can only assume this means you will therefore becoming a champion fencer soon.

Jan: Uh, well I fenced as a kid and I was really, really bad at it. And we had this most wonderful teacher who, called Mr. Ching, who, um, who, who was very round and he used to yell at us as we're a bit frightened about, um, fencing with him.

I'm large enough for even you to hit. And so I have very fond memories of fencing in Ashburton College. There we are, I think that's enough of that.
[laughs]

Paul: It does explain why you only have one arm.

Jan: [laughing] Yes, it does indeed.

Paul: Well, for a special treat today, Jan, to bring our series two to a close, we're not joined by any guests, and instead just as we set the standard last year, it'll be just me and you talking about things and, and me bugging you about things and asking you things.

Jan: Well, I'm gonna also ask you things. I'm gonna ask you about, um, what, what things you found, you know, interesting and, and insightful from the, the series that we've just had.

But also, we asked a lot of people what was inspiring them, so I'd like to know what you thought of their inspiration.

Paul: Yes. I'm gonna ask you if you remember certain things from the podcast and what you think I've learned from this series.

I guarantee none of them will be on your list of things that you've learned from this series...

Jan: ...yeah, yeah, yeah...

Paul: ...it's just yes, when I've gone through...

Jan: ...we have independently done our lists, so we cannot guarantee what's going to happen next.

Paul: [laughs] Well, do you want to start off then, with what you've learned? What really stands out from you over this past nine months and 40 episodes that we've done?

Jan: One of the things that stands out to me, um, which really came through, uh, Alex Harrington's work and comes from a quote that I have, um, printed out and put on my wall, which is something that Al Gore said in frustration at one of the international conferences, and he said, "political will is a renewable resource."

And I really like that because one of the things that, that came through on her work, but also lots of other ones as well about, you know, how does a sustainability manager do their work, et cetera, et cetera, is the falling down and getting back up...

Paul: ...mm-hmm...

Jan:...and recommitting. An example that really stood out to me, um, with relation to the oceans and the plastics treaty, which is what Alex Harrington was talking about, is that recently we just had the third UN Ocean Conference, and at that conference there was an agreement of when the next negotiation was going to be...

Paul: ...mm-hmm...

Jan: ...and if listeners remember, what happened is that negotiation, the last one in Busan without the zombies, uh, or the trains, um, went, just was left open.

So the next time they meet is from the fifth to the 14th of August in Geneva. So while we are on our summer break and, and you are on the summer break, it might be that actually that moves forward.

That also came across in our conversation with Biraj Patnaik from the National Foundation of India that has had a really long-term campaign about eliminating hunger and has used every mechanism and keeps on coming back, uses a

different mechanism, solves one thing, it's another problem, solves it again and works forward.

And it takes me right back to our opening, um, of season one where we talked about wicked problems and how they manifest. So in that respect, that's one of the big things that came through...

Paul: ...mm-hmm...

Jan: ...that you keep on going, that there's always opportunities to regroup and to move forward.

Paul: So this meeting in Geneva in August, that's gonna be about the plastics treaty.

Jan: Yes.

Paul: Yes.

Jan: Yeah.

Paul: Yeah. Because obviously you mentioned that there's recently been the meeting about the oceans that took place. And that's another thing that Alex Harrington, who was our guest about the plastic treaty, she was actually there, and so was another Pentland Centre member, Celine Germond-Duret, who we've had on the podcast previously talking about the blue economy.

So our Pentland Centre members do get about.

Jan: They do indeed and, and hopefully in rooms that matter and with knowledge that matters.

So that's, that's my first thing, and we should take turn about, otherwise I should talk for hours. So what came across to you?

Paul: Well, in my list of non-trivial things that I have learned during this, that was actually number one as well...

Jan: [surprised] ...oh, that's very cool...

Paul: ...I thought that of all the people we spoke to, and we've spoken to some really brilliant people, Alex came across to me as just the most brilliant and inspirational person, who's traveling all the world and seeing all these issues, and representing the little man in quite often the cases.

'Cause I don't know if you remember, Alex was there as a voice to help a lot of these smaller nations have their voices heard amongst the large organisations such as the UN that are going there, and just seeing what Alex is doing, and seeing her optimism that something might get done quite quickly by the end of the year and thinking that sounds really slow, and then her explaining well the last, um, similar type thing that went on around chemicals and such actually took far, far longer than just a year. [chuckles]

So just seeing what Alex is doing, the work she was able to take part in, and how she's applying her work, both academically here, but very much practically within the organisations that are dealing with things such as the plastics treaty.

Beyond that, the second thing, I want to go right back to the first episode of this series and talk about asteroids. When I thought you were having some kind of episode when you said, 'we've got someone who can come on the podcast and talk to us about mining asteroids'. And I just nodded sweetly and, uh, went away and spoke to some healthcare professionals.

Uh, and it turned out no, you weren't imagining things and it was actually real. And we had Craig Jones with us talking to us all about the reality, the potential futures of asteroid mining, how that might turn out, what that means in terms of sustainability, in terms of what the asteroids might be able to provide on this planet, such as rare earth metals, et cetera.

What they can bring back, what asteroids might be used for, how Luxembourg is a leader in legislation when it comes to asteroid mining. That was a particularly fun fact that I remember.

Jan: And that comes onto a theme that, that, um, I have on my list as well. So asteroids certainly were like, you know, intergalactical fun, but then we've had lots of really very specialist topics, but topics that relate to us all.

So looking at and, antimicrobial resistance, you see, I can hardly say it. And that's not something that we would talk about day to day, and certainly not within maybe sustainability and business, but behind the scenes and those food industries and companies that are making food, here is a really important, um, element, but also really important for health as well.

So, um, the, the input from Oskar and Patrik were, was just, I think, really, you know, I found it really insightful and our hopelessness did as well.

The other example of, you know, a really important topic area that I hadn't necessarily thought of before was when we had Richard Hudson on from the Chartered Institute for Wastes Management [emphasises the 's' in Wastes].

Paul: Well remembered.

Jan: Yep. The, the S, I remember.

And, and actually realising that there's a whole professional association working in, in these areas.

And then the final one of that sort, which I thought was really insightful, uh, in terms of, you know, going into a topic that I hadn't thought of before, is with the World Federation of the Sporting Goods industry and the link across to the World Health Organisation to get, um, industry players to think about how sporting goods could help people lead healthier, more active lifestyles.

And particularly maybe that shift in marketing from 'here's an elite sports person' to 'here's somebody who wishes to be active for their own wellbeing' and, and you know, quite possibly low carbon as well if they're cycling or walking to work.

So there's some of those topic areas that hadn't been in my head before, but when you open them up, there's this whole myriad of really interesting things happening.

Paul: Yes, we've certainly learned a lot from a lot of different people.

Now I've got a list of other things that I've learned. [Jan laughs] Do you want, do you want to hear them, Jan?

Jan: Yeah, go on. They'll be frivolous, I fear.

Paul: First of all, it's possible for you to get stuck anywhere.

In series one, we had you stuck in the middle of Cumbria when your car broke down. In series two, the entire West Coast main line of the UK railway network closed down just so you didn't have to be here for our first day of recording for series what, for this series two.

Jan: Transportation is always a problem.

Paul: Yes. Secondly, I've learned that I know the, what TNFD stands for and you, despite the fact you work on it, don't necessarily always remember what it means.

Jan: Yeah. That's then trouble with acronyms, isn't it? We all get comfortable in our own wee knowledge pockets, and don't think about saying it properly out loud.

Paul: What does it mean?

Jan: The taskforce on financial related... [pauses]

Paul: [triumphantly] ...no, you've got it wrong, you've got it wrong!

Jan: ...I've got the 'on'...

Paul: ...you got the, you got the hard bit right, and then you got the easy bit wrong.

Jan: Taskforce on nature-related financial disclosures.

And indeed, we did quite a bit on biodiversity and it will continue being a really relevant topic for us in all sorts of ways.

Paul: Now I, I also learned that you misremember how you know people and imagine you've met them at weddings and all kinds of things [Jan giggles] when really you don't know them at all. But they turn out to be very good guests anyway.

Jan: No, it was a happy accident, wasn't it? Uh, my mind's not what it was. To be fair, my mind was never what it ought to have been.

Paul: And, uh, I, I've discovered in going back through episodes and remember now, that you were somehow meant to be now a time trial cyclist. [Jan laughs]

Yes, you may not remember this, but in the episode with Emma Zwiebler, from the World Federation of the Sporting Goods Industry, uh, Emma, um, said you'd be made perfectly for being a time trial cyclist.

Jan: Oh, I, I fear what's gonna happen next, as to what else he's remembered. [laughs]

Paul: And within the same episode, we're also meant to be recording this podcast whilst running.

Jan: That's right. I do remember that. Yeah, I was listening to that last night. We never got there.

Paul: Somehow it's just slipped our minds as we've recorded the remaining episodes, and we've managed to stay here in a nice sedentary position, which

again, goes completely against what Emma and the World Health Organisation and all of those people would like us to do. Running podcasts was the future.

Um, I've learned that it's harder to grow courgettes and onions at the moment because of the climate.

Jan: That's true, although this year's quite good for courgettes. I don't know about your garden, but my garden is about to go into overdrive on the courgette front.

Paul: The strawberries are going well in my garden this year...

Jan: ...yeah, yeah...

Paul: ...which, you know, last year didn't necessarily go, but that's, yeah.

And then finally I've looked, I'm almost brilliant at predicting the winner of the Stanley Cup, but not quite. [Jan laughs]

Because you may recall back in October or so when we were at the very start of this season, and indeed the NHL - National Hockey League - season in North America was only just beginning, we discussed who we thought was gonna win the Stanley Cup because we'd started talking about Wayne Gretzky.

And I said very early in the season, Edmonton Oilers. Unfortunately, they reached the final and lost. So they were second out of all the teams. So I was very, very close and you know, quite a good pick, 'cause I don't think many other people would've said the Edmondson Oilers at the time, given how bad they were...

Jan: ...yeah...

Paul: ...playing at the start the season, but they didn't quite win.

Jan: They didn't, and I can't remember who won, but I remember I noticed it on account of the fact that I now have an unhealthy interest in Canadian ice hockey on the strength of Wayne Gritz, Gratzky?

Paul: Wayne Gritzky. Yes, that's what he can, uh, be, be called now.

Jan: Ah, Wayne. Wayne. Just Wayne to me.

Paul: It was the Florida Panthers...

Jan: ...ah...

Paul: Yes. The Florida Panthers beat the Edmonton Oilers for the second year in a row in the Stanley Cup Final. Four-two this time rather than four-three, 'cause I know you were interested.

Jan: Yes, [laughs] I well, I kind of knew.

Paul: Yeah. That, so that is a list of things that I have learned during this series. I told you my list was not things that you were gonna have on your list.

Jan: [laughs] Uh, that, that is true. But there are some things on my list that I think you might agree were really inspirational and really interesting.

Paul: Yes. I've got a long list of, I've got, I've actually narrowed it down, I looked at four different areas of inspiration that people have brought to the...

Jan: ...okay...

Paul: ...to the conversation.

Jan: Well, should we go turn about?

Paul: Right. Do you want me to give you my first area of inspiration?

Jan: Go for it.

Paul: Well, across quite a few of the podcasts we've heard people talking about how they've been inspired by seeing work and theory and research in the area of sustainability being actually applied by businesses.

They're not just talking theory any more, they're seeing it as reality. So for instance, we had Sreevas, the man who beat us to the podcast award and who still managed to get himself as a guest on our podcast despite that, talking about work around global entrepreneurship and how that is applying ESGs and seeing how sometimes the smaller firms and the global South are applying things relating to sustainability. He's seen that in his work in India and globally.

Um, we had Frida Bengtsson who joined us very early on talking about Greenpeace and the oceans, and so she's seen change in how the oceans are being treated by industry, and is like seeing operational there as well.

Tim Lamont also in the seas and he's seeing coral restoration programs actually taking place and not, no longer people just sit talking about them in theory, but actually seeing organisations taking part in them and doing these things.

We've already talked about Emma Zwiebler who came on, and how she has seen sporting goods company change in their marketing for more general people, no longer just being elite athletes, but yeah, let's go for those general people.

Then we had Kaeisha from Pentland Brands, and she was talking about the growth of B-Corps, which is all about applying stuff relating to sustainability into practices of those businesses, so seeing that as well.

Then we had our ice hockey conversationalists, Julia and Knut, and they've done lots of work with businesses around the world and seeing how they apply sustainability within their operations. And there was a good phrase that Julia used there, which was borrowed from someone else, and I can't quite remember who it was, but it was 'the green train has left the station', saying that everyone's already on that train and moving, and if you're not, you've been left behind.

And finally, from our trip to Malaysia, because we haven't talked about our trip to Malaysia yet, but we did go to Malaysia, um, Ann Marie Sidhu, your academic granddaughter, uh, who talked to us all about seeing the smaller, traditional family based organisations in Malaysia and how they're applying sustainability into their operations, despite the fact there is no requirement for them to do that at all.

Jan: And I would add to that list, and I had a few of them, you can see me crossing things off my list as you were speaking there, uh, Steve Kempster, I thought spoke in a really inspiring way about his Good Dividends programme and good growth, thinking about good growth and, and you know, how to be a good business in all sorts of ways. I really liked his stories about people that, you know, work through that programme and go, ah, and really shape their businesses in a different way.

And then the person I'd add to that is our first local hero, Steve Parkman, who also sort of came with us with stories about how a very small organisation, in his case, with just two employees, can still do things to move forward to really, you know, support the whole agenda.

So, yeah, I, I agree. That's a really, really nice theme.

Paul: Yeah, it was something that went through everyone, people who were involved in business, people who were involved in broader organisations,

people who were academics, doing research. All of them seemed to bring that to the table that, we're no longer, we're very definitely no longer in the period of only talking about the potential for sustainability action. We're in a period where sustainability action for lots of organisations, businesses, individuals is taking place...

Jan: ...yeah.

Paul: So what's your area then, your first area, having taken that one away from you?

Jan: [laughs] Well, you, you said, uh, uh, Frida Bengtsson. And so, I want to give a shout out to her as well, 'cause, well, something I wrote down for out of hers...

Paul: ...helicopters...?

Jan: ...uh, no, there was...

Paul: ...how, how to hire a helicopter...

Jan: ...how to hire a helicopter stuck in my mind as well, but what she said. "I have seen change happen. I have experience of it. I know it's not easy, but I know it can happen."

So that sort of can do and get on attitude I think came through hers. That's also the case with Carys Nelkon who works on the Morecambe Bay curriculum and she described her experience, and again, I'm quoting 'cause I was listening to these, um, uh, ahead of this.

"People believe in a better life is possible and are working day in and day out to make that possible".

So in that respect, if you like, that sort of can do attitude and working to create a change is, is absolutely there. And what I liked about her story and around the Morecambe Bay curriculum and then Martin Quinn's, um, framing of anchor assets and thinking about Even Morecambe Bay itself, which you know, is starting to take shape and may actually be a subject of a, of what I hope will be a further podcast, that you can do things in a place and really tie it to that place and deal with all sorts of aspects of sustainability and, and bring it together in a holistic way.

And then the final example of that, again, was in Malaysia. Um, thinking about the ASEAN countries' collaboration around the role of sustainability and how

that's at the heart of their programme of work this year, as Malaysia is the, the host of that, that network for this year.

Paul: I was also thinking in that same area around Malaysia, but around something different.

And this is when we spoke to Mahendhiran about the work he was doing in the local community around the less developed areas and the less affluent areas, um, near the Sunway University campus. And how Sunway is a, an anchor institution within that area, helping people locally, regionally improve their lives. In this case, it was bringing better education to people who might not otherwise have education, and there was so many good things there about that too.

Yeah, I could certainly see that. Which brings me onto my second area...

Jan: ...excellent...

Paul: ...which is quite a lot of discussion that went on around the power of young people and how they can play a role in seeing the positivity that they already provide in the sustainability movement.

We had, from people such as Rose White, just talking about her own children and seeing that they're talking about issues of sustainability when, when Rose and myself, about the same age when we were that, that age, we certainly weren't talking about issues of sustainability, but her children are, and my children too, talk about such issues. So seeing that.

Going back to Carys Nelkon and Bethan Garrett when they were talking about the Morecambe Bay curriculum, that, of course, is all about young people and the power of hope in these young people coming forward. The enthusiasm, the engagement they have for this whole project, which brings sustainability in other areas, and the regeneration of the Morecambe Bay area, and education about everything that goes on around here to the fore.

Um, Darren Axe, you'll remember we had Darren on from Students Organizing for Sustainability, SOS, and him telling us about all the things he's come across about the positive attitudes that students have towards issues of sustainability and how they work together, almost like a community, a power that they have to shape people growing through the education system.

Which is a bit similar to what we also heard from Jose Alcaraz and Stephen Homer, um, Jose in Germany, and Steven in Malaysia. Talking about the way

they educate people about sustainability built into management education and seeing them and their positive attitudes towards it.

What about you, Jan? Is that something that struck you or not?

Jan: It is, and it's the same group of people with that theme and another thing associated with it. And this is where I think, um, particularly for many of our listeners are working in the academy and in universities of various sorts, or allied to universities.

So it seemed to me that there was a slew of insights about what can happen within the academy, from inspired teaching approaches and here Jose Alcaraz from like Lancaster's Leipzig campus would be a really good example. Likewise, Stephen Homer's implementation of the Principles of Responsible Management Education in Sunway University in Malaysia is another good example.

Darren Axe was on my list, and those Students Organizing for Sustainability and just the, the passion that goes with it. Then also Alex Ryan, maybe a very recent one, um, that we've had on the podcast looking at the potential role for universities to drive change, Rose White, rating agencies to maybe drive change. And then, um, Marian Iszatt-White's, um, looking at ESG school versus business school.

So it seemed to me that, I mean, we are an academic podcast and, and we, we have I think, good practice orientation as well, but we are at the heart thinking about what we do in the academy, and it seemed to me there was lots of epicentres of things to, to work on and change in the academy.

Paul: I think I'd like to clarify that. You said we're an academic podcast. We feature a lot of academics on us, but I like to think we talk about topics that aren't always restricted within the academy.

Jan: I agree...

Paul: ...especially because I hate referring to academia as the academy...

Jan: [laughs] ...yes...

Paul: ...even though I just did it.

Jan: [laughs] Yes. And I, I think, well, I mean, in the categories they ask you to sort of put your podcast in, I do find it quite hard to know where to put us. 'Cause we're, we're definitely not, you know, you know...

Paul: ...we are...

Jan: ...sort of entertainment...

Paul: ...we are a sustainability...

Jan: ...yes...

Paul: ...podcast, but that doesn't tend to come up as a category...

Jan: ...yeah...

Paul: ...environmental very occasionally does, but that doesn't touch on everything that we do. Yeah...

Jan: ...yeah...

Paul: ...yeah. No, I know what you mean. We are educational, but I think we're also business...

Jan: ...I agree...

Paul: ...focused. So, yeah...

Jan: So the same people that you had on your list, but for a slightly different reason. That organising around particular bodies, again using Martin Quinn's, uh, frame, maybe an anchor institution.

Paul: Mm-hmm. Then, I have another area which is the optimism that these people see by the potential speed of change. Um, we had Rebecca Liu and Steve Kramer on talking about Industry 5.0 and Society 5.0, and they were talking about the potential for a world where technology can help us have better lives, and technology can help us address some of the world's most pressing issues, and technology can work for us and with us, and the potential to just advance society to that level. That was something that really stood out to me.

Martin Quinn. Yep, I've got him down here, and hear how he's seen how you can so quickly make a difference in changes. What happened in Covid might be seen as a negative thing in many, many ways, rightly so, but it did demonstrate the ability to make changes quickly and how there is the potential out there to stop what we're doing in the way we're doing it if it's harmful, and find a new way of doing it, and do that without necessarily so much disruption happening.

We talked to Patrik and Oskar when we talked about the elements such as antimicrobial resistance, but we talked to them as well about the potential for change around these issues and how farmers and the food systems and all these things, there's the potential there to just quite quickly change the way they're operating and help reduce the amount of antimicrobial resistance that's going on.

John Verdin, who we spoke to, yes we had John on from over the other side of the Atlantic talking about boats that also have wind turbines on them that are catching fish and carrying cruise line passengers...

Jan: ...be fair. That was you, I think, not John. John was much more sensible than that.

Paul: I don't remember that. I definitely remember John proposing the idea.
[Jan laughs]

But aside from that particular idea, he's saying, you can see now that people are talking about the ocean so much more than they were doing, and they're thinking about the broad picture, not just the limited sphere of their particular impacts. And that's come about really quite quickly how that changes there.

Mahendhiran again, when we talked to him in Malaysia, I mean he was positive about everything, but when it came to helping underprivileged communities, like I mentioned before. Saying how the speed of the change he's already seen there with what's going on in these underprivileged communities.

And then finally, when we talked about sleeper trains with Nicole, she was talking about everyone now having the attitude of doing something to make the world a little bit better, choosing trains over planes. And seeing that happening and the revival of the sleeper train movement, and that's happened again quite quickly, having the sleeper train movement died out.

Jan: I love that point, and I've run out of points, but I've got a counterpoint to one of these. Um, one of the things that we did talk about is, and, and the reason for looking for these points of inspiration is that the world is maybe a, you know, a bit gritty at the moment and, and there's been a pushback on sustainability agendas.

Pushback on ESG, pushback on, um, diversity and inclusion focus as well. That's not happening univer, uniformly across the world, but it's also happening in

more than one place. So there's clearly something about that. And I've been, there's a really, uh, um, informative, uh, person that I follow on LinkedIn called Louisa Harris. And so she's been reporting on votes at, um, annual general meetings where there's been a proposal to push back on equality, um, programmes.

And then she's been listing the extent to which shareholders are rejecting these proposals and some of them by, you know, 99, 98%, uh, level of rejection. And so I picked up a, a quote that, um, Caterpillar, the, um, you know, the heavy machinery producers said that the proposal i.e., the one against equality and diversity, the proposal inappropriately attempts to restrict Caterpillar's ability to manage its own employees, ordinary business operations and enterprise strategy.

And then went on to say we are committed to fostering an inclusive environment, uh, a workplace that is representative of our diverse customers and communities that we serve around the globe.

So it seemed to me that, that, you know, some of the inspiration can be found, you know, from core financial shareholders saying, no, we're not gonna have any of that nonsense. You know, there's really good and sound reasons to be, be, you know, thinking about equality, thinking about ensuring that, that there's an equality of opportunity and, and a level playing field and, and what we know is an unlevel world.

Paul: Now. And we've given a shout out to all the optimism that came into the podcast. I feel only fair to mention there were a few people who were on our podcast who were very definitely naturally pessimistic about the whole situation.

Whilst we mentioned Rose and the optimism for the future, Rose was not a natural optimist, and she admitted that. And then Katherine Ellsworth-Krebs was definitely not an optimist when it came to corporations and sustainability officers and things like that. She could see the power of directives to change things, but she was also very much of the point, optimism could become greenwashing...

Jan: ...mm-hmm...

Paul: ...and then, we've mentioned him a couple times when it came to optimism, but Martin Quinn, took an awful lot to drag optimism out of him.

It sounded almost like it was a foreign concept to him when we first brought it up [Jan laughs] and asked him what he had to be optimistic and inspired by.

And likewise, Julia and Knut who had a couple of optimistic points, said it was very hard to be optimistic when they don't see things going fast enough when it comes to changes in business with sustainability practices.

So just a little shout out there to the pessimists in the group because there are some of them there.

Jan: Yeah, yeah.

And, um, this might be a good time to come onto it because we're crafting the next five years of our, our working strategy for the, the Pentland Centre, um, subsequent to, you know, being refunded by the, the Rubin Charitable Trust for which we are, you know, hugely grateful.

Um, and we've been thinking about how you articulate how you deal with that. So I can, I can do that now. I can do it a bit later on. I don't know where you're at from your running order.

Paul: No, I think we're, we are at a point where we can look to the future. I can certainly see, we've already seen over the course of this series some major changes that have happened since we started the series.

We've had Trump mark two in America, which ties in with the things you were talking about with the DEI, but also lots of other changes about energy policies around other sustainability policies and such like that. We've had the rise of Reform in this country in local elections, and plans to get rid of DEI again.

Um, EDI, I, I've got the Americanism in my head 'cause the episode we did was with Yuka and obviously Yuka talks about DEI, but yes, E-D-I, D-E-I, sustainability policies as well. They're talking about, just recently, how they think net zero plans are just gonna be abandoned because they're not realistic, or certainly you get the feeling if they were in government, that's definitely what would happen and they think it should happen anywhere else.

So there's been enough changes over the course of the last nine months. So there's bound to be more changes over the course of the next four, five years and beyond.

Jan: Yeah. And so how we're thinking about that is, is three concepts, the squeeze, the gap, and leadership.

Paul: The first two sounded like you were getting into some kind of weird, like 1950s dance crazes, [Jan laughs] let's do the squeeze, let's do the gap, and then you just got leadership. No, that doesn't really fit for that.

Jan: [laughs] Yes, it does indeed. So, so the squeeze is exactly what you have described, that political backlash against sustainability issues in some places, but also a drawing back from regulatory approaches, which we're seeing in the EU in and around the Omnibus, which is trying to water down, they call simplify. So, simplify, water down, depending on how you view it, the various, uh, approaches to sustainability for business there.

So, so, so that squeeze is on, and we know it's on. And, um, even earlier during Trump one, we had, you know, the ESG backlash there as well. So all of that's happening.

But we also know, from a scientific understanding, um, but also from looking at any kind of statistics about, you know, quality of opportunity, widening gap between rich and poor, how poor the very poor are and, and the difficulty, um, that they face in their lives.

Um, we know that climate change is kicking in, and nature loss, and these are creating system-wide risks. So, the gap then is the gap between what we might be doing and what we need to do. And that was always a gap. But as you draw away from it, the gap gets bigger so that that makes you, you know, not, not gloomy, but just really worried about what to do.

So, we see our role at the Penland Centre, particularly going forward in time, as trying to bridge that dynamic through thinking about what does leadership for sustainability in business look like?

So there's three ways that, that we, we think that that can be enabled, and these are areas where, where our, our members and also we all do some strategic work as well.

Firstly, there still remains a large number of principals, socially and ecologically literate businesses that will continue to advance sustainability, regardless of what the, the environment is. So understanding how they do that, why they do that, what we can learn from that leading-edge, and then lay out what the path is that others might follow.

So that's one of our, our activities, is to codify and describe the best and provide a path to follow. The second thing we know then, and this is leadership

when it's collective leadership. We know that when the going gets tough, businesses are able to sustain their positive impact by working with other like-minded organisations.

So it might be in the context of, you know, Morecambe that you could work together. It might be in the context of long supply chains or within industries, et cetera. The Seafood Business for Ocean Stewardship would, and you know, the putative sort of Ocean 100 idea. That's the same thing, about collective leadership where if you come together, you can go further than you can go alone.

And then the final bit of leadership, and this comes back to a really early podcast we had in um, series one. Is that the role of professions becomes critical. So business advisors, whether they be accountants, lawyers, engineers, waste management, associations of sustainability managers, these professional groups carry that knowledge and feed it through into a whole greater environment and support lots of businesses doing what they're doing.

So the stronger the professions are on this topic, the stronger the whole eco, business ecosystem will be as well. So I, you know, from our perspective, that's if you like, where we think we can focus and add value. Dealing with the squeeze, the gap, but then really focusing on leadership, how it's exercised, how other people can do that as well.

Paul: Can you just rephrase it as the lead, the squeeze, the gap and the lead, then you've definitely got three dance moves.

Jan: [laughing] We will, we will spare Ffion our dance moves in the studio. It could get a wee bit, a wee bit wild, but yes it is, it is. It is a dance. It's always a dance.

Paul: It's, it's always a delicate dance as well.

Jan: ...yes, indeed.

Paul: Yes. Well, with that in mind then, where are we going with the future of the podcast? Because we have said we will be back for series three, barring you, getting your sword out and chasing me down a corridor and attacking me...

Jan: [laughing] ...or getting irreversibly lost somewhere in the wilds, um, due to a transport malfunction.

Um, yes, we are gonna have a series three. What you'd expect, you should expect more of the same: really interesting people who are inspiring, but also quite sober in some of their, their evaluations of what's going on. We've got a long list...

Paul: ...mm-hmm...

Jan: ...and, and we've, some of them are people in business, so more local heroes. Some of them are alumni of the University who have gone off and done really interesting things and we, we'd like to invite them back to have a conversation about that.

And then there's a good, uh, you know, raft of academics who are working in really interesting areas and applying their insights.

Paul: And I know what will worry you is, I've actually brought a few more names to the table for next series. This year and last year, a lot of it has been either people that we both know, or people that you know.

But, for next year, there's some names that only I know and you'll be worrying endlessly about who these people are and what they're actually like that I've recommended them.

Jan: If they're friends of yours, they can be friends of mine, Paul.

Paul: [laughs] I don't know if they want to be, but we'll find out...

Jan: [laughs] Yeah.

Paul: Well, I look forward to that. We will be back in October with our third series of Transforming Tomorrow. Thank you very much for listening throughout this series. It's been another enjoyable journey that we've taken you on.

Jan: I think that, well, we hope you had fun, dear listeners, but we certainly had fun and we learned a lot and, um, I just, I just love this part of my job as exploring and finding out new things.

Paul: Well, enjoy your summer, or winter, depending upon which hemisphere you are in. We will be back in the autumn, or spring, depending upon which hemisphere you are in, with some new episodes of Transforming Tomorrow.

Until then, I'm Paul Turner,

Jan: and I'm Professor Jan Bebbington.

[Theme music]

[Someone shouts 'wooo' in the background]