

Transcript of 'What We Leave Behind'

Season 3, Episode 4, Transforming Tomorrow

[Theme music]

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

Jan: And I'm Professor Jan Bebbington.

Paul: This week we're going back to the future. How do we look after future generations? How do we build organisations that deliver on long-term values? And how is this impacted by cultural differences?

But most importantly, how sustainable are the Moomins and how much are they considering future generations?

[Theme music]

Paul: Jan. You have a grandchild.

Jan: Um, I. Well, yes I do.

Paul: Yes, you do. [Jan laughs]

It wasn't a, a startling revelation to open up the, uh, podcast with. I, I, you know, this isn't like an episode of This is Your Life where you suddenly discover a long-lost family that you didn't know about...

Jan: ...no, no. I do have a grandie, a wee grandson.

Paul: Yes. I, I mentioned this because we're gonna be talking about future generations today, and when you have a child or a grandchild who's very young and yours is 13 months...?

Jan: ...yes...

Paul: ...as you, you say, I, I would've just said one, but 13 months, we want to be very precise and if he could speak, he would be definitely on the side of confirming it's 13 months and not one year.

Um, you've got there someone who is gonna be living through all the changes that are coming up in the world, is gonna be here possibly until the next

century. You'd certainly hope until the next century. And what they're going to see is gonna be far beyond what our imaginations can possibly encompass.

Jan: Absolutely. And, um, and if, uh, if I'm lucky enough to have a chance to chatter to him, um, as he, as he grows up, I can remember, you know, the century before this one. So between him and I, we've probably got a great spread.

Paul: Yeah, and, and just so you're not making that sound like you're really old, I can remember the century before this one as well. [laughs]

Jan: You're a good friend. You are a good friend. [laughs]

Paul: There are people who were 10 years younger than me who can remember the century before this one...

Jan: ...yeah...

Paul: ...so it's not that that's not as big a boast as you might think, I'm afraid.

Jan: I was really just giving him a span that...

Paul: ...yes...

Jan: ...that he can't find in his own lived reality, most likely, although we don't know how long people are gonna live in the future. But, but between the stories that his, his granddad and his, his mum and dad and, and, um, he can tell he's gonna have quite a big storyline there.

Paul: Yes, my children can, they've got an auntie who is in her mid-eighties, so that's going back to before the Second World War, and she has some memory of, vague memories of what was going on during the Second World War. She was born in, I want to say 1939, but she'll kill me if I've accidentally added years to her...

Jan: [laughs] ...don't let her hear this...

Paul: ...yes, yeah, no, no, no. That's, I will make sure she doesn't get this particular episode. Um, but yeah, that's it.

So they've got people in their lives who've got memories going back 85 years and then you've got them who, I'd like to think, might live another 85 years. So yeah, that spread there.

Jan: So while this is fascinating, why are we thinking about generations, Paul?

Paul: Because we're gonna be talking about something called generational governance.

Jan: Excellent.

Paul: [laughs] Is that all you have to say on the matter?

Jan: Well, I think somebody else has much more to say on the matter, so yes, we'll start off there.

Paul: Yes. We'll be discussing generational governance and what all that means, because it might not be a phrase that makes a lot of sense, with Professor Nick Barter.

He's a friend of the show from Griffith University in Australia. He's spoken to us before about Future Normal, which I think we'll touch on again today.

And I guess this kind of like really builds on the ideas of Future Normal.

Hello, Nick.

Nick: Hello Paul, hello Jan. Thank you for having me on the show.

Paul: And I'd like to say, I think Nick's memory goes back to the last century as well.

Jan: It does, but only just. He's young at heart.

[Jan and Nick laugh]

Paul: Only just? You really do owe him work or something, don't you...?

Jan: ...I do, I do. Sad but true.

Paul: Nick, welcome back to Transforming Tomorrow.

So I want to touch back on the idea of Future Normal, which is the concept that essentially, what normal is now isn't necessarily what normal is going to be tomorrow, and the ways that businesses are operating is gonna change and the way they see how they operate is gonna be different.

Are we any closer to Future Normal being the new normal?

Nick: I think, in short, yes and no. And that's probably my way of saying that the future is always out there. It's just not evenly spread.

And um, yeah, some, some organisations are leaning in as we'll talk about, you know, to how they operate and operating with a principle of, um, thinking

about those who come after us and lots of organisations don't, and um, it's part of what'll come through today.

I would say a whole bunch of other stuff is going on as well. You know, our politics is high at the moment and it's creating all sorts of shifts and changes in how we think and operate.

The one thing I can be sure of though, that will always be there, is people. And one thing I can be sure with people we will love and not love. We will be about others, and we will be about self, and we will be all sorts of different spectrums. And in that regard, I think, uh, what we'll also know is what makes for a good life, I think will always be consistent.

And in that regard, you know, look, helping others and setting an example for the next generation. And I think I, I mentioned that what makes for good life, because I think it's also what makes for long lasting great businesses.

And it is when they're of service to their communities in the broad sense. And when they set an example for those who come after them, so...

Paul: Yeah, you, you mentioned there something that I was thinking about, in the, the changes that have been even in the 12 months since we last spoke, to the global political spectrum, particularly here in the UK, in the USA, and attitudes towards sustainability, attitudes towards various aspects of life, immigration, EDI, et cetera.

And it just demonstrates how things can change so sharply, so quickly, and does that affect what the Future Normal is going to be? Does that change where we might end up in 10 years time, or is it just a blip that will then even out over time?

Nick: Oh, I, I think it, I think it does because it's making us shift our language, you know?

Uh, and language is so important in our sociological sense because it shapes how we think, how we act, all the metaphors we use. So I do, I do think it, I do think it does. I think we're, we are going to see definite shifts in, in how we talk about business, what we expect from business, um, who business serves, you know.

At the moment, as we all watch the Trump show, it seems like business must only serve Mr Trump. But, you know, we're gonna see debates and, uh, along the way about, uh, how that plays out.

We're also gonna see business leaders shift against that, I'm sure. So there'll always be that spectrum of business leaders who take one view, that they try and keep up with the currents of what's happening.

And, uh, there'll be those that take another view who are playing a much longer game, um, playing for generation after generation of leaders, customers, communities, et cetera, just playing for decades and decades.

And, um, those organisations I think will probably track very similarly to they are now. And I think it's because of that piece I said about what makes for a good life and, and, um, how we are.

So we will continue to be selfish and not selfish, but what'll make for a good life I don't think will ever shift for us. It's that notion of being of service and setting an example, and I think you just roll that up on a slightly bigger scale when you talk about organisations, so.

Jan: And that, that whole idea that you've expressed about, you know, generations and looking forward, et cetera.

So I'd like to come in on that, because this is really what we're gonna talk about today, is the idea of generational governance. And I wonder what does that mean in a, in a corporate setting?

Nick: Really, when I talk about that, it means organisations. I, I mean, I'm, I'm in danger of answering the question by rearranging the way, my answer rearranging the words you had in your question, but I'll try and do a bit more than that. [Jan laughs]

For me, this means organisations engaging in a form of governance that considers the next generation. Now, when I say that, I don't mean the next set of leaders like, you know, you might, somebody might be on the board of an organisation or in the C-suite, or a manager or whatever for five, six years or whatever.

What I'm talking about when I talk about a generation is a period of 30 years, and the reason I'm using 30 years is just because it was a number that was, uh, uh, landed on out of a, a really lovely paper, sociological paper I read from the 1960s.

But also it kind of tracks with some of, uh, sociologically constructed generations, Generation X, Generation Y. And it tracks very comfortably with. The kind of typical age difference or, um, between a parent and a child. So we

can kind of get a nice handle on 30 years. And that's what I mean. So it's not the kind of next five or six years, it's a much longer period.

And within generational governance I oscillate around two things at the moment. I oscillate around all generation governance and um, next generation governance.

And what I'm really saying there is, all generation governance is where you might have a board populated, not just by the average age of a board member, for example, is 60 years. So really what I'm saying is, um, get age diversity into that board, that would be an all-generation board. And, and, and have somebody maybe 30 years old, right.

And, and, and I think that's an important thing to underline when I talk about the 30 years and the 60 years there is, not talking about teenagers. You know, I'm talking about fully paid up members, economic agents. You know, I'm talking about people that probably in most, in most large organisations, there will be people of 60 working with people of 30, you know, and they will be, you know, they won't be straight, fresh graduates either. They will be, you know, contributing economic agents within the context of the organisation.

And then the, the next generation board is really the idea that you might have a younger person advisory board to the main board, and that might be populated by that particular strata of people in their thirties, or in and around their thirties.

So I'm dealing in those few ideas, sorry, let me step back. Long term, 30 years or more. All generations who have age diversity on the main board or next generation, you have an advisory board populated by younger people in their thirties.

I'm dealing in those two main ideas, and I haven't landed on one yet. I'm just, the key principle here is getting time into the decision making process, and using the practical aspect of people being 30 years younger as a way to help understand a future they might want.

Jan: Yeah, but also the future they might imagine as well. 'Cause, you know I'm sort of approaching more of the age of your, your older people in that span.

Then, you know, you can't think, what am I gonna do in 40 years time? Because you think, oh well I, actually am I gonna be well in 10 years time? So you have a, you have a whole different sort of perspective.

So do we have good examples to draw from in these either the all generation or the next generation approaches?

Nick: Well, we have examples. The examples, a bit like my earlier comment, the future's out there, it's just not evenly spread. We have examples in companies, so some often-quoted examples from my perspective would be Good Energy in the UK who have a Good Future Board, which is younger people.

Port of Amsterdam, which has a Future Proof Governance Program. Even the clothing company Hugo Boss has a next generation board. And then I think, uh, even Pentland Brands has explored this and likewise, The Body Shop.

And then on a more confidential basis, I've worked with a bank in this area too. All of these examples really around that kind of next generation idea. I haven't seen anybody really go after the all generation idea.

And then in the, in the government area, an example that's I think well known is the country of Wales, part of the United Kingdom, which has its Well-being of Future Generations Act and a Future Generations Commissioner. And then, uh, you know, I've always had a soft spot for Finland's Ministry of the Future.

And [laughs] so, um, partly because I think there's some kind of great sixties pulp novel called Ministry of the Future somewhere. [laughs]

So yeah, so there are examples and, and hopefully more, and I think I should probably add, you know what, why do I research this? Because I want there to be more, because I want us to make organisations that last longer in terms of, deliver longer term value.

And that take on that example of how do we make decisions that, that bring in the next generation, um, into that process and actually decisions that are compatible with them. And for me that that really aligns that notion of, suddenly you get organisations making decisions for the next generation, that the next generation want, and then organisations tie in their value for the long term as well.

And so it seems to be a really nice synchronous thing, and I just. I also want to tie it back almost Jan, to our opening comment about your grandson. You know, one of the interesting things about the next generation is when we look at them, we can very quickly realise, oh, actually what the, what we've gotta now do is steward this place, our decisions to make a good citizen out of.

And likewise with your, your children, Paul, you know, we gotta steward these people to be good citizens. That's our responsibility now.

And I see that kind of ethic tied up in this. Um, and if I was to be academic about it, I would, I would quickly go to Rawls and his 'veil of ignorance' and draw on the fact that, not just the veil of ignorance around what kind of world would you want if you didn't know your gender, your colour, your education, your socioeconomic group, et cetera.

But also, what kind of world would you want bequeathed to you and would you want to bequeath to the next generation, so. And so I just think there's a high, these are high principles that allow us to reach for much greater ideals with organisations and in so doing create, in inverted commas, 'better organisations'.

Jan: I think you'd be fascinated, Nick, by the work of Professor Alfredo de Massis, who is partly here and partly at IMD in Switzerland and partly at various other places around the world. He's a very busy man.

He specifically looks at family businesses. He's got a great background in family businesses, and we will get him as a guest on this show. And part of his work looks at the influence of the next generation on sustainability attitudes in family businesses.

And he sees there that that can be such a big influence in those companies that have got boards where the next generation feature more vocally and actively...

Nick: ...mm-hmm...

Paul: ...and how that can shape what their attitudes are and how that does have an effect on sustainability practices, and what they're doing and how they're perceiving the future.

I think that that ties in really nicely with this. I say we will get him in as a guest, Jan.

Jan: He's on, he's certainly on our list. So, um, yeah, it'll happen.

Paul: So Nick, with your work though, you've been surveying companies in, um, various different countries about these ideas.

So what have you been talking to them about? What have you been asking them?

Nick: So, unfortunately we don't do surveys with clipboards, that's a very last century way to do things probably. We now do, uh, surveys with mobiles and electronically distributed and nobody ever sees anybody kind of thing.

And so we distributed a survey, so 2024, in Japan, Australia, and the UK. And we had about a thousand, just over a thousand responses from each country. The respondents were, uh, on average 43 years old, and the age range was 18 to um, I think a hundred, surprisingly.

But you know, whenever somebody puts a hundred in a survey response, you're like, yeah, I'm not so sure, but...

[Jan and Paul chuckle]

Nick: ...by the way, we had a broad age range.

Um, 70% of those people work for, for-profit companies, and about 30% were on the board or C-suite of the organisation they worked for. And really that survey was about understanding people's perceptions of this notion of generational governance.

And this, we, we, in the survey we explained an all generation board or a, a next generation board. Um, we asked them things like, did they think the organisation they worked for made decisions that consider the next generation or future generations, sorry. Did they think the organisation they worked for would benefit from implementing generational governance?

Would the decisions it make change, in their view, particularly around societal outcomes and climate change? And what did they see as the benefits and barriers of implementing generational governance?

So it was a very, you know, very straightforward questionnaire, survey, if you like. Not trying to do anything too fancy, but really we, we wanted to do it just to kind of get a sense of the world out there.

'Cause no, the, the thing with this idea is, plenty's been written on it. Plenty of academic papers have kind of, academic papers have danced around this, there's a few examples that I talked about. But nobody had done any kind of survey on it. So we thought, oh, well, let's just try and get a bit of a litmus test of what people think.

Paul: What did you actually uncover then? What did you find out?

And were there any differences between the three countries, uh, between different types of companies that you spoke to?

Nick: At a base level, people do think their organisations consider future generations and are leaving a positive legacy. And that's especially so if you are already in the board or C-suite, you really do think your company is making decisions for future generations and leaving a positive legacy.

Similarly, at a base level, people think their organisation is enabling a just society and enabling, we talked about net zero by 2050. They think that that's happening too.

Interestingly, they also believe their organisation would benefit from developing a form of generational governance. And if it did, they would, their organisation would date, make decisions that are even more socially just and even more enabling of net zero.

And again, if you're in the board or C-suite, you were even more positive about generational governance, leaving a positive legacy and making decisions for future generations than you were if you didn't have a form of generational governance.

So kind of what that, what that showed us was once you make generational governance conscious, you'll make even, even better decisions for future generations.

And then going further, we asked about barriers and potential positive outcomes. And what we got, which I was really pleased to see, was all think generational governance would enhance the long-term value of the company, enhance its reputation, and give it a greater ability to attract talent.

Again, three things which, you know, not every CEO, 'cause they're not in it for the long term, but CEOs and, and leaders in it for the long term, like everybody wants that. Can we attract talent? Can we make money over the long term? Will we enhance our reputation? Because all of those things point to customer loyalty and employee loyalty.

And then we, but then we also found these barriers of people thinking, aah, but they won't really wanna share power, they won't really want to invest in the next generation to be able to sit on these boards and alike, so. We found that was in the broad stakes what we found.

And then I think the most particular, other than the story about the board and C-suite being even more positive was, [short laugh] the Japanese are least convinced by any of this. [laughs]

They were kind of like, and that took us by surprise, I think, because you just have this notion of Japan, long-term thinking, you know, traditional steadiness. Um, but they were just middle of the road on virtually every response.

And thankfully our Japanese colleague who was involved, um, Doctor Akihiro Omura, did identify some work that had been done by some other academics, which showed this is very typical Japanese response to surveys, where they're kind of, you know, everything's a five outta 10 all the time kind of thing.

So yeah, that was probably what surprised us the most. But overall, yeah, it was a, I think it was an endorsement for generational governance and it's given us a kind of, oh yeah, we're onto something here. And like all surveys, you know, we'd change things now, we've learned from it, et cetera, et we wouldn't do the same way again.

But it's given us a spur to go forward and get these results formally released, which we're still working on. Um, but that'll be in the next few months, I would've thought, between now and Q1 next year, hopefully, and then go to the next stage of the research, so.

Jan: What I really like about that finding that, that, you know, we're pretty good, but we'd be much better and that that would sort of almost like. I, I think in answering the survey, that would maybe seed the idea in many people's minds, which I think is, um, you know, one of the great things of a survey. They're not just finding out, they're also conveying information.

So if, if you had filled in that survey and you've decided, oh wow, this is something I really want to investigate, how would a company or a, or a member of a board or a senior manager actually get started on that process?

Is there like a kit set to follow? Is there a set of guiding principles? What would I do next if you'd excited me? [Nick laughs] I just answered your survey and I go, I wanna do this.

Nick: Uh, what I will say in response to that is, I haven't come up with a set of guiding principles, but I actually, in preparation for this podcast, I thought, okay, I better start to think about what the next steps would be. [Jan laughs]

And I actually wrote down, I think it's one of the things I'd really like to do over the next phase of this research is start to develop a, a set of guidelines about moving forward on this.

But what I did was I kind of, I wrote down a few things, and this is not withstanding, there are lessons from, uh, uh, other areas. I think one of the most important lessons is you've got to, you've got to expand people's horizons.

And by with that I mean time horizons. And I think one of the ways to do that, so the protocol I wrote down was pale blue dot, the philosophy of the organisation, value for decades, and then how to intervene, and then implement and monitor.

So the pale blue dot is really a reference to Carl Sagan's video, The Pale Blue Dot, which whenever you show it to anybody, they start to get a, a much better understanding of how they are here for, you know, 80-odd years, and thus they're stewards of a time.

And once people can get into the place where they're stewards, they take a much more humble view of what they're doing in the organisation and realise, they, they can start to move to a place where they start to understand, oh, this job isn't, isn't, yes what I do and it matters to my personal reputation, but actually what I'm contributing is for this organisation to continue to deliver for all its stakeholders through time.

Once you've got that, I think you have to turn to what is this organisation all about? What's it trying to achieve? And invariably make sure that captures things like who's it of service to? Why is it of service?

And then from there you have to, it's very easy, I think then to go to the conversation of, well, who's stewarding this organisation? Where are the future customers coming from? Where are the future employees coming from? Who is likely to be, so really pack, unpacking that conversation about where people are coming from, where they're going to, how long they'll last.

So you start to add this timeline in for the organisation that is beyond length in any conventional sense that they may have. And then you can start to say, how do we govern for the next 30 years? And you would start to bring forward the conversations I had about all generation or next generation.

And agree, the parameters within which that would happen. And those parameters would really be about time value, what you want to inherit, et cetera, et cetera.

So starting to work up the kind of decision framework within that. And that's, that's, that's probably the details of that, or what the next phase of this research is gonna try and unpack a little bit more, so.

Paul: Particularly with Japanese companies, I'm aware that some of those go back hundreds, hundreds, hundreds of years...

Nick: ...yeah...

Paul: ...it's, you know, the, even something that you might think is uber-modern, I say Nintendo goes back to the 19th century. Um, albeit they didn't have Super Mario back in 1873, Jan, in case you were wondering, I could see from the look on your face, you...

Jan: ...ah no, I was just checking out your T-shirt to see if you're wearing a Super Mario t-shirt today, but...

Paul: ...no, no, no. It, it's nothing to do with, uh, super Mario.

But therefore, when you have companies that are so, so old, do they find it easier or harder to plan ahead for 30 years? Do they see 30 years as a period of nothing because they're so old and what's 30 years in the grand scheme of things?

Or do they say, yeah, we've had experience of planning for such long times in the past, so we know how we plan ahead for 30 years.

Nick: Oh yeah, no. So you're talking about what are called shinise companies. Um, it's what they're typically called. Um, and there's a wonderful researcher, I've forgotten her name, but I think she's at Warwick, um, who's researched these. Um, I think you may know her, Jan, actually, I've forgotten her name.

Jan: Um, Paul knows her, 'cause she has a connection with Lancaster.

Paul: Yes. Yeah. Uh, I know exactly who you are talking about Nick. It's in Innan Sasaki who used to be here at Lancaster, is now at, uh, Warwick and has a great love of the Moomins, 'cause we bonded over our shared Moomin badges.

I had one of Little My, and she had one of the Moomins on her bags.

Jan: Of course...

Paul: ...yes...

Jan: ...but what's really nice is that, um, I have met her as well and had a chat, and we'll make sure that we put in the show notes that we put some reference to her work. So if this is a, a point that's exciting, you, uh, dear listeners, you can go and listen to that.

She's half Japanese, half Finnish, so it has absolutely fitted in with your, your provocation, Nick, that the Japanese are really super interesting, as are the Finns. So there we are. We have that right at the heart of this.

Paul: We, we've kind of interrupted ourselves, with talk about Moomins and Finland and everything.

[Jan laughs]

Paul: Go Moomins though.

Jan: Paul, Paul, get us back on track.

Paul: The Moomins are very sustainable. That, that, that's what I say. They do a lot to look after the land and the people around them.

Jan: Excellent.

Paul: I, I dunno how they feel about next generation and generational governance. I don't know if Moominpappa has considered what Moomintroll needs to do in order to, you know, properly progress 30 years down the line.

I'm sorry, we're getting even further off track now, aren't we...?

Jan: ...we, we are. Where, where were we, Nick? Save us, save us from ourselves. [laughs]

Nick: I remember the Moomins, and that's a generation ago.

I, I think 30 years for any company that plans, like the companies you're talking about, shinise companies, typically have been around for, you know, 200 years, 300 years, even 1500 years, one of the oldest. Nintendo falls into 200 to 300 year, uh, age, I think.

You've got a lot of companies in the UK that would fall into this as well. Be they brewers or banks or all sorts of things, right? And then you've even got a few in

North America like, although I think it's just gone bust, as it were, a few years ago, but the Hudson Bay Company was falling into this.

What you see with a lot of these companies, 'cause one of the things I've been doing is distilling the lessons from these, is they have an enduring philosophy. Right? And that philosophy will be about those things I said probably at the start of this podcast, which is about being of service to others, building community, and setting an example for those who come after us.

So I don't know exactly what they think of 30 years, Paul. Um, but I'd hypothesise they go, [blows through lips] that's nothing. We're thinking much, much longer term. And I think what I'm doing when I talk about 30 years, and try and translate that to being it's about your kids or your nephew or niece, is I'm trying to collapse the psychological distance.

Because years ago I did some research where I, I was asking people, you know, which one moves you more, talking about the atmosphere or the air you breathe? Talking about the water you drink or like liquid outputs. Talking about the places you swim or the ocean.

And what I found was people are much more, the survey that I did then people are much more likely to act when you collapse the psychological distance. So when you make it about the air, they breathe, they go, oh yeah, I'll do something about that.

When you make it about the, the places they go, they'll do something about that. And hence, I, you know, the 30 years allows me to quickly go, it's about your kids or it's about your nephew or something. And, and that's the psychological distance gets collapsed and allows you then to get people thinking much further forward.

But I, to want, to come back to your point, 30 years is really nothing in where I think we could go with thinking about these organisations.

Jan: Shall we open our horizon back out to something that you said at the start, Nick, that I found really engaging and that is the idea of sustainability and, and public dialogue. And political dialogue is, is getting increasingly contentious. And even ESG, which is a very sort of watered-down version of sustainability, feels too contentious for some people.

So. Is the idea of future generations or adopting future generations thinking, is that as contentious and, and if it's not, is that a way to keep this sustainability

feel in play without antagonising people, because there's words that they find triggering and a bit difficult to think about?

Nick: I actually wrote a piece, 'cause I have my own kind of website as well called futurenormal.net, and I actually wrote a piece called Beyond Sustainable Development, which was arguing that we've got lost in the word sustainability.

People have lost sight of what it means and we need to come back to the core Brundtland definition, which had humans at the centre and basically humans now and future humans, and future humans are our kids. And, uh, you know, a like.

So I, I actually think when you talk about generations, so you talk about, I think we opened up talking about your grandchild, Jan. But when we talk in that way we can quickly get people to, it's not distant, it's close, it's not contentious.

Everybody, everybody, like, it'd be a pretty strange person that said, you know what? I want the world to be worse for my kids than it is for me. You know, that's a pretty strange contention and I'd love to meet the person. I'm sure maybe, maybe that person is out there and will reach out to me.

But that's a pretty strange contention, and I think what you get when you talk about generations and future generations is you, you actually bring it back to what sustainable, sustainability was all about. It's about people and us continuing, but you just make it much simpler because you make it about everything we care about.

Like, pretty much every human on the planet, I hypothesise, wants to set a good example for those who come after us, wants to leave some kind of positive legacy in the way they treat others, and wants the, whoever comes after them to kind of have a better go, or have the opportunity to have a better go, than they did.

And so I think it, I think the whole shift away from sustainability to talking about generational thinking makes it easier. Makes it almost beyond contention, you know, because how could you contend with that? Um, but it's still actually, once you follow the logic of it, brings forward all the other things that we consider. Such as, you know, am I, can I pollute less? Can I tread less? Can I have a better impact on the community, et cetera, et cetera?

I think it's an appropriate way forward, and I think it simplifies, because this sustainability word has, has become lost.

Jan: And I, I think this is something we'll be discussing just before Christmas with one of our guests, uh at Florencia Lujani, about the language of sustainability, and how you communicate sustainability, and how sustainability maybe isn't a word you want to use with certain people like, maybe the general public, et cetera. That ties in very nicely with the discussion we're going to have then in a few weeks time.

Well, I suppose, Nick, on the discussion that we're talking about, the next generation, it's suitable to end on a question about what's next. So what's coming next for you in this work, and what's coming next in this sphere of work generally?

Nick: What I wanted to say was, um, at the level of the generational governance research, what's next for me? It's just more of it. Just more of it.

And, and I think the immediate next is I actually want to work on, uh, creating a, a list of people who will meet and talk and sit and have in-depth discussions about this and, be they organisational, uh, you know, people who own organisations, chairmans, CEOs, shareholders, whatever. With the view to developing, you know, protocols and guidelines, if you like, to help people take the next step. And with a view to fleshing out even more of the benefits, I think.

And then, you know, alongside that, interestingly enough, I'm about to, in the next couple of months, put pen to paper on the next Future Normal book, which is the last thing I spoke to you about.

And that is gonna be the, you know, how to build enduring organisations and it's gonna take all the lessons we have from organisations such as shinise organisations, but also others. About what it means to build great long-lasting organisations.

And part, generational governance is part of that ingredient list, as is a whole bunch of other stuff, which I won't bore you with now.

So my whole trajectory going forward, uh, within the context of this research is more of it and my trajectory going forward is more of how do you build great, long lasting companies that deliver value for generation after generation?

Jan: Well, well, I think Nick's just earned his, his place in series four.

[Everyone laughs]

Jan: Can we think, can we think that far ahead?

Paul: I don't know! Do we have a future generations board that's considering whether season four is the way to go forward or whether we just, uh, stop season three?

Jan: Oh no, we've gotta have season four.

Look, Nick, that was brilliant. Thank you.

Paul: Thank you very much, Nick. It's been great having you back on the show.

[Theme music]

Paul: So Jan, that's a lot to consider there and my main worry is that your grandson is gonna be demanding some kind of rights for the amount of times that we've mentioned him in, in this show. [Jan laughs]

How aware is he about copyright and commercial licensing and, you know, the use of his own image and, uh, being, et cetera?

Jan: Mmmm, at the moment he's really interested in shower curtains, I'm told. But also, I mean, I should say something about, about the wee man. So like, I haven't had children, so he is my grandson, but it is basically my husband's grandson. If you're gonna go all biological on this, which, uh, I don't really sort of think is, is worth it.

But I suppose, and I never really understood when people said, I had kids and I thought about the world in a different way, because I didn't have kids. So I, so I couldn't make sense of it. But it's been, I found it really intriguing when this wee, well partly 'cause, I mean, we love his mum and then this, another wee person arise to be a part of our family.

And so I, I, I think I, I think I am, I should call him my grandson, I view him as my grandson. He's got more grandmothers than most people need [Jan and Paul laugh] because of the, the hybridity of that family setting. But it's just, yeah, it does sort of make you think a wee bit further again. And I thought I was already thinking in that way...

Paul: ...mm-hmm...

Jan: ...wo I think it's not about, um, necessarily having, you know, blood relatives of a certain age, but actually to have a, a good in-depth experience with someone and think, ah, actually what's their life gonna be like?

And I think that can happen in, in all sorts of contexts. You don't have to have kids yourself to do that.

Paul: Wait until he starts asking you questions about these kind of topics in ways that only children can, or along the lines of, you know, well, why do we use plastics then?

Uh, you know, if, if there are, why do people keep throwing rubbish everywhere? And why, why is it that if it's bad, why do we keep using like coal and gas and all this...?

Jan: ...yeah...

Paul: ...and they'll ask them in ways that are very simple and straightforward as children, not the ways that people will post on LinkedIn, that their 5-year-old has asked the question worthy of a Nobel Prize winner. [Jan laughs]

But they will ask questions around these areas and you've got to try and think about them and, uh, yeah, for the areas at the, oh, the topics that come up there.

And, you know, I, I start thinking about, I don't even know if when my children are fully grown up, the house that I grew up in will even be accessible if sea levels continue to rise.

Jan: Ah, yeah.

Paul: I don't think that the house itself will necessarily have flooded over because it's high enough up that it would take a three metre or something sea level rise in order to do that.

But is it gonna be so easily accessible? Because parts of the way that you get there are gonna be flooded on such a regular basis and...

Jan: ...yeah...

Paul: ...yeah. You start thinking about all kinds of things, yeah.

Jan: But what I also really liked about what Nick was talking about was that distinction between like all generation and next generation.

Paul: Mm-hmm.

Jan: And so that actually opening up a temporal perception or, or a way of valuing different things or making sense of different things is, is really important.

And I don't necessarily by the totalising nature of Gen X, Gen whatever, but there is something about one's life experience over a particular period of time that definitely does shape how you think about things, what your expectations are.

And I suppose for people, you know, more or less our age, which I suspect a lot of our, our listeners will be, um, that row back from sustainability, from equality and diversity, from some of those things that we've maybe taken for granted 'cause I've been there during our working lives, is actually quite a surprise.

And it takes a bit to sort of get your head around. So I think, yeah, the sense of flux is always there.

Paul: Yeah. It's... essentially we've been moving further and further towards issues such as equality and around topics of sustainability for so, so long over our lives. Everything has moved gradually in that direction.

That then comes the pushback. It's pushing further away over these last, well this last 12 months especially, there's been so much talk. And it's almost if you want to talk about sustainability, if you're in America, you're so far on the left, you may as well be Chairman Mao. It's gone that extreme in discussions in certain countries.

And as Nick says, it's what happens and how it's treated as maybe a bump in the road, rather than a definitive change in tack. And how for these companies that have been going for hundreds of years, even more than a thousand years, in some regards, that 30 years is nothing, therefore the last 12 months, that's, that's less than nothing.

Jan: Yes. And, um, we'll put on the show notes for, for this episode, the Pentland Centre did some work on longevity, resilience and, and, um, thinking about the, the future.

So we, we had a conversation with some really engaging folk, you know, thinking about some of those lessons from those Japanese companies, to make sense of when these things happen.

So we'll make sure that's in the show notes, 'cause that's a piece of work we did a while ago, and it's sort of been, been sitting there and I'm kind of like aware it's there, but I think it is now just going to gel and crystallise with this work that's Nick's done. And it's gonna become, you know, feed into that in a good way.

So that's always good, to have work in your pocket.

Paul: Mm-hmm. And I think that something else that struck me, um, from the Japanese companies, as well as the, the longevity of them there, was the fact that they always rate everything five out of 10.

Which makes me worry, a) for people who are employed by companies such as Uber there, knowing that if you get one rating less than 10 out of 10 in certain countries in the world, then you'll come up for a disciplinary and a big inspection of how you operate. But it also makes you feel that they, they do view everything in that long term thing of, yeah, five outta 10, because we've seen in the past that it could be so much better, so much worse. Everything now is just normal.

Jan: Yeah, I know. And that, that was something that we, you know, first pass the results, we go, Japan didn't do what we thought! Did we ask the right questions? And we may now, we may, I mean, to ask questions of a, an Australian, a UK, and Japanese audience, the same questions is actually maybe, ill-considered, but it's also quite hard.

So actually understanding that, that some of those differences between countries are actually about cultural ways of answering questionnaires, not about actual underlying preferences.

Paul: Mm-hmm. And I know we've spoken in the past about the work that you do around, uh, seafood agencies and stuff, and there's ties there with Japan...

Jan: ...yes...

Paul: ...and the companies there and how that they maybe do their reporting, uh, and such and how it's different there...

Jan: ...yeah...

Paul: ...each company, sorry, each country, and indeed each company, is gonna have different attitudes and approaches. And I liked as well what Nick was saying, that they spoke to all these people and lots of them like to think, these

companies, they already doing stuff towards net zero, 2050 and just society, but that's gonna happen. But that it could be happening better.

Jan: Yeah. I thought that was, yeah, that was an interesting. Yeah, we're great. We could be better. That's a, that's a pretty nice way to start a report, isn't it?

[Jan and Paul laugh]

Paul: Yeah, that's it. We're doing lots of good stuff, but that's not to say we can't be doing more...

Jan: ...yeah, I like that...

Paul: ...which, that, that's a really positive way to, to think about it. And that's their own perceptions of what they're doing, of course. What outside perceptions of what companies are doing is gonna be different and the reality is gonna be different again.

But it's good to see that there's recognition from even those that recognise the need for change around sustainability issues that, and they see themselves doing things. There's always room for improvement.

Jan: Indeed, indeed.

Paul: Well, there's always room for improvement on this podcast as well, Jan.
[Jan laughs]

Um, I'll be giving you notes afterwards and you can act upon them...

Jan: ...I shall do...

Paul: ...I'll see if you do indeed act upon them in our next episode, when we're going to be going once again into space, because frankly, we've only done a few episodes on space and we just need to do more, more, more.

Jan: Absolutely. I think that would be good.

Paul: Yes. 'Cause we're gonna be speaking to Mia Hammond, who's from the University of Washington over on the far West Coast. I say the far West Coast, it's just the West Coast. [Jan laughs] It's not like there's two coasts over there. From the West Coast of America.

She's gonna be talking to us about the development of space in the Arctic specifically and that region and the effects there are on the people there and why it is such an important region for space.

Jan: And that's two, two out frontiers, isn't it? The frontier of the Arctic and how it all changes, climate change passes through that region and, and accelerating, but also, uh, space, the distant future.

I'm, I'm looking forward to that.

Paul: It's like you were doing a really bad Star Trek impersonation. Space, the distant future. No, I mean, final frontier, aaaw...

[Jan laughs]

Paul: ...oh, ah, we're almost there, almost there. There's copyright reasons that we can't just carry on using the...

Jan: ...exactly, exactly...

Paul: ...same one as the phrase for this research.

Until then, thank you very much for listening. I'm Paul Turner.

Jan: And I'm Professor Jan Bebbington.

[Theme music]