

ORAUX Mutualisés de Langues (ex IENA) 2025

ANGLAIS

SOMMAIRE

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Dialogue 1 The ‘hotelification’ of offices

A: Paul, I’m so glad to run into you.

B: Hey, Jeannie, how’s it going?

A: Great! I just heard you got a job in Silicon Valley, and you’ll be moving soon to California.

B: Yes, it’s true. I’m very excited.

A: Congratulations! Will your office be a “work resort”?

B: Sorry – what do you mean?

A: Well, it seems the new trend in office design is to make the workspace seem like a super luxurious hotel, or a spa.

B: Not me. I’ll be working from home three to four days a week. The rest in the company headquarters. In an industrial park. But what’s the idea about these new spaces?

A: It’s precisely to bring people back into the office, after the years they have spent working from home. It’s to attract them with the comfort and beauty of what you can find in a resort. They are such inviting places; you want to be there.

B: I’m quite happy working from my home office. Not commuting for three hours, and able to organize my own time. Coffee when I like.

A: I can understand that, but consider what these work resorts offer. Take the example of the Springline complex in Menlo Park, probably not too far from where your new company is. It’s a 3-hectare town square just minutes from the train station. It has two premium office buildings, nine restaurants, outdoor workspaces and terraces, a gym, and an Italian grocery store. All the decoration is luxurious. Plus plenty of community events, cocktail hours and so on.

B: That sounds sumptuous. Do people actually get work done?

A: Absolutely. The large, open spaces encourage interaction and collaboration with other employees. They are essential aspects of company productivity.

B: Not for me. I’m an introverted, solitary kind of guy. I don’t like mingling with people.

A: You wouldn’t necessarily have to. But the opportunity is there. And who knows—you might come out of yourself. Plus, these spaces anticipate all your needs—places to get a drink, quiet places to make a call, different lounge areas where you can work from, meditation pods.

B: Are there lots of these work resorts?

A: It’s growing. Office vacancy rate in the U.S. is 20 percent. This has had disastrous effects on the surrounding shops and services. So out of this came the idea to transform traditional offices into workspaces that are like hotels. It’s referred to as “hotelification”—it’s adding the hospitality experience.

B: Would this hotel-like experience compensate for me having to get up so early for my long commute?

A: Perhaps. A recent workplace survey found that what employees need is to feel that their office space is beautiful, welcoming, and that it inspires new thinking, as do the work resorts.

B: So companies are spending millions of dollars to transform their workspaces. They want to keep the workers happy – when they should be ready to return to the office anyway. Another thing. If all the amenities—from places to eat to places to exercise—are within the work resort, I don't see how this will bring back the lunch shops, the gyms that closed down.

A: That's a good point. But it doesn't seem to have discouraged the designers of some other even wilder work resort concepts. One in Chicago comprises 2.4 million square feet of office space, and includes lounges, a fitness center, an infrared sauna, an on-site dietician.

B: This seems another example of crazy money being spent by crazy Americans.

A: Well, there's a work resort planned for London. It will have an open market square with food and drink stalls, there will be music and entertainment, plus a private boat dock and kayaks that can be rented for the commute home.

B: If you live near the river. It's all a bit much. My view is that a stronger work ethic is what people need, rather than pampering. And I wonder, Jeannie, what employees would say if they were asked, "Would you rather have this fancy work resort, or a salary increase". I would answer a salary increase.

A: Give me a work resort, every time, Paul!

Summary

With many employees working from home, some companies have come up with a new concept to entice them back into the office. The idea is to make their office spaces as beautiful and welcoming as a luxurious hotel or a spa, offering all sorts of amenities, so that employees will want to spend their time in such an environment. From their fitness centers to meditation pods, restaurants and bars to open-air terraces, these spaces are luring employees back. This process of turning traditional office spaces into environments more like hotels, with all the amenities that they offer, is called "hotelification". While some welcome these new spaces, others are still partial to the ease and freedom that working from home offers.

Questions

1. Do you see this as a possible growing trend- or is it only for the wealthiest tech companies?
2. Do you agree with the speaker who says that a stronger work ethic is needed?
3. Has the 'working from home' phase now disappeared, or has it changed working habits permanently?
4. What would be your favored way of working?

Dialogue 2 AI job interview

A: Anna, good to see you. How was your weekend?

B: Hi Hugo. Actually, it was terrible.

A: What happened?

B: You know I'm looking for a new job?

A: Yes. You told me your company folded, and you were made redundant. Any possibilities yet?

B: Well, that's the problem. Late on Friday I saw an interesting job with a charitable nonprofit organization, working with disabled people. They need someone to write accessible English content for their communications. Just right for me.

A: Sounds good. So, you sent in your application, it was acknowledged, and you were expecting some contact after the weekend. Right?

B: Yes. I did apply: put in my CV, submitted the form, thought I was in with a chance. Then a reply email popped up almost immediately. I was invited to take the next step in the application process. This was to answer some "personality" questions in a sort of pre-interview. But not with a person – with a chatbot.

A: That does sound weird. All this was happening on Friday night? With the weekend already started?

B: Exactly. Well, I thought, I can do "personality" questions ok. They started with the usual "Tell me about yourself" stuff.

A: And, I suppose, the standard interview questions. "Tell us how you overcame some problems", "Tell us how you work in a team", "Tell us why you want this job".

B: That's right. I submitted those answers, but then another email arrived, not from the hiring organization. It was from a third-party Artificial Intelligence platform. The rather ominous subject line read "Your personality insights, Anna".

A: But you hadn't agreed to that kind of process. You thought you were just answering fairly standard job interview questions?

B: Yes. But the email then gave me six "insights"; some were ok, like enjoying a challenge, being positive, confident and enthusiastic. But after that I began to feel targeted.

A: By some pretty negative comments?

B: Yes. The AI platform told me that not everyone likes positive, confident and enthusiastic people. Had I considered I might seem a bit abrasive, or arrogant? Why did I keep getting defensive when other people made suggestions? And then – how about this – have I ever tried listening to other people for a change?

A: I can't believe this. How did you feel?

B: Angry and upset. Having your character criticized by some machine learning chatbot, an automated system – and on the weekend – was not a nice experience. Plus, there was one other thing at the end. It was called "Coaching Tips".

A: What advice did they give you?

B: They said I should adapt my working style to be less unnerving for people. By this stage of the so-called interview, there had been no human interaction with anybody at all. Just AI.

A: What about the organization that is hiring people? Why do they do this?

B: I looked into it. Apparently the number one complaint from job hunters is that they never get to hear back after applying. The idea is that everybody gets a rapid response – even if it tears you to bits, as it did with me!

A: I guess in the modern world, more organizations are using this kind of automated reply.

B: Yes. It seems supermarkets, airlines, stores and lots of other people use this automated AI platform.

A: Just to put the other side of the story here. You applied for a job, submitted the application, then got an almost instant response, with some observations on what you said. Isn't that better than waiting a long time for an answer that might never come? At least you know where you are.

B: That's true, but it doesn't take into account the totally impersonal nature of the experience. Lots of people applying for jobs can be a bit depressed or anxious. A cold assessment on a computer screen, pointing out your defects, is not the way to do it. Who wants to be told, by Artificial Intelligence, that if you are unemployed, the problem might be **you**?

A: I understand that. Anyway, I hope you can find a job soon, Anna, from talking to real people!

Summary

Two friends are discussing a job 'interview' that one of them recently had. It was all conducted online, including personality questions, with a chatbot. Various observations about the personality of the applicant were made, which had the effect of demoralizing the person. These were all automated replies, with no human intervention. The methods and the consequences of this approach to dealing with job applications is considered.

Questions

1. Do you have any experience of job interviews yourself?
2. Can you understand the point of view of a company which puts in place an automated system of dealing with job applications?
3. Do you think the person in the dialogue was too sensitive, and over-reacted to the chatbot?
4. What do you need to do to prepare yourself for a successful job interview?

Dialogue 3 Modern dictators put democracy under threat

A. Good morning. I'm Tony Pullin, on 'Politics Today'. Now, when we think of dictators, we often picture a lone strongman in total control of a country. But journalist and writer Anne Applebaum, who is here with us today, describes a "network of convenience" that exists among various autocratic states. Hi, Anne. Could you elaborate on that?

B. Hi Tony, of course. Unlike dictatorships of the past, a modern form of a dictatorship involves several autocratic states collaborating together. I would include China, Russia, Venezuela and Turkey among others. They oppose democracy as we understand it.

A. Maybe it resembles a big group of different companies, each running their own activities, but cooperating when it's convenient? A bit like Turkey: sometimes they support the west, sometimes not. How would you explain this shift? Why is this happening?

B. If we look at Russia, when Putin and his group came to power, they took control of many of Russia's material resources – gas, petrol and so on. They became very rich. They found ways to launder this money through European and American banks. In the process, they became very cynical about the Western world.

A. And so they wanted at all costs to keep the money they made, and also the power they obtained from it.

B: That's right. But to be fair, it's not just Putin or his team. Other modern world dictators are also beginning to see and use different ways of stealing and hiding money, through tax havens and Western banks.

A. All this is happening now, in the US, the UK, and other western nations?

B. Yes, it is. In several American states it's possible for anyone to set up an anonymous company whose true owner is completely hidden. They don't need to worry about their accountability or public opinion. Along with that, there were systems in place in the real estate business, allowing anyone to buy property anonymously.

A. I had no idea that was possible. And you've mentioned some cities that have been impacted?

B. Yes, the most notorious one is London. This stores enormous wealth from the oligarchies and modern dictatorships, Russia especially. Some apartment buildings there have been built just to serve as banks, effectively. They enable their undisclosed owners to hide their money. At the same time as there is a housing shortage in London...

A. How sad. Anne, you write about Donald Trump. Does he fit somewhere into your broader theory of autocracy?

B. Now, I know this is controversial, in the early months of the Trump second presidency. But I think there is a real threat to democracy. To me, the US does not see itself anymore as a democracy uniting and leading other democracies.....

A:come on, that's too strong, isn't it? The American system has its Congress, House of Representatives and Supreme Court? Not to mention the 50% or so of the country who did not vote Trump?

B: Trump is, I think, transactional - “what’s in it for me” seems to be his approach, whether the “me” is his personal wealth, or the USA. There’s no doubt he and his family profited financially from his first term as President, and probably the second one as well.

A: I do accept something of a parallel between the mega-rich Trump, and some other very wealthy world leaders.

B: One member of the German Parliament recently told me that he wondered what the world would look like with three dictatorships: Russia, China and the United States.

A: There again, I think you go too far. In less than four years’ time there will be a new American President, which may well not be true for China and Russia!

B: Maybe, but there is a global shift, in my view, towards more autocratic governments. They use every means to persuade us to believe what they say. They are very good at misinformation.

A: That’s true. It’s easy to lose hope and become inert when you don’t know who to believe. So lots of people disengage from politics, Anne.

B: That’s right, Tony. We mustn’t give in to the autocrats, but have opinions, fight for them, and for democracy too.

Summary

The dialogue is between a journalist and an author, who explains her vision of modern dictatorship and sheds light on modern financial systems that allow kleptocrats to launder money through Western banks. She notes that some American states and London have become financial havens, enabling corruption. She also comments on Donald Trump's alignment with autocratic values, suggesting the U.S. could shift from promoting democracy to transactional autocracy. She urges citizens to stay engaged and fight for their democratic rights against the spread of disinformation.

Questions

1. Do you agree with the speaker who says President Trump is a danger to democracy?
2. One speaker mentions a global shift towards autocratic governments – do you believe this is the case?
3. Is there a danger in having very rich people in charge of a country? (We might think of Rishi Sunak as well as Donald Trump).
4. What can individual citizens do to protect democracy in their own countries?

A: Today, we look into how one of the world’s most popular singer-songwriters of our times took on the music industry, and won. You’ve guessed it, Taylor Swift. Music Specialist Julia Nightingale will share her insights. Julia, where to begin?

B: Well, at the end of 2019 there were around 80,000 members of the Taylor Swift community on Reddit. Today there are 2.8m. Between 2023 and 2024 the number of times her name was mentioned in the *New York Times* was only slightly less than Joe Biden’s!

A: Incredible!

B: Yes. Her career successes are impressive, like her universally acclaimed July 2020 album “Folklore” released during lockdown. But the key to understanding them is understanding her keen business sense.

A: Like in November 2021. She re-recorded one of her early albums following the controversy around her first contract signed with Big Machine Records in 2005.

B: That contract had stipulated Big Machine kept the rights to the “masters” (the original recordings) of her albums. As Swift grew more successful, she became frustrated she didn’t own them. And so subsequently wasn’t earning much in royalties.

A: Didn’t she try to buy back her songs ?

B: Yes, but in vain. In 2018 she got a contract with a different company for her new songs. But those of her old albums were still not hers.

A: So Swift began to re-record those old albums.

B: Yes, that began a period of dominance that has been extremely lucrative for Swift and her team – I call them Taylor Incorporated, or Taylor Inc. She is worth about \$1.3bn and about 75% has been made since 2021.

A: Don’t many Swifties refuse to listen to the original recordings, saying the masters were “stolen” from Swift?

B: Yes, but it’s common for record companies to own masters’ rights. She had some negative publicity for a few years, and two albums were not very well received. By 2019 it seemed that the best of Swift’s career might be behind her.

A: So, the dispute over the masters helped change things?

B: She started talking about getting back the rights to her masters. From the beginning, Swift controlled the narrative. She painted herself as a victim, taking on the music industry that had not let her buy her masters back.

A: But she's not the first musician to complain about ownership of their masters; Prince and Paul McCartney had the same problem. Many artists issue anniversary editions of albums; some release new versions or "remaster" old works.

B: True, but no one has received as much acclaim as Swift. One can't overstate the importance of the story as *she* told it in the eventual success of the re-recordings. The Swifties' image of their idol – a woman standing up to the male-dominated music industry – protects her even when things go wrong.

A: Like when Taylor Inc wanted a large number of her 2022 Era tour tickets to be sold at once to make the biggest possible splash, but then Ticketmaster's website crashed.

B: Fans blamed Ticketmaster, not her, showing Taylor Inc's knack for turning bad situations to its advantage. This cleverness – even ruthlessness – has shaped its strategy from the start.

A: How's that?

B: Family. Swift and her family are in charge of tours, fan clubs and rights management. New companies were also formed to deal with each stage of Swift's career, and some 16 corporations comprise Taylor Inc today. But the number of people linked to these entities is small. Swift's inner circle includes her parents, brother (tour manager), lawyer and personal assistant. They've been with her since the beginning.

A: Most artists leave the details to external teams or their record labels. She has a small close group.

B: She is surrounded by people whose livelihoods depend on her, not a portfolio of artists., This breeds loyalty and making it easier to keep control of the narrative.

Summary Taylor Swift is not just a talented singer-songwriter that has 2.8 million Reddit fans worldwide. Swifties, whose image of their idol – a woman standing up to the male-dominated music industry – protects her even when things go wrong. Swift is a shrewd businesswoman who, with her family are in charge of tours, fan clubs and rights management. The genius of Taylor Inc is the ability to pursue sharp business tactics, while being careful not to undermine Swift's wholesome image.

Questions

- 1) What is your opinion on the reasons for Taylor Swift's worldwide popularity?
- 2) How do you listen to music?
- 3) Are musicians paid properly for the work they do, or are they exploited by the big companies and streaming services?
- 4) How is "controlling the narrative" important in business – do all the successful businesses manage to do this?
- 5) What changes could AI bring into the music business?

Dialogue 5 Cruise ship tourism in Alaska.

A: Hi there Jonas, you have a new job, I hear?

B: That's right, Karla, I'm working now for the Alaska Public Office. My job is to promote the economic health and wellbeing of our community here in Juneau. To see everyone better off.

A: Oh no. You're trying to persuade more of those cruise ships to come here?

B: That's right. There's huge interest now in Alaskan cruises. Glaciers, whales, wilderness – we are a brilliant attraction!

A: Well, let me tell you right out, Jonas. Juneau, my home, has been transformed into an amusement park for tourists. The constant noise of helicopters and the disruption from cruise ships are unbearable. Every day between April and October, helicopters ferry tourists from cruise ships to the remote glaciers, and I experience up to 75 flights a day overhead. It's impossible to enjoy my town any more.

B: Oh, come on Karla, aren't you exaggerating a bit? We can't ignore the reality: tourism, especially from cruise ships, is the lifeblood of our local economy.

A: You don't understand, Jonas. Beyond the noise, this industry has completely reshaped our community. Our small town was once quiet and connected to nature. It has now become dominated by an influx of thousands of visitors daily. We're a backdrop for people's vacation photos.

B: Karla, Juneau is a small, remote town. Without the cruise industry, we would face severe economic challenges. Tourists on the cruise ships bring a ripple effect — local food producers, mechanics, electricians, gas stations rely on the cruise business. And yes, the helicopter company! Without it, we'd be looking at higher unemployment rates and fewer opportunities for young people.

A: I agree that the cruise industry does bring jobs, but at what cost? When you focus solely on the economic benefits, you ignore the long-term damage! Tourism in Juneau has become completely unsustainable. We no longer have the space to enjoy our own town! Helicopter noise, traffic jams and streets are clogged up with tourists. And what about the environmental damage? The cruise ships are massive, they pollute the waters, harm marine life, and disrupt local ecosystems. They should be banned!

B: Come on Karla, it's not as simple as saying we should shut it all down. It's important to recognize that Juneau's economy has shifted. Yes, Juneau was built on industries like timber and gold, but those are no longer viable. Tourism keeps our community alive.

A: I am not against tourism as such, Jonas, but this industrial tourism! And the reality is, most of the profits are not staying here. The cruise lines are large corporations, many of them based in Miami or other distant locations. So yes, we're getting some money from the tourists themselves, but certainly not from those big companies. Their profits go elsewhere! Meanwhile, the very landscapes and wildlife that people come here to see are being damaged. We need to protect our environment and way of life before it's completely destroyed.

B: We must find a way to balance growth and sustainability, and I believe it's possible to have both. The key is working together, finding solutions that protect the environment, while also supporting local businesses.

A: I agree with you on that. We need to rethink how we approach tourism. Let's focus on smaller, more sustainable options that allow visitors to experience the wilderness without overwhelming our town.

B: To be honest I don't believe we can stop the development of the cruise ship industry. We have to work with the cruise lines, local businesses, and residents to develop a sustainable model for tourism. This means limiting the number of visitors during peak times. And have environmental protections in place. But also investing in infrastructure that can handle the influx of tourists without overwhelming the community. It's not about choosing between tourism and preservation, but about finding a middle ground that ensures both can coexist.

A: I don't think that'll be enough to save our lands and traditions, Jonas.

Summary

Two Alaskans, debate cruise ship tourism and its effects on the town of Juneau, which has become divided over the huge increase in the number of tourists brought in by cruise ships. One speaker is strongly against it as the noise and heavy traffic have made her life difficult. She believes that this type of tourism damages the environment and is destroying her town's traditional culture and traditions. The other speaker works for a public agency working for the town's economic development;

Questions

1. Do you think it is possible to reconcile the two points of view expressed in this discussion?
2. Are you aware of other places which might be experiencing a similar problem to Juneau?
3. Is it realistically possible to limit the number of persons visiting a particular place?
4. Has the cruising industry become too large, in that it threatens to overwhelm certain places?

A: Hi Tony! Good to see you. I guess you're always busy here in the hospital emergency unit. Are you still dealing with gunshot wounds?

B: Yes, I am, Cindy. Too many.

A: So, what about this new public health advisory about firearms? I saw that the US Surgeon General's Office has for the first time ever issued a public health advisory about firearms. They say its goal is to reframe the conversation about death by gunfire.

B: That's right. 48,000 Americans were killed by guns in last year. It's appalling.

A: But I don't see the point in calling the issue a public health crisis. That's pretty weak, isn't it?

B: Well, I think this report is really important. It shines a spotlight on this public health issue. Think about the surgeon general's report on smoking and tobacco, years ago. It changed the paradigm and allowed us to tackle the tobacco industry. So, this is something that I think allows us to look at the cures to gun violence. Not through a political lens, but a scientific and public health lens.

A: Alright, that 1964 advisory report on the health risks of smoking *did* reframe the national conversation about smoking. But smoking cigarettes was not a constitutionally protected right. Whereas the right to bear arms is. There's no real comparison.

B: Let me explain. We physicians have a responsibility to our patients to advise them as to what's the best thing for their health. So we tell them to stop smoking. We have that same responsibility when it comes to talking to our patients about firearms. It's something that is harmful to their health.

A: So you think that gun violence can be tackled like any other sort of public health crisis? I don't really see how...

B: Let me give you another example. For a long time, children and teenagers' number one cause of death was motor vehicles. That has now been overtaken by firearm violence. With vehicles, we've done things like having car seats for children. They can't sit in the front seat of cars now. And no one has gotten rid of cars! We can do the same sorts of things to firearms.

A: So what you have in mind is actually the kinds of policies that the surgeon general recommends - things like requiring safe storage of guns, universal background checks on owners, and a ban on assault weapons. But these are the responsibility of political decision-makers, not doctors!

B: I think you're wrong, Cindy! I like to think about it the same way we, public health professionals, think about any other disease process, and that's prevention. It involves those things you mention -like background checks, and so on. Safety measures!

A: OK... can I ask you a personal question?

B: Yes, of course...

A: You are a gun owner, Tony. How can you own a gun while supporting these measures to prevent gun violence?

B: Actually, I don't see it as contradictory. I live in Texas where there's a very strong gun culture. My house was broken into when I first moved there. My wife went to the store the next day and bought a couple of guns. Until then, I had never actually owned a firearm myself. But we were responsible about it. We took courses to know how to use them, and then once we had a child, we put those firearms away in a safe place.

A: But as a gun-owning physician, I don't think you're legitimate in telling people what they should or shouldn't do!

B: It's not my job to tell you how to run your house, but it is my job to tell you about risk. The surgeon general's statement is important, as we can now tell people about the risks.

A: Can this really change public opinion, when mass school shootings haven't managed to do so?

B: I hope so, Cindy. When people talk about things like mass shootings or assault weapons, they may disagree. What I'm hoping, though, is that the report will allow us to talk about this topic in an evidence-based way. And have positive proposals to save lives.

Summary

Two friends discuss the recent Surgeon General's Office public health advisory report about firearms. One speaker is not convinced it is the role of the Surgeon Office to release such a statement and she doubts its efficiency. The other, a doctor, compares the epidemic of gun violence to other public health issues: smoking, which a similar report helped tackle, and children's deaths in car accidents, which prevention measures helped reduce. The doctor also explains that being a gun owning physician is not in contradiction with his advocating for prevention measures. His role, and the role of the report, is to inform people about the risks.

Questions

1. Do you think that establishing gun violence as a public health crisis will help the situation in the USA?
2. Why is it that gun control is such a controversial topic in the US?
3. How do you feel about a doctor also being a gun owner?
4. Can you see any comparison on this issue with smoking and tobacco, or car safety?

A: Welcome to UK Update. I'm Lucy Peters. There was a week last summer when England felt on the edge. It began in Southport with the killing of three little girls at a Taylor Swift dance class. Violence soon spread to cities across England. It was fuelled by misinformation online about the alleged attacker, who was wrongly said to be an asylum seeker. Josh Martin, you were in Southport to report on the attacks, when you suddenly found yourself in the middle of a riot...

B: Yes, I was so shocked by how quickly it turned violent.

A: Can you just remind us how widespread these riots were?

B: The first riot took place in Southport the day after the attack at the holiday club. The following night there was disorder in Middlesbrough. Then it quickly moved on to places like London, Liverpool, Bristol ...

A: I think there were riots in around 14 cities in the UK.

B: That's right. There were hundreds of people at many of these incidents. They targeted mosques initially, and then hotels housing asylum seekers. Then any business near these buildings was also caught in the crossfire - shops were looted, cars were torched. I was totally taken aback by how unpredictable and violent it was right from the very beginning.

A: You also covered the trials of those who were charged with taking part in the riots. Most of them were men in their 40s, 50s, or 60s. They were overwhelmingly white British. In the aftermath of the Southport attacks there were quite a lot of local politicians who were blaming outsiders for this violence. Did that turn out to be the case?

B: It didn't. Actually, three quarters of those charged lived within a 5-mile radius of where the riots took place. They were locals. It was comforting at the time to think that rioters were outsiders - but they weren't.

A: Another thing I found startling. It's that there were families who were involved. There was a 24-year-old man who was caught on camera carrying his two-year-old son around. While he was shouting racial abuse and throwing bricks at the police!

B: Yes, it looked like a family outing for some people. I remember a mum who stood next to me who was there with her young son looking absolutely terrified!

A: What do we know now about the motivations of those involved and how they ended up at the scenes? The court reports that many of those involved said that they were really drunk at the time.

B: It's actually true. There was for instance this 69-year-old grandad who took part in a looting attack on a library in Liverpool. His lawyer said that he had been drunk and that he'd been disinhibited by the presence of a large crowd. In many cases, lawyers for those defendants, for the younger people in particular, said their clients didn't even know the difference between far-right and far-left. They had never been interested in politics. They said their client was caught up in a moment of madness and was now ashamed and overwhelmed with regret.

A: What I also find surprising is that not all of the people who were prosecuted were physically at the riots.

B: Yes, there's one really noticeable case of a 41-year-old childminder who made the news. She's married to a counsellor in Northamptonshire. She had posted on social media messages calling for people to burn down hotels housing asylum seekers. She was charged with inflaming tensions.

A: Why were so many children involved in the riots?

B: It seems that they were mainly there because they heard about it all on social media and they wanted to see what was happening, because their friends were there.

A: When you were in court watching these children, did you get a sense that they understood why what they had done was wrong?

B: Many of them apologised and said they were ashamed of their actions. I think it was only when they had been arrested by police and brought before the court that they understood the seriousness of their actions. Many of them had never been in trouble with the police before.

Summary

This is a dialogue between a journalist who was in Southport during the summer riots and then in court during the subsequent trials of rioters. He describes how violent those riots were and explains who the rioters were: mainly British white men who lived in the area, but also families and young people. The motivations varied but it seems that many of them had no political motivation. Some were drunk and got carried away, and young people were there to be with their friends, after hearing about the riots on social media. Many of them didn't realize the scope of what they had done and regret what they did.

Questions

1. Why do you think the question of immigration is such a controversial one in many Western nations?
2. How much of a role does social media play in mass gatherings which sometimes become violent?
3. Should the big tech companies do more to regulate inflammatory posts on social media?
4. Do you think that the growing polarisation of politics in many countries is likely to lead to more violence in society?

A: Now Alex, is that tea I see you drinking here in Starbucks?

B: Hello, Emma, yes, it is. I'm trying a herbal tea.

A: Well, you're part of a trend. I read recently that regular normal black tea is losing its appeal in the UK. It's no longer everyone's go-to drink.

B: I know! It's so strange to think about. Tea is practically a part of British identity, right? It seems younger people don't feel the same connection to it anymore.

A: I heard one young person say that tea feels like "an old person's drink." I guess younger generations are exploring more modern and trendy options like iced tea or herbal teas.

B: Exactly. It's such a stark contrast to the older generations who seem to love it. It makes me wonder if this is just a generational shift or if it's something bigger.

A: Well, the numbers definitely show it's not just a few people. Tea sales have dropped by over 4% compared to just two years ago. One well-known brand, Typhoo Tea, has even gone out of business after 120 years.

B: More customers now want to focus on healthier drinks and iced teas. Those appeal much more to younger people.

A: Yes, tea companies are being forced to innovate to stay relevant. One very old brand, Twinings is already doing it with their canned sparkling tea. Kombucha is becoming a big trend. It's funny because it's still tea, but it's packaged and marketed so differently that it feels new.

B: That's true. I think younger people are looking for drinks that feel fresh and exciting. Regular black tea doesn't have that same appeal anymore, especially with so many other options like coffee or energy drinks. And coffee is clearly winning—its sales are almost triple those of traditional tea. Coffee shops are everywhere.

A: Right, coffee is king. Instant coffee alone, it seems, makes nearly £1 billion in sales. It's like tea is struggling to keep up in a world where convenience and variety are everything.

B: I think part of the problem is also rising costs. The article mentioned that families are buying less tea now than they did decades ago. Back in 1974, people bought on average about 30 tea bags per person per week. Now it's only about 10. It's clear that habits are changing.

A: True, and the timing of when people drink tea is changing too. Younger people still drink tea with breakfast. But they're much less likely to have it later in the day compared to older generations. That's a big shift from the traditional image of tea being something people drink all day long.

B: Yes, tea is becoming just another option instead of the default drink. And if younger people stick to these habits as they grow older, it could really hurt the traditional tea market in the long run.

A: Do you think tea will ever completely disappear from British culture? It feels so ingrained, even if it's evolving.

B: I don't think it will disappear entirely. There's still a lot of nostalgia and tradition tied to tea. Plus, there are always going to be people who prefer a classic cup of tea. But I do think the way it's consumed and marketed will evolve.

A: Same here. It's like tea is splitting into two worlds: traditional tea for those who love it and all these modern variations for younger or trend-conscious drinkers. I think companies will have to cater to both to survive.

B: I've changed in what I drink. I used to drink black tea all the time, but now I've moved on to things like green tea and iced teas. They just feel lighter and more refreshing, especially in the summer.

A: That makes sense. I guess it's all about finding what works for you. It'll be interesting to see if these innovations bring tea back into the spotlight, or if coffee and other drinks will keep overshadowing it.

B: Either way, it's clear that the tea industry is at a crossroads. Let's see if they can brew up something new to win people back!

Summary

The article explores the decline in the popularity of traditional tea in the UK, once considered a quintessential part of British culture. Tea has long been a symbol of hospitality and comfort, but younger generations are turning away from it, viewing it as outdated or an "old person's drink." Preferences have shifted towards alternatives like iced teas, herbal teas, and coffee, fuelled by changing tastes and a desire for healthier or trendier options.

Questions

1. What other food and drink products do you think of as part of traditional British culture?
2. How are changing lifestyle trends, such as a focus on health and convenience, influencing beverage choices around the world?
3. Can traditional products, like black tea, survive modern trends by adapting, or does innovation risk losing their original identity?
4. Is now coffee beginning to be less attractive to younger people?

A: Hi Sarah! Fancy meeting you leaving the library again!

B: Hello Darcy. Yes, it does seem like I've been living here these past few weeks.

A: Still working on your research paper on managers, then?

B: I am. And just when I thought I was ready to finish, I came across a very interesting new study.

A: What did you find? A paper on how you find a good manager?

B: Exactly that. It asked a deeply practical question in a refreshingly plain way.

A: I assume answering that question well is important for recruitment in companies. The quality of management must explain some differences in performance between companies.

B: That's right. And the problem is that, despite knowing this, a survey conducted last year by the Chartered Management Institute in Britain found something surprising. Four in every five people entering management had received no formal training.

A: You're joking.

B: Not at all. And what's more, lots of bosses obtain more managerial responsibilities for reasons unrelated to their ability to carry them out. Another study looked at the career paths of thousands of sales workers in over 1000 American firms. They found that better sales performance increased the likelihood of people being promoted. But these promotions were also associated with worse performance among their new subordinates.

A: Can you explain that a bit?

B: It's called the "Peter Principle". It's the idea that people rise up the ladder if they do their current job well. Until they reach a job at which they are incompetent.

A: So, this Peter Principle appears to be alive and well?

B: Yes, it is. The study tried to answer the question by running a series of repeated experiments. Participants were randomly assigned to three-person teams of one manager and two subordinates. Each member of the team, including the manager, had to complete a number of problem-solving tasks. The manager's job was to assign people to the task they were most suited to; monitor their performance and reassign them as needed; and keep them motivated.

A: That's something that managers in big companies have to do all the time.

B: Absolutely. The researchers found that a competent manager had about twice as much impact on the team's performance as a competent worker. More usefully, they also found out which traits were associated with good and bad managerial performance.

A: What were they?

B: There was one really striking thing. Teams run by people who said they really, really wanted to be managers performed worse than those who were assigned to lead them by chance. Self-promoting types tended to be overconfident about their own abilities. And this will not surprise you. They also tended to be men.

A: So, the study looked for better ways of appointing managers. Not just by choosing from a group of a clever volunteer.

B: Yes, they said good managerial outcomes were associated with certain skills. One in particular stood out.

A: Which?

B: Doing well in a test where you have to quickly spot patterns in the performance data of fictional workers. Then you match them to the tasks they are best at. Since the assignment game is like the experiment where they used three-person teams, you would expect people who were good in the experiment to be good in the assignment game.

A: And were they?

B: Yes, they were. that is precisely the point. So the research is showing how management tasks can be identified, codified and incorporated into selection processes. That is a much better way of choosing bosses than drawing only on those who thrust themselves forward. Or looking at how people perform in other jobs.

A: Well, the conclusions make sense. Why hasn't this been studied before?

B: It has, to a certain extent. An earlier study actually found – and this seems amazing to me – that it was better to promote people at random, rather than based on how well they perform their current role.

A: None of what you've told me fills me with confidence about managerial recruitment in our big companies, Sarah!

Summary

Two friends discuss the work of one of them, on the subject of 'how you find a good manager' in a company. It is important to avoid the Peter Principle. The researcher discovered that many people entering management have no training. Two experiments were discussed, which could help to provide companies with tools to use in recruitment. Often self-confident people who put themselves forward for management are very poor in management skills.

Questions

1. What are two or three of the main qualities you would expect to see in an effective business leader?
2. Which do you think is more important – analytical skills, or intuitive and visionary thinking?
3. Do you think, with the speakers in the dialogue, that the "Peter Principle" is valid?
4. Could AI replace the need for some decision-making in business?
5. If you were a boss needing to appoint a person to be your assistant, would you choose a person who put themselves forward for the job?

A: Hazel, I haven't seen you in a long time. You don't come to London very often, do you?

B: No, I don't, Gordon. And I'd rather not be here today. I'd rather be at home in my quiet village in Norfolk.

A: What are you doing?

B: I'm here protesting at the Ministry of Energy. The new Labour minister has already announced three huge new solar farms which will cover vast areas of countryside. Now he wants to put a huge line of 420 electricity pylons all down the east coast of England, finishing in Norfolk. It's disgraceful!

A: I guess I can understand you don't like the visual impact of these pylons. But they're essential, aren't they? You have to get the electricity from the offshore wind farms down to the southeast of England. You need cables on pylons to do that.

B: No, you don't. You can bury the cables underground, or put them in the sea.

A: Too expensive.

B: No again. The National Grid, which is responsible for all the electricity infrastructure, has paid its international shareholders nearly £9 billion in dividends over the last five years; if they can do that, they could bury their cables or sink them in the sea. And not destroy beautiful countryside.

A: Have you heard of something called global warming? Or our desperate need for renewable energy? If we're going to cut carbon emissions and live more sustainably, we have to accept some impact on our open spaces – wind farms, solar panels, electricity pylons.

B: I'm pretty doubtful about using the 'global warming' argument to destroy our countryside. Obviously, we must play our part in developing renewable energy. But the contribution that Britain can hope to make to that cause is tiny, compared to India and China. Our actions are really only just a gesture.

A: No. Everybody needs to do their part, otherwise everybody loses in the end.

B: But there's a bigger element in all this. I don't think our government puts any value at all on the beauty of the British landscape, hills and valleys, woods and fields. The Labour minister who put forward these plans called the people who oppose them 'blockers', 'delayers', and 'obstructionists'. The contrast between the way the government treats the towns, compared to the countryside, is glaring.

A: What do you mean?

B: The British elite favors townscape. Each town has a listed and protected "conservation" area. This house of yours, Gordon, is a listed building in a conservation area – that's right?

A: Yes, it is. And I see your point; I'm not able to change its appearance, because it fits into my neighborhood. My neighbors can object. Actually, I'm severely restricted in what I can do to my house.

B: Another question: everybody realizes we need more houses in Britain. Conservative and Labour governments have both set big targets for building new houses. But to do that, they shouldn't build big new housing estates which cover the green spaces and good farmland. There are plenty of 'brownfield'

sites, like unused train stations, railway lines, or old factories. It would be ideal to build new homes and affordable accommodation there.

A: I agree with that, but you must also agree that it's the government's duty to protect the environment in our towns and cities. That is where the overwhelming majority of people live. Only a very small minority can live in lovely little villages in the middle of the fields!

B: OK, but my question is still, why can't the countryside be treated in the same way as the towns, with proper respect and care for the people who live and work there?

A: But it is, isn't it? What about all the National Trust places – lots of the seacoast for example, or National Parks like Dartmoor or the Lake District?

B: They are relatively small. They don't take account of the lovely countryside areas which are full of working farms, and which people love to visit and enjoy.

A: Do you think the Minister of Energy will be persuaded by your protest, Hazel?

B: I hope so Gordon. I want to see our countryside preserved!

Summary

The dialogue centres around a plan by the British government to construct a 420-pylon electricity link through lovely British countryside. This is to bring renewable energy from North Sea wind farms to the southeast of England. One speaker strongly disagrees with the proposal, citing the damage caused to a beautiful landscape; the other highlights some of the practical consequences of global warming and the need for renewable energy. The difference between the way some conservation areas and listed buildings in cities is preserved, compared to the countryside, is also highlighted.

Questions

1. Are you troubled by the electricity pylons and wind turbines which have taken over large parts of the landscape in many places?
2. Would you say that, in general, governments tend to favour the big towns and cities, and that rural interests are second best?
3. Is there some impact of renewable energy infrastructure near where you live?
4. Do you agree with the idea that there is not much point in us making small impacts on global warming, unless the big polluters like India and China act radically?

A: Hey, Zooey, I just got out of my chemistry class and I'm grateful to find the campus so peaceful.

B: You mean after last year's protests that took place here?

A: Right. I was totally against how the students were protesting. Totally against their being able to protest here on campus. It was incredibly disruptive.

B: You should know, Dave, that I was one of the students out here protesting almost every day. I would be now, except the school administration has placed severe restrictions on our ability to demonstrate.

A: I have to say I'm glad the school has done that. I didn't like having to pass you and your comrades, and your tents, when I walked across the campus to go to class. And I didn't like hearing your chants.

B: So you don't think that we have a right to express our beliefs? People feel strongly about the environment, the war in the Middle East, inequalities in our society. Can't we express our beliefs?

A: Not when it interferes with my personal space and peace of mind.

B: Amazing. What's something you believe passionately about?

A: I'm a big gamer.

B: Let's say restrictions were placed on the times and places you could game. Wouldn't you be furious?

A: I would.

B: And wouldn't you want to inform other students about the new gaming restrictions and get them to try to change the rules?

A: Probably, but I'd do it differently. I'd send text messages.

B: We wanted to protest in such a way that we could get others to join us. We wanted to show there is major opposition to our government's allowing the wars to go on. We're not hurting anyone, we're pacifists, we inform people.

A: But it gets violent. I read about what happened at the University of California at Los Angeles last spring.

B: It got violent because the counter-protesters violently attacked the protesters for hours. And the police did almost nothing to stop it.

A: OK. So, what kinds of rules now regulate student protests?

B: Since last year's campus protests regarding the war in the Middle East, there's been a wave of new rules and restrictions. It's different at each university. In some places students can't engage in what the administrators call "expressive activity" during certain hours. And some universities limit the protests to two hours.

A: What's "expressive activity"?

B: Curious term, no? I would say the discussion you and I are having is “expressive activity”—we’re each expressing our ideas. One university has an “Expressive Activity Support Team”, whose members wear badges identifying themselves. They carry warnings to be read aloud to people who are protesting.

A: If they have such a team on our campus, I might join.

B: The American Civil Liberties Union, which provides legal assistance in cases where it considers civil liberties at risk, is suing one university. They claim that its time restrictions basically prohibit people from talking to a friend about politics, or even standing silently with a sign during the excluded times.

A: What are some other rules?

B: Some universities require that protest organizers get approval for a demonstration at least a few days before. Another limits the number of protesters to 25. At others, they limit where protests can be held. And most ban encampments, with tents and overnight stays.

A: I imagine there are protests against these rules restricting protests.

B: There are. At the university that limits protests to 25 people, a group gathered with signs numbered 1 to 29 showing they had intentionally violated the new rule.

A: So you’re opposed to these restrictions. Why?

B: Firstly, these rules are designed to repress campus protests. Protest is vital for democracy. Also, universities are meant to be places where we are encouraged to speak our minds openly, to challenge what we think is wrong.

A: Will you continue to protest, Zooey, despite any possible consequences?

B: Our group is very creative, Dave. We’ll find ways to get around the rules and challenge the restrictions on our student rights. And we’ll continue our protests.

Summary

There were many major demonstrations on American campuses, mostly against the war in the Middle East. Many universities suffered major disruption. As a result, many universities have taken steps to restrict protests – limiting the times they can be held, saying where, and so on. One of the speakers in this dialogue approves of these changes; the other sees them as a restriction on the liberty to express ideas.

Questions

1. Are there restrictions on the right to protest in the place where you study – or are protests not really an issue for you?
2. Would you see a restriction on the time or place for protests, or the number of participants, as a major problem?
3. Is it essential for democracy that people have the right to protest?
4. If you were to join a protest over an issue that was very important to you, what issue would it be?

A : Sally, good to see you this morning. Are you well?

B: Thanks Jeff, yes. And I had an interesting evening yesterday. I watched the TV programme about the Earthshot prize this year. Did you see it?

A: No. What is the Earthshot prize? I've never heard of it, let alone about this year.

B: The Earthshot prize is something which was set up by Prince William, the King's son. It's been going since 2020. What it does is offer a prize of £1 million to innovative ideas which are good for the environment. There are five different categories.

A: £1 million is a lot of money, wouldn't it be better to divide it up a bit?

B: In fact it's 5 million. because one winner in each category receives the £1 million. That amount of money can really enable them to get their idea off the ground.

A: What are the categories?

B: Well there's Protect and Restore Nature, Clean our Air, Revive our Oceans, Build a Waste-free World, and Fix our Climate.

A: They all sound very ambitious! What sort of projects come up?

B: A recent winner was a technology company that had solar powered dryers and processing equipment. That meant that farmers in developing countries could process some of their own produce. They could reduce waste and add value to the crops they were producing.

A: This sounds like charitable giving to businesses which should be able to make a profit anyway. Surely if money is being given away it should be to non profit organisations, not businesses?

B: Not necessarily. If it's a business, it's got the chance to become self-supporting and generate income for the employees as well. The project can become permanent and self-sustaining.

A: Well that's interesting. I suppose if a business is quite small and is trying to do the right thing for the environment, they might need a bit of money injected. That can help them develop or scale up their idea. A million pounds would be very useful in that situation, wouldn't it?

B: Absolutely. Some of the projects that won this year are very exciting too.

A: For example?

B: Well in the Protect and Restore nature category it was a conservation initiative in Kazakhstan. It was a programme which saved the critically endangered Saiga antelope from extinction.

A: Excellent. But haven't they done their job? What will they do with another £1 million?

B: Their goal for the future is to fully restore the Steppe grassland ecosystem in the country. A massive task, but worthwhile.

A: Yes. I guess that given their success with the saiga antelope they've shown that they can make a difference if they're given the resources. What are some of the other projects which won prizes?

B: The Clean our Air prize went to the Green Africa Youth Organisation for helping local communities manage their waste. Last year they kept 170 tonnes of waste out of landfills. They saved around 3.6 tonnes of carbon dioxide going into the atmosphere. In the future they want to build a waste management movement all across Africa.

A: That sounds really ambitious! And I suppose neither of those groups – the conservation project in the Steppes or the Green Africa Youth Organisation, are for profit organisations. Ok, one final example for me?

B: It's called Fix our climate. It was won by a company which has developed technology to capture heat which is wasted when making cement and steel. That is globally estimated to be the equivalent of energy for about four billion homes.

A: Wow, that's a huge amount of energy. But it's one thing developing the technology. It's another thing getting companies to use it. Though it's in their interest, as I imagine it would lower the cost of production as well.

B: Yes, it probably would.

A: I have to say I think all these projects sound really worthwhile. It's a great initiative from Prince William to set this up, giving £1 million to each of them. It's an optimistic note in lots of gloomy news on the environment.

Summary

The Earthshot prize is an annual award, set up by Prince William, to encourage solutions to the major environmental issues. Prizes of £1 million are given in five different categories, to either nonprofit organisations or small businesses. Various environmental issues are discussed, including whether it is justifiable to give a large sum of money to a business, and the overall impact of the prizes.

Questions

- 1 Is it appropriate for Prince William's prizes to be given to a business, rather than a non-profit organisation?
- 2 Do you think governments or charitable organisations should be the ones to make environmental changes?
- 3 Do you feel any optimism over the worldwide challenge of climate change and the environment, or are you pessimistic for the future?
- 4 Can economic interests and the protection of the environment be reconciled?

A: Hi Patrick! How are you?

B: Hi Isabella, I'm so-so.

A: What's the matter, Patrick? Work problems?

B: Not at all, just a bit fed up with the news. It's the same depressing thing all the time. The media are everywhere, so it's hard to escape. Besides, right now the Luigi Mangione affair keeps people talking.

A: Oh, you mean that man who murdered the CEO of a major insurance company on the street in New York? Shot him twice, in the back?

B: Yes. But I don't want to even think about it. Besides, it's hard to tell the difference between what's fake and what's real sometimes.

A: If you're upset, let's go and have something to eat. McDonald's?

B: No way. Burger King.

A: Well, it's all the same, isn't it? They're both fast-food chains. Too fatty, too sweet, but fast and cheap.

B: I can't let you say that, Burger King is much better. The two brands have been waging a communication war for decades. Which reminds me of the subject we were discussing earlier.

A: What about it?

B: Didn't you hear what happened with Burger King's tweet about the Luigi Mangione affair?

A: Not sure. The alleged killer was arrested in a McDonald's restaurant in Pennsylvania, wasn't he?

B: Yes; An employee of a McDonald's there recognized the murderer following the distribution of his portrait by the authorities. He called the police, and Mangione was arrested on December 9, 5 days after the murder.

A: Very good initiative.

B: Obviously. But shortly after, the Burger King account on X published the message: "we don't snitch"! In other words, « we don't betray our customers »

A: But that's terrible! Taking advantage of a tragedy like this for commercial purposes!

B: Exactly. But the message was a complete fake! Some hacker put it there. But it was too late. Burger King is now also linked to the affair. Along with all the communication, good or bad, around the two brands.

A: The rivalry between the two brands is not new, but do you think it really benefits them?

B: I do. Burger King and Mac Donald's are no longer really restaurants; they are real pop culture icons. Consumers have become actors thanks to new technologies and the internet. They participate in writing the story of their brand.

A: But then, who has control over the communication of these brands? This could be dangerous, right? The example of the fake message concerning the Mangione affair.

B: Today, consumers are stakeholders in brand promotion and they themselves fuel rivalries. People get involved supporting one or the other. We saw it with this meme "we don't snitch" which spread virally extremely quickly before being debunked.

A: I guess some people like this stuff.....

B:yes, people love big face-offs between big brands. There's Coca Cola and Pepsi, Nintendo and Sega, or DC against Marvel. Besides, big firms often use this rivalry to their advantage.

A: To what extent?

B: I saw some research which indicates that when a brand mentions its main competitor in its communication campaign, it has a reassuring effect on consumers.

A: Really?

B: In fact, by doing this, brands immerse consumers in a well-known story, hence the reassuring effect. We find the story of primary antagonism, the good and the bad, the hero and the villain. And it always finds its audience! People identify with one brand or the other in the story.

A: But then in the end, which of these two restaurants is the best objectively?

B: Depends what you look at. Both brands have the same experience in serving burgers, Burger King from 1954. Mac Donald's from 1955.

A: Mac Donald's is present in more countries, right?

B: Yes 120 countries compared to 100 for Burger King recently. And McDonald's has a much bigger turnover.

A: But the fast-food business world is very competitive – lots of new chains. Tacos, pizza, chicken....

B: It's in McDonald's and Burger King's interests to represent themselves as the two big winners in this sector.

A: Anyway, let's go and get something to eat.

B: Where?

A: You decide...

Summary

The Luigi Mangione case has relaunched a rather unexpected question: the communication of large firms on the internet and the rivalry between two burger giants, Burger King and McDonald's. Indeed, following the arrest of the murderer thanks to the photo report of a McDonald's employee, the publication on social networks of the phrase "we don't snitch", supposedly by the Burger King chain, caused a certain shock. This post being ultimately only a fake, the speakers wonder about the communication methods of these two large firms and the involvement of consumers in the great story of the rivalry between large brands.

Questions

1. Do you have a preference in this rivalry?
2. How do these huge brands communicate with consumers on social media – have these platforms fundamentally changed the way brands communicate?
3. How do you detect the real from the fake on social media?
4. Is the multiplication of fast-food chains a health disaster?

A: Welcome to Future California, our weekly look at issues which will affect the Golden State in the next few years. I'm Aimée Connelly, and with me is Rex Richardson, mayor of Long Beach. Welcome Rex.

B: Thank you Aimée.

A: Rex, we're sitting here in your office on the 11th floor of the Long Beach City Hall, looking out at the downtown and the water beyond. For our listeners who may be unsure of exactly where we are, can you tell us about Long Beach briefly, Rex?

B: We are a city about 35 kilometers south of the Los Angeles downtown. An hour in the tram, a bit more in a car on a bad traffic day! We are part of the greater Los Angeles area, but a city in our own right. Long Beach has a huge shipping port, and also – perhaps surprisingly for you - a considerable oil production.

A: Thank you. Our main concern today is the hosting that Long Beach will be doing for the 2028 LA Olympics. What are your plans?

B: Our waterfront will be the primary location for the events that will be held here. We will have rowing, canoe sprints, water polo and artistic swimming. Then further offshore we will have marathon swimming, sailing, and the first leg of the triathlon. Nearly all the water-based sports will be here. We have handball also, and Paralympic events a bit later.

A: That's great, but here's the question I'm sure lots of the local taxpayers want to ask the Mayor: how is this being paid for, and who will be paying for it? I have to say I'm looking out of your window here at a vacant lot, where the old town hall was recently demolished . A bit further on is a partly empty office block. Long Beach doesn't look in good shape.

B: Well, Aimée, it's in part to change the city that we want the Olympic events to come. As far as the cost is concerned, we are budgeting \$933 million: this is part of a 5-year infrastructure and public safety improvement program aimed at addressing long term needs. About \$200 million will be focused on Olympic projects, but that leaves a lot to benefit Long Beach in the coming years.

A: Where's the money for this coming from, Rex?

B: Some of it will come from an agreement with the Port of Long Beach, which generates very large revenues. There will be some from a big legal settlement we got from the Monsanto chemical corporation, over polluted waterways in our city. Another part will come from an LA county sales tax to develop transport links in the whole of LA county.

A: So the local Long Beach residents won't have to pay for anything?!

B: Not quite. We will also add a city sales tax – already approved by voters, by the way. And we expect financial help from the central LA Olympic Games organizing committee.

A: That might be a bit optimistic. When you look at the history of cities hosting the Olympics, many of them lost a huge amount of money. Athens in 2004, or Tokyo. Rio de Janeiro in 2016 was \$2 billion over budget. Is it sensible for a city like Long Beach to take on the Olympic burdens?

B: OK. But just like the Paris Olympics, we are using a lot of existing infrastructure. Paris came out of the 2024 Games with a positive balance sheet.

A: Let me read a few comments from your critics. One said “The Olympics need to be in service of Long Beach, not Long Beach in the service of the Olympics”.

B: Largely true, but being on worldwide view during the Olympic period will be fantastic for us.

A: Another one: “I believe the impacts on our city will be huge and costly. I have watched our city governments get in over their heads before”.

B: Not this time.

A: Will the wildfires in Los Angeles affect the Games?

B: Not here in Long Beach, though areas to the north of LA may have problems. But Californians are resilient – we will rebuild well!

A: Thanks Rex.

Summary

The dialogue takes the form of an interview with a journalist and the Mayor of Long Beach California, a city near Los Angeles which will host a number of (mostly) water-based events in the 2028 Olympic Games. The journalist asks about the organization of the events, particularly on the cost of the Games to local residents. Questions of financial viability are always raised around the organization of large sporting events.

Questions

1. Is there any romance or idealism left in the Olympic movement, or are things now much too focused on money?
2. How do you measure the success of any Olympic Games – Paris in 2024 for example?
3. Is it your impression that the holding of a Games is of any long-term benefit to a city?
4. One of the critics in the dialogue says “The Olympics will shift the city’s attention away from issues like policing, homelessness and climate change”. Do you agree with that view?
5. Will the Los Angeles fires affect the Games?

A: Hey, Randy. Enjoying that banana?

B: Yes, I am, Helena, thanks.

A: Well, in a few days you may not be able to buy bananas.

B: Why? There are plenty of bananas around, and they're not expensive.

A: I know. Delicious, nutritious, all that. But they may be one of the casualties of the dockworkers strike that has just begun. The strike will shut down almost all activities at some of the busiest ports in the U.S., from Maine in New England down to Texas.

B: That's basically the whole East Coast and the Gulf Coast. Who is striking?

A: The International Longshoremen's Association, or the ILA. They are the largest U.S. maritime union, representing 45,000 longshoremen.

B: That's the dockworkers union?

A: Right. Longshoremen is an old term. It means a person who works along the shore, a dockworker who loads and unloads ships.

B: What is the ILA striking for?

A: They're demanding a salary increase greater than what the management, the port operators' group, has offered. Negotiations have failed after months of talking.

B: And how might that affect my banana purchases?

A: With ports closed, ships won't be able to deliver bananas from places like Guatemala and Ecuador where most come from. And many other products will be blocked.

B: I imagine that those items that will be most affected by the shutdown of the ports will be perishable goods, like fruits and vegetables. Or dairy products that spoil quickly.

A: Right. But not only those. Plenty of other commodities will also be affected by the strike. For example, car parts, furniture and raw materials, like cotton and wood. As for bananas, some 75 percent pass through those ports, and 80 percent of coffee.

B: There goes my breakfast, and no repairs to my car.

A: If the strike lasts just a few days, there won't be serious consequences. But if it lasts longer, there will be a ripple effect that will be felt in all sorts of industries and areas.

B: I guess transportation and warehousing will be affected. With no goods being delivered to the ports, trucks won't be collecting them and then delivering them across the country.

A: And warehouses won't have goods to store, plus all those people will be without work. So not just availability problems, but the corner store where you buy your bananas, for example, could suffer financially. They won't have enough products to sell.

B: Still, most food consumed in the US is grown here. So maybe no bananas, but I won't go hungry.

A: Ports do sometimes have to shut down for a few days because of dangerous weather conditions, with no significant repercussions. But if this strike goes on for one or two weeks, then we may see big financial losses and cascading effects. Things like people losing their jobs, and prices increasing. This could ultimately cost the economy \$4 to \$7 billion per week.

B: Here's what I think. My father was a big union man—he was an electrician, member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical workers. His membership enabled him to have good protections. My family could enjoy a comfortable life. So though the dockworkers strike can potentially cause economic problems in the country, the dockworkers have a right to decent pay and working conditions. Their work is very hard.

A: And this is the first time in 50 years that they've gone on strike.

B: We mustn't ignore the role the dock operators, the bosses, have in any disruption to the country. They're refusing to listen to the unions. But it's always the strikers who get blamed. I think it's very sad that fewer and fewer workers in the U.S. are members of unions. By taking this drastic step the I.L.A. is showing what workers can do if they band together. They should fight for their rights, whether for safety protections or fair wages.

A: Though they should also take into account the problems and inconvenience for the general public. Ordinary people will suffer hardship because of the strike.

B: Yes, but sometimes a strike is the only way. I'll do without bananas for a bit.

Summary

The dialogue concerns a dockworkers' strike, led by the International Longshoremen's Association. This will close a large number of American ports. The two speakers discuss the repercussions of the strike in the availability of certain products. They are essentially sympathetic to the strikers, but raise the need to be aware of hardship caused by the strike.

Questions

1. Would you join a union in a place you would go to work?
2. In what circumstances can a strike be justified in a company?
3. Is a minimum service necessary when there is a strike in the transport sector?
4. Do you think the day of unions is over, or do they still provide an important service to their members?

A: Good morning. I'm Joe Pike. This is National Public Radio's Top Topics show. Now, we know there's a lot of evidence that electric vehicles are better for the planet than gas cars. But a lot of Americans are growing less convinced of that. NPR's Camila Dean has been looking into why. Hi, Camila.

B: Hi, Joe.

A: Why did you start exploring this question in the first place?

B: Earlier this year, we did a show inviting questions from listeners about their plans for car purchases – more specifically, what they were wondering about Electric Vehicles. We looked at them by popularity. And the top three questions were all about the EVs' environmental impacts. So people are thinking about this.

A: What do you mean by their environmental impacts?

B: Fundamentally, are they actually better than gas cars, petrol cars. People have heard about the mining of materials for batteries. Plus, the coal power plants making electricity to charge the electric vehicles - things like that.

A: How did you answer those questions?

B: We answered the questions in the programme as best we could, but I was just so struck by how many of these questions we got. I wanted to see if there was data about whether what Americans believe about the impact of EVs on the environment has been changing.

A: So what did you discover? I imagine you had to find people who had asked that question over several years. A market research firm, maybe?

B: Yes, Ipsos had this data. They shared it with us. If you ask people, "Do EVs have any environmental benefit over gas cars at all?", a majority of people still agree with this. But that majority - it's gone down by five percentage points since 2022.

A: Does it only include people who are interested in buying such a vehicle?

B: Quite the opposite. It is specifically people who are not thinking of buying an EV, who aren't interested in them. They are the ones who are getting more skeptical about the environmental benefits. Perhaps to get their existing skeptical views reinforced!

A: Any idea of what is influencing their views?

B: Yes. Well, there's been a lot of reporting about EVs' environmental impact - real impact. Mining for batteries - that's a real thing. Power plants - that has a real footprint. If you see those headlines and you don't read closely, it could be easy to miss the main point. Which is that, compared to gas cars and the huge damages of fossil fuels, EVs are still better.

A: Ok, so people who are not really digging into this deeply may have false impressions on the real impact of EV. But what about those who did their research on the topic?

B: Interestingly, there's also a lot of really misleading information out there. EVs have gotten very politicized. They're caught up in the culture wars. And so in addition to things that might be easy to misinterpret, you also have outright falsehoods that are floating around.

A: Can you give us an example?

B: Sure. There are lots, but there was one study that inspired a lot of headlines, and the headlines gave the impression that EVs are overall worse for the planet. But when I talked to the researcher who did that study, he was angry, he said the headlines were completely untrue.

A: What was this study about?

B: It was a study which only looked at one specific kind of pollution - particulates, the rubber that rubs off tires. They did not look at greenhouse gases at all by design. So saying that this very study is about the environment as a whole is leaving out climate change. That is a total distortion of the truth. The headlines gave a wrong conclusion.

A: And is this misinformation impacting EV sales?

B: A bit, but not too much. Most of the people skeptical about EV benefits are not planning to buy one. But their skepticism might have an impact on wider public opinion eventually.

A: NPR's Camila. Thank you.

B: Thank you for having me.

Summary

This dialogue concerns the environmental benefits, or otherwise, of electric vehicles. Fewer Americans now believe they are greener than gas cars than two years ago. Two points often mentioned are the mining for battery materials, and the coal needed to produce electricity to charge the EVs. Other factors relating to this growing skepticism are discussed.

Questions

1. In your opinion, what are the positive and negative points concerning electric vehicles?
2. Do you see EVs as making a major contribution to a decrease in pollution and greenhouse gases, or are there much more significant elements in this question?
3. Will the next car you buy be an electric vehicle?
4. In the UK, the numbers of EVs being purchased has slowed considerably. Why do you think this is?

A: Hello Ben, glad you could come for coffee. When I suggest it, you always choose Starbucks – your favorite, I think? But it seems they may be in trouble.

B: Hi Anne, yes, in its last quarterly-earnings report, Starbucks announced disappointing results. There was a general 4% drop in sales. In China, its second-biggest market, it was even 11%, which is huge. After that announcement, the stock market price plunged.

A: Yes. Its founder, Howard Schultz, sent an open letter to its shareholders saying his aim was to rediscover and embrace the company's core purpose, its reason for existence.

B: Of course, saying that, he admitted that Starbucks isn't what it used to be, and the brand itself isn't what it used to mean.

A: I agree, the company should shift its focus back to the in-person experience, and suggest ways to do that. Its problems show how companies that had succeeded by offering customers exceptional experiences can lose their way. They give in to the temptation to pursue goals like efficiency and volume and, in the process, commoditize themselves.

B: Sorry, I lost you. Commoditize?

A: It means your goods and services become very widely available, and are no different to those of other people. Your product is interchangeable with theirs. I think Starbucks's unique selling point has got lost.

B: True. Starbucks, used to be a place beyond home and work where people could gather, relax and talk. But now comfy chairs have largely disappeared, replaced by hard wooden ones, so that people don't stay so long. Maybe without even realizing it, they are pushing people out, so they go back to their homes and offices. It's harder to find somewhere now, even to plug in your phone or laptop. They've made it less attractive for people to stay.

A: Right. Printed orders have replaced handwriting on cups, removing the human touch from its famously handcrafted drinks. Gone is the rich aroma of coffee beans roasting and grinding; instead, there are ready-to-use sealed packages. Now they even offer "value meals"!

B: Another bad policy was to decrease the on-premises experience and increase the drive-throughs, It divided the attention of baristas and increased the length of time it takes to be served. And it took up space that could be used to enhance the in-person experience.

A: Yes. And they introduced order by telephone. But if you order on your phone, you can be in a very long, but totally invisible, queue!

B: I think too there are workforce tensions, and workers are joining unions. It's less appealing for employees.

A: Starbucks used to rank as one the best places to work. But it's completely disappeared from the charts since 2016.

B: Well, sure, the company gained revenue and efficiency in the short term, but lost its authenticity. And down the road, some customers too.

A: I think it's not too late for Starbucks. I agree with Schultz's assessment that the path forward begins with revisiting what made the company so successful in the first place.

B: They should reorganize their loyalty program into an *experience platform*. Something that offers guests experiences that they would not otherwise have.

A: Yes, this is what almost every credit card company, airline, and hospitality company has already done. Delta's SkyMiles Experiences program, for example says "you can turn your miles into memories." Mastercard's platform offers "priceless" experiences. Make going to Starbucks an experience again!

B: Yes, Starbucks must also find ways to cater to those people who treat them just as a mere service, somewhere to get a coffee. Without impairing the experience of those who consider it something more. This means separating mobile and drive-through orders from the people in the coffee shop.

A: Yes, it would also mean reinvesting in comfort and amenities for people who want to hang around. They should also provide better facilities for people who want to come in and work on their laptop for an hour or two. This would encourage those people to drink more coffee!

B: So, there's a big challenge for Howard Schultz to turn Starbucks round and regain its uniqueness.

Summary

Starbucks is in trouble again. In its last quarterly-earnings report, it announced disappointing results, provoking a drop in its share price. The two speakers discuss the fact that, in their view, Starbucks has lost its uniqueness, being more concerned with turnover, revenue, and has been commoditizing its offer. It now seems no different to other similar brands. The speakers see a major challenge for Starbucks to rediscover its unique selling point.

Questions

1. What was it about Starbucks that made it so successful?
2. Do you share the opinion of the speakers that Starbucks has lost its unique selling point? – or do you have no information to make a judgment about it?
3. Is it inevitable that, after a long period of success, a brand will fall into a decline?
4. Is the market for coffee, and for coffee shops, now saturated?

Dialogue 18

Europe's flying taxi dreams falter

A: Hello Alex, long time since I saw you. The last time we met you were planning to visit Paris for the Olympics. Did you do that?

B: Yes, I did, Lucy. It was great. Only one disappointment.

A: OK. So, tell me.

B: I had hoped to get around in the flying taxi.

A: Flying taxi? What is that? Some fantasy?

B: No, actually, it's a real thing. A company which has created a flying taxi which they're calling the Volocity. They wanted to operate in Paris during the Olympic Games.

A: I don't remember hearing about it at all.

B: That's because in the end the Volocity wasn't ready. They could only give demonstrations. But I saw one when I was in Paris and it's really cool.

A: How does it work?

B: It's like a helicopter but it's electric. It's quiet and doesn't produce pollution. So, like a helicopter, it takes off vertically.

A: This has to be battery technology I presume. But why didn't the air taxi work?

B: Yes, it does use a battery. The main problem with the project was putting all the manufacturing infrastructure in, and it was too expensive. The investors lost interest. The company is still trying to find money.

A: It's an interesting idea. Though I'm not sure how it could work in practice. It could make the skies above cities a bit chaotic. Is Paris the only place where the idea of flying taxis is being explored?

B: Not at all! There's a German company called Lilium, also developed a flying taxi. But unfortunately, they ran out of money too and the company faced insolvency.

A: Well, things seem pretty clear to me. Surely if investors are not interested it's because the idea of a flying taxi just isn't viable. It's obviously not going to make them the kind of return they would expect. Is there anyone else trying to develop the idea?

B: A British firm was aiming to produce 150 aircraft by the end of the decade, but again they have run into financial difficulties. They have had to be rescued. You make a good point though : financial viability is a big issue.

A: Hmm, well I'm not even sure if I would use a flying taxi if I had the opportunity. I know that helicopters are not the safest way of travelling. You're keen to try it?

B: Yes, I would, the one I saw in Paris looked amazing! They are very quiet, unlike normal helicopters, and very safe. Running costs can be cheaper too.

A: If they are so much cheaper then why are they having so many problems getting funding?

B: Well, if you think about it, normal helicopters can fly quite long distances. If you're thinking about having flying taxis, it would probably be within a particular city or kilometre range. That's because electric batteries are more restricted, and need to be heavier the more distance they cover.

A: So, you are saying that the use of traditional helicopters is more varied? And I guess the technology is tried and tested. Whereas people don't really trust new technology?

B: Yes, I think that's it. Look how slow people are to take up electric cars.

A: That's true. I still think I wouldn't want to use a flying taxi. I like my feet firmly on the ground.

B: But think about how crowded the streets are with cars and buses, and now e-bikes and scooters. Much better to get around a city by flying taxi, don't you think?

A: Maybe, but also a city with flying taxis will need infrastructure, like flying taxi ranks and landing places. What will they do? I can't see our city councils, with so many financial challenges, building new helipads everywhere, Alex.

B: You might be right, Lucy, but I'm a bit more optimistic. I think once someone comes up with the right combination of technology and a good plan for the overall infrastructure needed to make it work, politicians will give it the go-ahead. And then as with a lot of new technology, there will be no going back. Flying taxis will be here to stay!

Summary

A number of companies in different countries are attempting to develop 'flying taxis'- like helicopters but running on electricity and quieter and safer. To date these companies have run into financial difficulties in developing their technology as investors cannot see the return they would like. There are also issues of infrastructure required and consumer acceptance.

Questions

1. Do you think that battery-powered flying taxis could be viable in the long term?
2. Is this a case where a clever investor could put money into the right new company and make a lot of money?
3. Is there a parallel with the success of Tesla?
4. Is this something that either the government, or the city councils of say London, Madrid or Paris should invest in?

A: Hey, Anthony, can I sit in the sun with you and eat my sandwich?

B: Sure, Heather. You look upset.

A: I am. I just came out of my political science class where most of the students yelled at me for expressing an opinion.

B: What did you say that got everyone so angry?

A: It was about the recent Supreme Court decision that bans Affirmative Action. That says that a person's background can no longer be considered in admission to schools and universities.

B: Yes, Affirmative Action was meant to overcome the unequal access to education opportunities in the U.S.

A: I gave my reasons for supporting this new decision, but I was verbally attacked. I was even a little afraid that I might be physically pushed out of the classroom. They yelled I was a white racist; I had no business being in that class with such ideas.

B: That must have been very upsetting.

A: It was, particularly as they didn't listen to my reasons, which have nothing to do with race but simply the legal issues. I may never again give any opinion in that class.

B: Well, I just read a report saying that two-thirds of Americans are afraid to say in public what we believe. Simply because someone might not like what we say.

A: America is supposed to be "the land of the free and the home of the brave." To be afraid to speak your mind in public, to censor yourself, doesn't sound very free or very brave.

B: The author of the report, a psychologist, said that that particular fear is nothing new. Humans have always been afraid of being forced out of the tribe. It's an ancient instinct, he says. If the tribe threw you out, you might get eaten by a tiger.

A: Fortunately, we don't fear tigers today.....

B:but there's the real possibility of ghosting.

A: Which is?

B: Ghosting means when you abruptly end communication with someone without giving any explanation.

A: So my classmates may very well ghost me.

B: I'm sure you won't give in to your unreasonable classmates, but think of some 14-year-old boy whose friends 'ghost' him – they stop texting him. He might feel like he's been eaten by a tiger.

A: Most of us want acceptance—I do—so I can understand not saying things that might be rejected. That would be especially true in a workplace, where you don't want to be fired because you said the wrong thing.

B: It's also very true for public speakers, whose "tribe" is right there in front of them. They don't want to be booed. But by saying only "safe" things, not saying anything new, they risk being boring.

A: I fully support free speech as it's written in the First Amendment. I shouldn't stop myself from saying something people might not like or agree with. I want people to think about what I have to say. Still, the anger of my classmates when I did that was very unsettling.

B: Some people think that the First Amendment goes too far in the rights it guarantees, and that people who express offensive ideas should be censored. Or even fired from their jobs.

A: That's scary.

B: It seems that one in four Americans say they are "very" or "somewhat" worried that they might lose their job because of someone complaining about something they said.

A: So lots of self-censorship. Did the author of the article have any suggestions?

B: He says people really need to listen to each other, even when some hard things are being discussed. And they need to agree that facts matter.

A: Instead of yelling at me, my classmates should have discussed the facts around Affirmative Action.

B: Yes. He says that respect is key. And that it's important to listen first to understand. Then, only after we have understood, to thoughtfully offer differing points of view. And never attack the other for who they are or what they do.

A: I'll try to discuss that with my classmates. I hope that they'll be open to listening.

Summary

The dialogue relates to freedom of speech in America. A student has been upset by the hostile reaction of classmates to the views she expressed. The First Amendment guarantees the right of people to express their opinions. Some people believe this goes too far in granting freedom of speech; others find themselves criticized for voicing sometimes unpopular opinions. There should be mutual respect and understanding.

Questions

1. Do you sometimes find yourself in situations where you are careful to talk about what you really think?
2. Does America have the biggest problem in this question of freedom of speech, or is the situation in other countries similar?
3. Much of the debate on this topic revolves around universities and the academic world. Why do you think this is?
4. Do you think the media are mostly to blame for 'groupthink', where most people tend to believe the same things?

A: Sam, you've been here in Europe now from New York for a couple of months. How are you finding things – I think you've spent some time in the UK and France?

B: Exactly right, Beverley. Enjoying my time very much.

A: So have you met any big cultural differences between the US and Europe which have surprised you? Or are there aspects of American culture coming into Europe?

B: Well yes, one thing that has bothered me is the way the American practices of tipping in restaurants and hotels seem to be happening more and more over here.

A: So how does it work in the US? I think most people here would think a tip is actually that, a 'thank you' for good service. But I agree with you that more and more places in the UK and in France are adding a percentage service charge to a bill. Why do you object so much to tipping?

B: First of all, it's annoying. Remember that in the US you also have to add the local sales tax to your bill, usually about 10%. You then have to make another mental calculation to put the 20% service charge on top of that. This is a good way to get irritated; my tasty tacos which cost \$15 on the menu, now in fact come to \$19 dollars 80 cents.

A: All right, but isn't tipping a way to help the waiters who serve us the food? Surely, it's a way to show our appreciation by boosting their income a bit. I don't see why you would think that's a bad thing.

B: But I have a more philosophical objection as well. Neither society nor the economy should need philanthropy to function. I actually think it's anti-democratic. Tipping just means that we can calm our individual consciences a bit, rather than deal with the real issues – which are to do with reducing inequalities, and providing a fair reward for people's labour.

A: Hm. That sounds a bit airy-fairy to me. Why shouldn't I offer a tip as appreciation for good service, or as part of something which was a great experience?

B: Nothing at all to stop you doing that. But a tip which is obligatory is not a tip – it's a surcharge. So that not leaving a tip is like saying you were actually treated badly. So you are withholding part of a person's wages as retaliation for your treatment.

A: That's a bit extreme. What about the restaurant owners? With the price of everything increasing, they want to keep food prices as low as possible. If you leave tipping to the discretion of the customer it means that lower prices can bring more people into the restaurant.

B: I think that's doubtful. Some research I've seen shows some interesting things about tipping. One is that people tip less than they used to some years ago. And most people tip a lot less than the 20% American culture expects them to.

A: It's true that there is expectation on tipping. When I was returning from the USA recently, I wanted to buy a banana in the airport. There was an iPad screen suggesting I leave a tip on buying my single banana! Crazy.

B: There's another aspect of this which I think is unfair. Tipping can create inequality and bad feeling between the waiting staff and the serving staff. I know some places say all tips are equally shared, but that's not always the case. Why should the waiting staff get a good tip, rather than the person in the hot, high-pressure kitchen, where your delicious food is made? Seems to me like the waiters have it a lot easier than the cooks and the chefs.

A: Well, that's the management's job to make sure things are fair. But tipping has been around a long time now, and there are different views. I don't think you'll get rid of it easily.

B: Of course. But I think there's a lot of support, both in Britain and in Europe, for a better minimum wage for restaurant staff. Let's give them a decent income, without tips.

Summary

The dialogue concerns the practice of tipping in restaurants, with an American making some comparisons between how things are done in the US, and in Europe. One speaker sees some positives in tipping, where a customer can show appreciation of good service by a waiter. The other sees it as annoying and unfair. It would be much better to charge a standard price, and not leave things to the generosity, or otherwise, of the customer. Tensions between kitchen staff and waiting staff can also arise if tipping is not shared fairly.

Questions

1. If you paid 50 euros for a meal and some drinks, well served, how much would you be likely to give as a tip?
2. Do you think it is demeaning to the waiters to offer a tip?
3. Should the kitchen staff get tips as well?
4. Do you agree that tipping is undemocratic and unfair?

A: Becky, did you see the email from Human Resources about the company's new mental health policy and benefits?

B: No, I haven't seen it, Henry. What does it say?

A: It explains that we now have access to counseling, mental health days, and even the option to work from home if we're going through a tough time.

B: Wow, I didn't know that. But honestly, it doesn't surprise me. Mental health is such a big topic these days. Everyone talks about it.

A: True. But I think it's good the company is finally taking it seriously. Sometimes, just knowing there's help available can make a huge difference.

B: Definitely. Although I haven't used any mental health benefits yet, I've heard about other wellness programs the company offers.

A: Wellness programs? Like what? Are you talking about things like reimbursement for doctor visits or hospital stays?

B: Not really. It's more about preventative measures—things like gym memberships, support to quit smoking, or programs that encourage biking to work. These kinds of initiatives can actually lower your health insurance costs.

A: That sounds interesting. I had no idea! How did you find out about this?

B: I wanted to see if there were ways to reduce my health insurance costs, so I looked online at the company site. I'm planning to sign up for a couple of them next year.

A: That's smart. But why would the company do all this? What's in it for them?

B: It's all about balance. When employees are healthier—physically and mentally—they're more productive, take fewer sick days, and even have fewer workplace accidents. That benefits the company too. Plus, people who stay active or quit smoking often need less medical care, which keeps insurance costs lower for everyone.

A: That makes sense. I guess it's a win-win situation. Oh, by the way, the email from HR also mentioned the upcoming elections. They said we could take a mental health day or work from home if we're feeling stressed about the results.

B: Really? I mean, elections can be emotional, but doesn't it seem strange to take a day off because of the outcome?

A: At first, I thought the same thing. But when I think about it, elections can be overwhelming. The results can bring up strong feelings—sometimes sadness, frustration, or even anxiety.

B: Maybe it's not about the day off itself but about giving people space to process their feelings.

A: Exactly. Sometimes you just need a little time to clear your head. It's hard to focus when you're upset or worried about what's coming next.

B: True; the workplace isn't the right place for political discussions. They can really create tension between co-workers.

A: Absolutely. That's why HR is probably encouraging people to work from home if they're feeling emotional. It avoids potential conflicts in the office.

B: That's for sure. I might just work from home the day after the election to avoid any awkward situations.

A: That's a smart idea. I'm really glad mental health is becoming less of a taboo.

B: Do you remember when the gymnast Simone Biles pulled out of the Olympics because of the "twisties"?

A: Oh, yes! That was such a brave decision. So many people criticized her for stepping away, but they didn't understand how dangerous the situation was for her.

B: People had such high expectations for her? The pressure must have been unbearable.

A: It's sad how quick people were to judge without knowing the full story. But I'm glad she took the time she needed to recover. And when she came back to win gold in the Paris Olympics, it was amazing to see her so happy and confident.

B: Totally. She's such an inspiration—not just for her talent but also for showing that mental health matters. By taking care of herself, she set an example for others, including her teammates.

A: It's true. I think we're slowly moving toward a culture where mental health is just as important as physical health. That's a good thing for everyone, Becky, both at work and in life.

B: Here's to making our mental health a priority, Henry!

Summary

The dialogue concerns mental health. A company is offering various benefits to its employees in areas of wellness, including physical and mental health. Two employees discuss the benefits, which include the option of taking time off if the employees are anxious about election results. The example of the Olympic gymnast is cited as a positive example.

Questions

1. Is it really a company's concern to take measures for the mental health of employees?
2. What do you think are some of the major factors which affect someone's mental health?
3. What do you do for your own wellbeing?
4. Do some people use mental health issues as an excuse for bad behavior?

A: Now Paula, I want you to cast your mind back to the start of 2025.

B: Okay John.....but where are you going with this?

A: I'd like you to think about how things were a few weeks after President Trump's inauguration.

B: He started with a blizzard of executive orders – seems to me he was trying to undo everything that President Biden had accomplished.

A: Well, to me, it seemed like Trump was doing everything people elected him to do – change things, disrupt, attack the status quo, reduce the size of the government, put America first in our foreign policy.

B: But look at how many people he offended. Lots of people in the Middle East, NATO partners and allies, Ukrainian leaders, Greenland and Canada which he says he wants to take over. Trade tariffs on China, Canada, the EU. And on the other hand, talking nicely to Putin. What was the matter with him?

A: He was doing what Trump does. Remember, he won a huge mandate from the American people when he beat Kamala Harris for the Presidency.

B: Not as big as all that. Trump got 77 million popular votes, Harris 74 million. Just a couple of percentage points. He doesn't seem interested in governing for all Americans, just the Republicans. Especially the white and rich Republicans.

A: I think you'll see the difference over time, as the American economy grows and everyone feels better off.

B: Doubtful.....

A: All right, but let's focus on the best thing he started, in my view. I mean the assault on the waste of expenditure, and the fraud in the federal government. Everybody knows the US government is too big and too expensive. Spending needs to be brought down.

B: You're talking about Elon Musk and the DOGE – the Department of Government Efficiency. Is that right?

A: Exactly. I loved that famous clip of him waving a chainsaw, showing the need for radical action to cut out the waste and inefficiency in government.

B: Musk is a billionaire, the richest man on the planet, it seems. He has no understanding of, or empathy for, the poor and marginalized in our societies. He associates with rich people only, and is just interested in money. He is totally the wrong choice at the top of the government. Even worse, he is unelected and unaccountable – has never had to face the voters in his life.

A: That's why he's just the right guy: someone who knows how business works, and can apply good business principles to get our economy moving in the right direction.

B: Another thing: Musk is the CEO of three huge businesses, Tesla, X, and SpaceX. How could he find the time to run all those, as well as working for the government?

A: Well, time will tell on that one. He might only need a short time. Cutting unnecessary spending is the main thing.

B: But there's no concern for the people involved in this. Don't you remember, right when Musk was getting started, all those federal employees who were fired? They were just ordinary Americans, trying to do a good job in the social care world, or in the National Parks – and they suddenly discovered they were unemployed. All because this unelected billionaire decided they were expendable!

A: Well, that's sad for those people – but too many of the Washington bureaucrats just live on a generous income and don't do much work. They don't accomplish anything, and expect the government to look after them. It's time to get back to the American tradition of hard work and small government.

B: What about many of the immigrants? They are often the hardest workers in America. Trump wants to throw millions of them out of the country.

A: Illegal immigration is a huge problem for the USA. We can't afford to keep taking them. Even most Democrats will agree with me on that one!

B: Of course. I'm just asking for some compassion for them – or for the poorest people in the world, who receive no more foreign aid from the USA, John.

A: We must look after Americans first, Paula.

Summary

Two people debate the first weeks of Donald Trump's second presidency, in the early part of 2025. One speaker sees Trump as undoing all of President Biden's work, by executive order, and is particularly critical of the appointment of Elon Musk as a key government figure, tasked with ending waste and inefficiency in the federal government. The other supports Trump's decisions, and says the new president was simply putting into action what he was elected to do.

Questions

1. In the time since President Trump took office, do you think his actions have had positive or negative effects?
2. What can be the advantages and disadvantages of appointing a successful business entrepreneur to a key government post?
3. Has your opinion about Elon Musk changed at all over recent times?
4. What observations would you make about the current state of President Trump's relations with NATO and the European nations?

A: Welcome to today's discussion on the pressing issue of pharmacy closures in the UK and their impact on the National Health Service and local communities. I'm John Bolden. With me today is Dr. Emily Roberts, a healthcare policy expert, welcome.

B: Thank you, John.

A: Let's dive right in, Emily. Over 400 pharmacies closed last year in the UK. Then thousands of temporary shutdowns added up to a significant disruption in patient care. Emily, could you give us some context? Why are pharmacies closing at such an alarming rate?

B: The data is worrying. In 2023, 436 pharmacies closed permanently in England, for three reasons. First, staff shortages -there are not enough trained pharmacists; second, financial strain, income being insufficient, and third, rising operational costs – salaries, rents, energy bills, all increasing. Many smaller, independent pharmacies can't stay open under these pressures, especially in rural or economically disadvantaged areas. Government funding doesn't cover costs and low pay makes it hard to retain staff.

A: Yes, so many small local pharmacies are closing. They do much more than dispense medication—they're essential for healthcare advice, managing chronic conditions, and providing minor treatments. When these pharmacies close, especially in rural or low-income areas, people have fewer healthcare options. That puts even more strain on doctors' surgeries and hospitals.

B: There's a kind of domino effect, with more pressure on doctors' services. In areas with few pharmacies, patients, especially older or chronically ill ones, face long journeys to get their medications, adding emotional and financial strain.

A: The Government recently introduced a "Pharmacy First" scheme. It was meant to ease pressure on GPs – the General Practitioners, or family doctors - by directing patients with minor ailments to pharmacies. But with pharmacies closing, patients are left with no choice but to visit GPs. This increases the strain on an already overburdened system.

B: The thing is that, pharmacy closures undermine the "Pharmacy First" initiative. The plan was to save GP appointments by handling minor conditions. But with pharmacies closed for hours or even days, patients are forced into crowded GP surgeries, delaying care and worsening the strain on the NHS.

A: In 2023, over 46,000 hours of pharmacy service were lost due to temporary closures alone. Emily, in your opinion, what are the long-term consequences if this trend continues?

B: If closures continue, some areas could become "pharmacy deserts," leaving people isolated from essential services. This will increase reliance on already overburdened GPs and hospitals. And it will worsen health outcomes, especially in rural and disadvantaged areas.

A: Yes. Losing local pharmacies, especially in rural areas, can be devastating. Elderly patients and those with mobility issues rely on pharmacies for prescriptions and health advice. Without nearby pharmacies, they'll face greater challenges in managing their health. And another point: what about funding?

B: The funding issue is critical. Many independent pharmacies simply don't get enough financial support to cover their costs.

A: Pharmacies also provide a vital social function, I think, especially for poorer and older people.

B: That's right. The "Pharmacy First" initiative – going to see the pharmacist first rather than the doctor - needs proper resources. Without the funding, we undermine the system meant to relieve pressure on GPs and provide accessible care.

A: Well, it's clear that we have a lot to think about. Thank you, Emily, for your valuable insights into this important issue.

Summary:

The UK is facing a significant rise in pharmacy closures, with 436 permanently closing in 2023 and many others temporarily shutting down. This has led to increased pressure on GP services and worsened access to healthcare, especially in rural and disadvantaged areas. The two speakers discuss the causes behind these closures, including staff shortages, financial strain, and inadequate government funding. They also highlighted the impact of these closures on the NHS and patient care, particularly with the failure of the "Pharmacy First" initiative. To address the crisis, they called for increased funding and better recruitment strategies to support smaller, independent pharmacies.

Questions

1. Should pharmacies be provided by a country's national health system, or is private enterprise a better idea?
2. Do you think it is true that pharmacies also have a social function?
3. What do you think about the "Pharmacy First" idea – going to see the pharmacist rather than the doctor for more minor problems?
4. Has it now become too expensive for governments to provide good healthcare for all its citizens?
5. What role do private doctors and hospitals play in a nation's healthcare system?

A: Hi, Larry. Feel free to sit down when you've finished tapping away on your cellphone.

B: Oh, sorry, Jennifer, I was just replying to a friend's message.

A: Was it urgent?

B: No, but I don't like to wait too long to answer friends.

A: I have a question for you: does your son use a cellphone when he is in the classroom?

B: You mean now, in high school?

A: Yes, or middle school before that. And if so, what does he use it for?

B: Well, I guess to make plans with friends, check on videos, to tell his Mom he might be late. Why do you ask?

A: Well, California's Governor Gavin Newsom has just signed legislation called the Phone-Free Schools Act. This will require schools to restrict cellphones on school grounds by July 2026. And across the country increasing numbers of states are passing similar laws.

B: Why are they doing it?

A: For a few main reasons. First of all, because of all the reports of cyberbullying among adolescents. I'm sure you've read of students that have been shamed, tormented, harassed by messages sent by their fellow students.

B: There was even a girl at my son's school who was humiliated when photos of her without any clothes were texted to the entire class. She ended up leaving the school.

A: Another reason for this law is that the 24/7 distraction that cellphones offer has had a negative effect on children's mental health. It can cause or increase anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues.

B: Hm. I wonder sometimes how real the supposed impact on mental health is. I can see how some of the online content causes anxiety, but not necessarily the constant use. Though I do recognize some young people can get addicted.

A: Addiction is precisely why the U.S. Surgeon General has actually called for social media platforms to have warning labels, like those on cigarettes and other addictive consumer products. And why last year nearly three dozen states sued Meta, which owns Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp. They claimed that the company was knowingly trying to addict children to its platforms.

B: That's rather sinister of Meta. Did the states win their case?

A: It's not yet been decided. But there's another important reason for cellphone restrictions in schools. It's the distraction they cause in classrooms, which interferes with teaching and learning.

B: I see that point. But I think sometimes students find it useful to be able to get more information about something the teacher was discussing. You can google it during class.

A: Not sure about that idea....in a recent study some 72 percent of high school teachers and 33 percent of middle school teachers said that cellphone distractions during class were a "major problem".

B: So this is a growing concern?

A: This year, more than a dozen states have agreed to restrict cellphone use in schools.

B: I can imagine the tech industry is not happy about this.

A: They aren't at all, and have been challenging some laws in courts, which has delayed their implementation.

B: Are there any other groups opposed to such restrictions?

A: Many parents feel that cellphones offer essential ways for them to keep in touch with their children in the case of, say, a school shooting, or some natural disaster like an earthquake. An issue for us in California. And a number of teachers do say that cellphones are an important tool for in-class learning.

B: I tend to agree with that. So, Jennifer, if you have children, will you want them to be able to use cellphones in school?

A: I would hope I could convince them not to use them in school if forbidden, or if allowed by their school, to use them only when allowed.

B: I don't think it should be the states that make laws regarding cellphone use in schools, but each school. After all, teachers and parents in a small rural school in the mountains of California aren't going to have the same concerns as teachers and parents in schools in downtown Los Angeles.

A: Good point.

Summary

California's Governor Gavin Newsom has signed legislation, the Phone-Free Schools Act, that requires schools throughout the state to restrict the use of cellphones on school property by July 2026. The concerns are related to cyberbullying, constant distraction, and mental health. The positive and negative aspects of the ban, for both parents and teachers, are discussed in the dialogue.

Questions

1. Are you in favor of cellphone restrictions in schools, or are they unnecessary?
2. Do you think the social media platforms take their responsibilities to children and young people seriously enough?
3. Should the view of parents carry more weight than the view of teachers?
4. If you had a child, what do you think would be a suitable age for them to get their first cellphone?

A: Good morning. Welcome to our Entrepreneurs Start-up Forum I'm Doug Cannon. I'm 29 years old, and I started my first company when I was 24. Now I'm the CEO of my second company, Griffin Labs, here in Austin, Texas. With me is Chenille Sanders. Chenille, just tell us who you are?

B: I'm 30 years old, and I co-founded a company called GroomFi; a recruitment agency. We've been running the business for six years now.

A: So, our topic in this Forum today is this: is it a good idea to start a company right away after leaving college or university? Chenille, you were just 24 I think when you began your start-up. Which of course is very young, most people would think! Although you did work in another company for a short time. Do you think there are advantages with beginning straight out of college?

B: Yes, I do. I feel like the main advantage is a youthful optimism. That's probably the main one that comes to mind. I was full of hope, and was sure everything would work out. You probably thought the same thing?

A: I did. I would say the advantages are just that you have everything to gain, right? You have nothing to lose at that point. For sure, there are college loans that you are worried about, but other than that, you have no other big financial responsibilities or family obligations.

B: Absolutely, the lack of significant financial and family responsibilities is a huge advantage. At that age, you're free to focus solely on your startup, putting in long hours and making sacrifices without the immediate pressure of other commitments. This allows for a level of dedication and focus that might be harder to achieve later in life.

A: And what about some of the disadvantages?

B: I worked in a company to help me pay my way through university, and then continued at that company for a while after graduation. So I did have some business experience, and that was super useful to me in getting the start-up going. Working for a boss was helpful! But I know you started yours right out of college. What was your experience?

A: As I mentioned, the freedom is marvelous. However, it's important to acknowledge that this freedom can also be a double-edged sword. Without a safety net, it can be challenging to weather financial storms or unexpected setbacks on your own. It's crucial to have a strong support system. So whether it's friends, family, or mentors, who can offer guidance and assistance when needed, you need people around you.

B: That's true. I'm so glad I had a partner to work with. And when you started at college, did you know that you wanted to be an entrepreneur by the time you were done, or did that kind of evolve?

A: Yeah, I think I knew it all along. I mean, ever since I was a kid. Let me be honest, I was a little strange, right? And even later on in college, I would come out with these weird ideas to make some money. One example: I came up with an idea for wristbands to support the college sports teams, and I would sell them outside of college games. So, I think I always had an itch to start something. And then, you know, it just happened that I found a good idea and started it right out of college. But I actually envy that you had experience working for a company prior to starting your own.

B: That's right. You know, I had the opportunity to make a few mistakes working for someone else. It would have been much harder if I had made those mistakes when I was by myself.

A: And someone who has worked maybe for two or three companies, even briefly, can get good experience from different people and environments.

B: Yes. When I started my company, I was able pick and choose from my different experiences.

A: True.....but I have to say I still envy Zuckerberg and Gates, who dropped out of college and founded world-beating successful companies!

Summary

Two entrepreneurs discuss starting companies young. One began at 22 and gained experience working during and after college; the other started at 24, directly out of school. Advantages include optimism and minimal obligations, while disadvantages involve lack of industry experience. Working beforehand allowed one to learn from others and apply best practices. The other valued the freedom to experiment but envied the chance to learn on a company's dime. Both agreed that working in startups before launching their own ventures can provide invaluable insights and skills.

Questions

1. Do you have some dreams of starting your own business?
2. How can young entrepreneurs keep a healthy work/life balance, and avoid burnout?
3. Where is the best place to go to find good mentors and guides when starting a business?
4. A lot of people would think that trying to start a business at the age of, maybe 21 or 22 is rather ridiculous. Would you agree?

A: G'day. I'm Bruce Dundee at National Public Radio Melbourne. Across the world, international students are often at the center of national migration debates. Our government here in Australia is facing criticism of its plan to limit overseas student numbers, as it seeks to contain migration. With me to talk about this is our education correspondent, Sheila Troon. What's happening, Sheila?

B: Well Bruce, a national election may still be some time away here in Australia, but immigration is already a focus of policy debate. This is connected with the housing and rental crisis the country is also currently facing.

A: How are the two issues linked together?

B: The national government wants to cap overseas student numbers. There is pressure to reduce migration and ease Australia's housing shortage. The Education minister says the change will improve the quality of the education system. It will mean that overseas enrollment will return to near pre-pandemic levels.

A: Do they have any figures?

B: According to the minister, the overall number of new international students starting a course next year will be set at 270,000. Official data shows more than 800,000 international students were already enrolled in Australia in the year to May.

A: Australia is well-known for attracting foreign students. Is this number that unusual?

B: According to one expert I talked to, the number of overseas students at universities, and, in particular, the big universities in Australia, are at levels we've never seen before.

A: Interesting. But I thought that the Australian government was quite happy with that many foreign students coming to Australia, wasn't it?

B: You're absolutely right. As the expert said, the government initially welcomed its predecessor's policies to recover student numbers lost during the COVID pandemic.

A: So then what happened?

B: Once it looked like net migration was going to hit new records, there was political pressure for them to tighten the rules. Many people believe that high numbers of international students take up housing that ordinary working Australians could use. So the government is responding in an increasingly panicky way.

A: How did university officials react?

B: Reactions have been swift. Some of Australia's largest universities are warning critical jobs and research funding could be lost if revenue from overseas students drops due to the caps.

A: And what about the students?

B: Students on campus are talking, too. Especially at Melbourne University, one of Australia's most prestigious public universities. There, nearly half of those enrolled are from overseas. The university authorities doubt the government's caps on overseas enrollments will address housing pressures. They believe international students take a disproportionate amount of blame regarding the housing crisis.

A: What do we know about the origins of this housing crisis?

B: According to the National Housing Council, a government advisory body, it's a multi-faceted phenomenon.

A: What on earth does that mean?

B: The crisis is affected by multiple factors, like interest rates, inflation and labor shortages in the construction sector. Not just migration.

A: So, if the government eventually implements this limitation, what will be the impact on universities?

B: According to government data, 15 public universities face cuts to international enrollment under the new policy. Some private education providers warn they could also be forced to close.

A: What kind of signals does it send to international partners?

B: The signal that we're sending to our key partners in Asia is that Australia is not open for business. But Australia is one of the world's top markets for international students and education, one of its biggest export industries. For many, the caps, which the government vows would not harm the international education sector, could hurt the economy.

A: How come?

B: It will have a significant impact in millions of dollars to the economy. At the time when the economy is already fragile, Bruce.

A: Thank you, Sheila. The debate goes on!

Summary:

As in other nations, Australia is debating migration and immigration policies. A particular focus is the number of international students, traditionally a high value 'market' for Australian universities. Many believe the high number of students is a major cause of a housing crisis; others dispute this. The government is planning to cap the number of new students arriving. Some think this will be detrimental to the Australian economy.

Questions

1. Are other Western nations facing this issue also?
2. What impact do you think large numbers of students has on the housing market in any local community?
3. Should university admission fees be higher for international students?
4. What are some of the positive and negative aspects of a country giving university places to international students?

A: Welcome to our podcast entitled “Everything you’ve always wanted to know about leadership.” I’m Katie, your host, and our guest is David Burkus, author, and leadership & teamwork expert on business. Welcome.

B: Thank you, Katie.

A: Today we’ll be talking about a topic that concerns most of us at some point in our lives: conflict. In particular, conflict in a team.

B: OK. Let’s start. There is a theory that conflict is always negative.

A: Well, isn’t it?

B: Not always. There are two categories: personal conflict and task-focused conflict. An effective team leader recognizes the difference and knows if, when, and how to react. Let me explain. A good leader knows whether to try to resolve the conflict immediately or instead, to try to channel that conflict into creativity and progress.

A: I don’t follow you. How can conflict lead to progress?

B: First let’s take personal conflict. That’s the stress that sparks unkind comments or behaviors that disrespect others. Relationships get broken. That won’t be productive; on the contrary, it fosters a lack of trust and productivity in the team.

A: I imagine leaders face this quite often.

B: Yes. That’s why addressing toxic behavior quickly and confidently is crucial to maintaining a healthy team spirit.

A: What should leaders do if they observe inappropriate behavior?

B: To start, they should have a private, one-on-one conversation with the person involved to explain three things: the behavior observed, the impact on the team, and what needs to change.

A: Are sanctions involved?

B: Not yet. The idea is not to punish the person, but rather to encourage positive and constructive behavior.

A: What if the tension between team members continues?

B: Take action. Aim to understand both sides and determine the root of the issue. It’s best to first speak with members separately. After that, meet up together so they commit to acting respectfully and professionally. As a result, they often end up genuinely respecting one another.

A: So, leaders need to act quickly and hold all team members accountable for their actions.

B: Absolutely, it’s vital to recognize and address toxic situations quickly, directly, and consistently. Otherwise, they poison the environment for everyone.

A: You mentioned another type of conflict...

B: Yes. In addition to personal conflict, teams can experience task-focused conflict stemming from diverse ideas, experiences, and points of view. Contrary to personal conflicts, task-related conflict is not a problem leaders need to solve.

A: It can be positive?

B: Real leadership skills can create the conditions necessary for productive conflict to thrive.

A: How can they do that?

B: Team members must be comfortable sharing their opinions and giving honest feedback. A leader should ask for “builds” and “flags”.

A: Please explain.

B: “Builds” refers to suggestions for improvement, and “flags” could be concerns, or suggestions of other ways to do something, for example.

A: That sounds more specific than simply asking “What do you think?”.

B: But it’s not enough. It’s important that those who speak up feel confident that they won’t be judged or penalized later. Leaders must be also be vulnerable, and not take criticism too personally or be defensive. They can do this by actively listening to comments and responding with respect. We want a crucial trust; when a team trusts its leader, conflict can actually pave the way to better solutions.

A: Does this always work?

B: Not always. Sometimes leaders need to look beyond conflicting ideas and focus on the assumptions behind them.

A: And what if even this doesn’t work?

B: Sometimes, despite even the most effective leader’s best efforts, teams don’t agree. Once everybody has had the chance to express themselves, the leader just needs to make a decision and go with it. The team must clearly understand that once a decision has been made, the discussion is over.

A: And that wraps up today’s interview. Thank you, David.

Summary

Conflict in teams is unavoidable, but not all conflict is bad. David Burkus, leading business thinker and best-selling author shares his beliefs on two categories of conflict in teams and how an effective leader deals with each: personal conflict, which is toxic and must be resolved, and task-focused conflict, which can be channeled to become a positive force and propel a team toward better decision making.

Questions

1. During your studies, have you had experience of teamwork – either positive or negative?
2. Does every team need a leader, or can colleagues just work together?
3. Would you say that personal conflict is harder to deal with than task-focused conflict?
4. What are the main qualities needed in a good leader? Do you have an example?

A: Hi there Graham, nice to see you. I thought you were in Africa?

B: Hello Cécilia, I just got back yesterday.

A: So were you in East or West Africa this time? I know you work in pretty hi-tech stuff – space technology, satellites, that kind of thing.

B: Yes. This time my company sent me to Kenya. I was visiting the Kenyan Meteorological Department, helping with data analysis from their satellites. They have launched them with help from European satellite agency.

A: You've surprised me there. I didn't know that African countries are launching satellites. Are there a lot of them?

B: Actually, there are. And here's something else that might surprise you. Last August there was the launch of a spacecraft with a lot of satellites on board. Many of them were designed and built by western nations, but one of them was the first ever satellite made in an African nation – Senegal.

A: OK, that's great news, I guess..... but I have to say I'm doubtful about African nations spending lots of money on stuff that goes into space. Don't they have enough problems on the ground to spend their money on?

B: In fact, the satellites can help solve some of them.

A: For example?

B: In Kenya, satellites have proved invaluable in helping the meteorologists track dangerous weather conditions. They were able to monitor a major dust storm earlier this year, and track its direction. They could warn the people who lived in the areas affected.

A: I can see the value in that.

B: Yes. They can help Africans monitor crops, detect threats caused by extreme weather like floods, and improve telecommunications in remote areas.

A: But surely a lot of that information could be accessed from other nations' satellites – is it really worth the huge amounts of money they must spend?

B: They aren't necessarily huge amounts. The cost of launching a satellite has fallen significantly in recent years. Reduction in cost has opened the market up, and smaller nations now have the opportunity to get involved.

A: So how many countries are involved in this?

B: So far, a total of 17 African countries have put satellites into orbit – including South Africa, Djibouti, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Senegal. Dozens more are expected in the next few years.

A: But surely this is an 'élite' kind of project. Something for the leaders of those countries to boast about at international conferences, when there is still so much to be done at a local level. Especially with all the challenges that the African nations are facing from climate change.

B: It's precisely those kinds of challenges that satellite technology can help with. I spoke to the director of Spacehubs Africa, a space consultancy. He said it's important for African countries to have their own satellites. It gives them better control of the technology and easier access to satellite data. They can see precisely how their own country can be affected by changing climate.

A: I think I can see another danger in this. Once these countries start their adventures in space, won't they be tempted to go further? Put a man or woman on the moon? Send a probe to Mars? This might be leading to an African space race, which wouldn't help anybody.

B: Now, that's a bit ridiculous, Cecilia. All the people I spoke to were insistent that space development must help Africa solve its own problems. Watch out for your colonial attitude!

A: Is there also some danger from the big world powers getting involved in this? I could see Russia or China, or maybe even the USA, trying to increase their diplomatic influence by offering new technologies to the African countries.

B: That is a risk, I agree. But some of the western nations do want to help. They give university places to African students and engineers to develop space knowhow. The Senegal satellite was built by their own technicians.

A: One last question. Ethiopia is the African country where, unfortunately, drought, poverty and famine are words that come to mind. Don't tell me they have a satellite.

B: Yes, they do. To help with agriculture and drought mitigation!

Summary

Two friends are discussing the recent increase in the number of satellite launches by African nations. One speaker points out the positive aspects of this, particularly in help with weather prediction, tracking extreme events, and helping those nations manage climate change. The other speaker is skeptical, asking whether this is a good use of resources, if a space race might develop from prestige projects, and if the bigger nations would use their technology to increase their diplomatic influence.

Questions

1. Do you think that development of satellite technology is a good use of resources for African nations?
2. Can you imagine some kind of space race beginning between African countries?
3. What do you think are some of the major problems for Africa as a result of climate change?
4. Are there dangers in a fairly uncontrolled use of space, with so many countries putting all kinds of different satellites into space?

A: Thousands fewer people in the U.S. are dying from drug overdoses. Public health data from around the country shows the first big sustained drop in fatal overdoses since the opioid crisis began decades ago. Researchers and public health officials are racing to understand why this hopeful trend is happening, so they can keep it going and save more lives. I'm Cindy Johnson, and with me is National Public Radio addiction correspondent Brian Mann, who broke the story. Good morning, Brian.

B: Good morning, Cindy.

A: Brian, you have been researching these numbers. How big is the decrease in deaths from drug overdoses?

B: It's very significant. Deaths from opioids, methamphetamines and other drugs are dropping fast, down 11% nationally. And down to 20%, or even 30%, in some places.

A: And what does this drop mean?

B: It means that if this trend holds up, researchers say we could see 20,000 fewer deaths per year from drugs. I spoke about this with the head of the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

A: And what did she tell you?

B: She told me that the decrease looks real. It is predominantly driven by significant reductions in mortality from opioids. In some places, deaths from fentanyl in particular have dropped dramatically just in the last year. That seemed completely unachievable.

A: Hm. Pretty remarkable. Is this improvement something that health officials believe that they can really build on?

B: Government officials and frontline health workers say the answer is to keep working hard on public health programs. This means providing better medical treatment for people with addiction. A very important element of that is the wider use of naloxone, also known as Narcan.

A: What's that?

B: That's the medication that reverses opioid overdoses. Two specific strategies were implemented to address the issue. Firstly, health workers increased the prescribing of naloxone; secondly, they expanded access to medications for opioid use disorder. And these two strategies have worked.

A: A lot of public health officials say the fentanyl overdose crisis isn't over, but they say these big gains may show a way forward. What do you think?

B: Well, a lot of drug policy experts say these gains and improvements are so big and so sudden that they may not be explainable by those public health strategies alone. I spoke about this with a researcher at the University of California.

A: And what are his thoughts on the topic?

B: To him, what makes this fascinating is the speed at which it's happening. Everyone's going to claim that it was their contribution that caused the decline. But he also explains that there's a mystery here, some factor that's driving this positive trend. And it's still unknown, and impossible to identify.

A: But does that actually matter?

B: It does matter because if we don't know why the change is happening, it's going to be harder to sustain.

A: Brian, are you hearing theories about other factors that could perhaps be reducing drug deaths?

B: Yes, plenty. For sure, things like Narcan are helping. Everybody agrees about that. The U.S. is also hitting the Mexican drug cartels really hard, making big arrests and drug seizures. Some researchers say fentanyl is now harder to get and less pure in some areas. So, less people get addicted.

A: Well, all this sounds like really good news. I wonder, do people think that this positive trend is going to continue?

B: You know, I'm hearing a lot of hope. We know more resources are reaching people in addiction. Experts say the U.S. is slowly getting better at helping people caught up in this drug epidemic. For now, these improvements actually seem to be accelerating.

A: I see... some kind of a silver lining?

B: Exactly. No one thinks this overdose crisis is over. A lot of people are still dying. But, after decades of super grim statistics, researchers think this pivot is real, and they think it's going to offer clues about how to save even more lives.

A: That's NPR addiction correspondent Brian Mann. Brian, thank you.

B: Thanks so much, Cindy.

Summary

The U.S. is seeing a significant decrease in drug overdose deaths, the first sustained drop since the opioid crisis began. Fatal overdoses have fallen by 11% nationwide, more in some places. Experts believe that increased use of naloxone (Narcan) and better access to addiction treatment have contributed to this positive trend. Others think unknown factors might also be driving this rapid improvement. While challenges remain and the fentanyl crisis isn't over, there's hope that these strategies can continue to save lives. Efforts such as targeting drug cartels and reducing fentanyl purity may be helping too.

Questions

1. What kind of factors in someone's life can lead them into drug addiction?
2. Would you say that drug addiction is a worse problem in the USA than in other countries?
3. Are the big pharmaceutical companies too wealthy and too powerful?
4. What might the US Government do to encourage the decrease in deaths from overdoses?

A: Sarah, nice to see you here at the coffee machine. I've been thinking about how we teach here in the university. I 'm really bothered that so many students depend on AI tools like ChatGPT. I think it's crucial that we continue teaching writing, don't you think?

B: Well, yes and no, Jason. With AI becoming so advanced, I don't think we need to emphasize writing as much. AI can generate text almost instantaneously. Why spend valuable classroom time on something that machines can do?

A: Hmm, I think you're a techie rather than a teacher. AI lacks the depth and emotional resonance that human writing provides. Writing is more than just producing words; it's a way to think critically and connect with others on a deeper level. When students write, they engage with ideas actively, which enhances their understanding. If we rely solely on AI for writing, they won't develop those critical thinking skills.

B: But consider this — AI can help students brainstorm ideas, outline their essays, and even provide grammar checks. Isn't it better to let technology assist them rather than making writing such a difficult task? It could actually boost their creativity. They can focus more on what they want to say, rather than how to say it.

A: I see your point, but using AI as a crutch can lead students to become overly dependent. Writing is a craft that requires grappling with language, ideas, and structure. If students don't wrestle with these elements, how can they truly express themselves or cultivate their voice? And there are potential harmful effects. If they don't learn to write, they will struggle to communicate effectively later in life.

B: I think writing will still hold some importance, but much less than it did in the past. Consider how spelling and grammar are gradually being taken care of by software. In the future, we might only need basic writing skills for straightforward tasks. It's a new era, Sarah!

A: Relying too heavily on AI could lead to a dangerous precedent. Without the ability to articulate thoughts clearly, students risk losing their unique identities as writers.

B: That's a valid point, but I see it differently. Imagine how much more time and energy they could channel toward creative pursuits. AI won't eliminate the need for human insight and emotion. Instead, it can make creation easier.

A: But writing is a creative activity. AI does eliminate human insight and emotion. AI texts all feel the same. As an English teacher I notice it immediately. If students start to rely on AI to write for them, it's a kind of plagiarism. Sure, let's teach students how to use AI responsibly. But let's not forget the importance of original thought in writing.

B: But isn't it also about adapting? In a world where technology is rapidly advancing, wouldn't it make sense to train students to use AI as a resource? They can learn how to leverage AI while still finding their voice. It doesn't have to mean abandoning writing altogether.

A: It's a question of priority. We need to ensure that students view AI as a tool, not the main solution. We can't overlook foundational skills that they'll need, for college, job, or even socially. If they can't write a coherent email, or articulate their thoughts in discussions, they may find the world leaves them behind.

B: I see where you're coming from, but I believe we can embrace both. AI could be integrated into writing education. Let's teach students how to critically evaluate AI-generated content.

A: Well, that's a more balanced perspective. We should teach them the importance of their voice. But they must understand how to engage with technology. Writing can enhance their critical thinking. If we guide them on responsible AI use, we might actually empower students to become better communicators.

B: Agreed! It doesn't have to be an either-or situation, Jason. I think a shift is coming. Sure, writing is essential for personal development. But let's use modern technology as much as possible.

A: I still insist writing is vital, Sarah. AI can help, but can never replace the power of human expression.

Summary

Two teachers discuss the relative roles of individual writing, and AI technology. One speaker argues for the continued importance of teaching writing despite the rise of AI tools like ChatGPT, emphasizing that writing fosters critical thinking and personal expression. The other counters that AI can enhance creativity and efficiency, potentially reducing the need for extensive writing skills. They debate the potential dangers of over-reliance on AI, the similarities to plagiarism and diminished communication skills. The conversation highlights the necessity of balancing technological advancements with foundational writing skills.

Questions

1. Do you use Artificial Intelligence in some of your work?
2. Do you agree with the speaker who believes that AI can be very negative for someone's creativity and originality?
3. On a global scale, are you optimistic or pessimistic about the growing use of AI?
4. How do you think the growing use of AI will affect levels of employment in the western economies?

A: Hey, Eleanor, you're looking happy. Any special reason?

B: I leave next Monday to spend two weeks on an island in Greece, Jonathan. I can't wait!

A: Coincidentally, I was thinking about a holiday in Greece this summer, too, but I decided against it.

B: Why? It's one of the most popular destinations for us Brits. It's the beaches and culture of course, but it also offers the best value for money.

A: I discovered that many of the Greek islands that are so popular to us are suffering severe droughts. Their wells and reservoirs are dry.

B: How can they not have enough water when there's water all around? Can't they desalinate the seawater?

A: In most of Greece there have been months with no rainfall, and record-breaking heat. Where there are desalination plants, some have broken down, plus they're expensive to maintain and replace. But there's a major factor that's making the situation even worse.

B: What's that?

A: Tourists. Take the island of Sifnos. One resident said last summer he had been unable to shower, cook, or clean for 10 days because of no water. From June to August Sifnos received more than 100,000 tourists. The permanent population is 2,600, so you can imagine what sort of impact all those tourists have on the diminishing water supply. Like other islands, Sifnos had to declare a state of emergency.

B: Wow—I had no idea. I'm glad I'm not going to Sifnos!

A: A government official on the island said it had reached its limit. Another drought year and thousands of tourists would be an utter disaster. He said his island welcomes tourists, but if the people have no water, the government will have no choice but to send tourists away.

B: But tourists bring so much to local economies, in many countries around the world.

A: That's right. In Greece tourism accounts for one-fifth of the economy. It also generates greed. Since the pandemic, developers have built big hotels and vacation villas. They draw enormously from the local water supply for their huge gardens and swimming pools. Many of these buildings have expansive lawns and gardens, which need a lot of water.

B: Can't the big hotels and fancy villas be forced to provide their own sources of water?

A: They should be. Shamefully in some big tourist destinations that are also having water shortages, like Sicily and Barcelona, priority for the water goes to hotels. It's the local residents who face restrictions

B: What about if the islands charge tourists some sort of tax to help pay for, say, desalination plants?

A: The Greek prime minister has implemented some taxes, but they're small. Not enough to really help bring enough water to the country. Another problem is wildfires. The heat and dryness have recently

brought huge fires, which required enormous amounts of water to extinguish them, and in some cases water infrastructures were damaged.

B: When I go, I'll take short showers, not keep the water running when I brush my teeth.

A: Local governments have printed information telling people about the water problem, encouraging them to restrict their usage as you're suggesting, but most tourists have no idea about the problem.

B: Well, I certainly didn't, until talking to you.

A: Some tourists, on arriving, discover that the water in their taps comes out in drips. Being used to endless amounts of water, they are not happy. They often leave where they're staying. And the locals renting out those homes or hotel rooms lose money.

B: I really don't want to contribute to such a serious problem, or stay someplace where the water might run out. Maybe I should change my plans and just take a cheap cruise somewhere.

A: Those gigantic cruise ships are also part of the problem. When they dock in places like Puerto Rico or Jamaica or Santorini in Greece, thousands of tourists descend on a town, often not buying anything, drawing on the infrastructure.

B: I'm sort of wishing I hadn't run into you.

A: Better to be forewarned than have your vacation ruined. In any case, you can always join me on my vacation trekking in the hills of Scotland.

Summary

Much of Greece is suffering from a lack of water. Tourism is a major contributor to this water shortage. The hotels and villas use large amounts of water. The arrival of cruise ships in some relatively small towns exacerbates the problem. Desalination is difficult and inadequate. Tourist taxes provide only a small income. Wildfires, which need huge amounts of water to deal with them, are also a problem in some places.

Questions

1. Can you see any solution to this for the Greek government? What can they do?
2. What are some of the other impacts that overtourism can have?
3. How does someone with an "environmental conscience" manage to go on holiday anywhere?
4. What kind of impact have wildfires had on the tourism industry?

A: Hi there Liam. Nice cheesy slice of pizza you have there. Peperoni max?

B: Hi Emma, yes, well.....I'm trying to cut down on take away food a bit. Not very successfully.

A: I can see that. Research on takeaways and obesity in the UK is pretty discouraging. In part because our eating habits have changed, especially since the pandemic.

B: Yes, I read that. We're ordering way more takeaways now than before COVID, and it's not just a phase—it's becoming a lifestyle. Many more people are getting fast food delivered.

A: Exactly. It's not just the frequency but the calorie load of these meals. Some takeaways can pack more calories in a single meal than what you're supposed to eat in an entire day! For instance, a pizza alone can have up to 2,400 calories. Add on the Pepsi....

B: That's a crazy number! I think the government suggests a daily intake of around 2,000 calories for women and 2,500 for men. A pizza or burger meal easily blows past that. And it's not just about the calories; many of these meals are full of salt, sugar, and fat too.

A: Right! Plus, during the pandemic, food delivery from apps like Deliveroo and Just Eat soared. People got comfortable with having food come to them, and many still find it more convenient than cooking or dining out.

B: Yes. Six in ten takeaway meals exceed the recommended 600-calorie limit. Even supermarket meal deals—like a sandwich, snack, and drink—often go over that. They're quick and affordable but the calories really add up.

A: That brings me to another issue—the economics of this. Fast food chains and bakeries are piling on promotions, especially with rising living costs. Did you know the number of deals and special offers at these places has gone up by a third?

B: I saw that! McDonald's, KFC, and others are constantly rolling out low-price deals, especially for breakfast or lunch. They're capitalizing on people wanting to save money, but it's almost like they're pushing people to make poor food choices just to get a bargain.

A: It's true. Marketing strategies get people to buy more food than they intended. And the portion sizes are often much bigger than people would cook at home.

B: Exactly. A home-cooked meal, even with similar ingredients, would likely have far fewer calories. Because you can control things like salt and oil. Plus, fast-food places are now using app deals like "McDonald's Mondays" to keep people coming back, and it seems to be working.

A: It's effective, for sure. But there's another side to the story too. Research suggests that people from lower-income households are more likely to use the food delivery apps. That's because they're often working longer hours with less time to cook. Here's where it gets tricky—these same households also have the higher rates of obesity.

B: Yes, people with lower incomes might find it easier to order takeaway. That's often cheaper or faster than preparing a meal. But then, they're also the ones more likely to suffer from the health impacts of this food. Which is heavy on calories, poor on nutrients.

A: Exactly. I think that nutritional quality varies a lot based on where you live. For some people who live in cities, takeaway might be the easiest choice even if it's not the healthiest.

B: But it's not just about location; we can't ignore convenience. Even if healthier options are available, not everyone has time to cook at home. Promotions make takeaways so accessible. For families on tight schedules, an affordable, quick meal is tempting.

A: True, but that's why we should have stricter regulations. The government ought to impose clearer limits on calories, salt, and sugar in these foods. If companies were held to standards, they'd have to consider health, not just profit.

B: Though you don't want the government regulating everything we eat. Still, adding calorie labels to ready meals would help.

A: Some companies do that. But I guess that like everything, moderation is the thing. Keep takeaways as a treat.

B: Good point. Want a bit of my pizza?

Summary

In this discussion, two people talk about the rising reliance on takeaways in the UK and its impact on health, especially since the pandemic. They discuss how frequent takeaway meals, which often contain high calories, salt, sugar, and fat, are contributing to obesity rates. The convenience and affordability of takeaways, particularly for those with limited time or lower income, make these options appealing. Promotions and app deals by fast-food chains further drive this trend. People should be moderate in their consumption of takeaway food.

Questions:

1. What are the factors in modern society that help to make fast food businesses so successful?
2. Should the government regulate what we eat, or is it a question of personal choice for which regulation would restrict our liberty?
3. Students and young people are often major customers of the fast-food chains. Is this a problem?
4. Have many people lost interest in cooking at home?

A: Welcome to “Voices of Change” on Radio Waves! I’m Mike Scott. Today, we have an extraordinary story of resilience, and a commitment to social change. We’re joined by Arti, a remarkable e-rickshaw driver from Uttar Pradesh in India. She has recently been honoured with a prestigious Royal Empowerment Award, sponsored by King Charles. Welcome, Arti!

B: Thank you, Mike! It’s a pleasure.

A: First off, congratulations on your incredible achievement! Winning a Royal Award is no small feat. Can you tell us about the moment you found out you had won?

B: Thank you! When I heard the news, I was overwhelmed with joy and disbelief. I was just doing my job, driving my pink e-rickshaw and trying to support my daughter.

A: What exactly is an e-rickshaw?

B: It’s an electric rickshaw. They are sometimes called electric tuk-tuks. They are small three-wheeled vehicles powered by an electric battery and motor. E-rickshaws don’t require petroleum fuel like auto rickshaws. But they still offer greater mobility than traditional pulled rickshaws. This has led to their popularity.

A: In which countries are they used?

B: Mostly here in Asia. Electric rickshaws are primarily manufactured in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and China.

A: And how did your journey into becoming a driver begin?

B: My journey began out of necessity. As a single mother, I needed to earn money and provide for my daughter. In 2023, a humanitarian project introduced me to the Indian government’s Pink E-Rickshaw scheme. This is an initiative aimed at empowering women and expanding their income earning opportunities.

A: How does it work?

B: It’s an innovative scheme. We female pink e-rickshaws were provided a subsidy, some money to get started. I took on the challenge, learnt to drive and began working. My e-rickshaw became well-known and my business began to grow. Then in turn I managed to influence my community to get more of us women driving.

A: I understand that your ‘pink rickshaw’ is significant as well. Can you tell us about that?

B: Absolutely! The pink colour represents female empowerment. It’s a symbol to encourage more women into the workforce, especially in fields dominated by men. When passengers see my pink e-rickshaw, I try to spark conversations with them about gender equality.

A: You’ve also been involved in a number of community initiatives, haven’t you?

B: Yes, I have. I’ve started workshops to teach women how to drive e-rickshaws, and to manage their finances.

A: What does this recognition mean to you personally and for others in your community?

B: The award represents hope for many women in my community, regardless of the obstacles.

A: Our listeners need to know that this award was made by the Prince's Trust International. This organisation was set up by Prince Charles, when he was Prince of Wales. Now of course he is King Charles III, but is still very much involved in the Trust. It supports young people across 20 countries through employment, education, and enterprise programmes.

B: My prize was from The Prince's Trust women's empowerment award group. They told me it recognises the global work of young women who have succeeded against the odds. And have also made a lasting difference to those around them

A: Could you tell us what was it like meeting the King, Arti?

B: It was an amazing experience, meeting the King who was so nice, and sent his greetings to my family back home too. He also listened carefully as I spoke about how much I love driving my e-rickshaw. Which of course does not run on polluting diesel.

A: Excellent, and I think you turned up in the pink e-rickshaw to the ceremony! The Prince's Trust is really keen on projects that help the environment. So, what's next for you, Arti?

B: My dream is to create a network of women drivers who support each other.

A: Do you have any advice for women who may be hesitant to pursue their goals?

B: My advice is surround yourself with supportive people, and believe in yourself. Remember, every big achievement starts with a decision to try.

A: Thank you so much for sharing your inspiring journey, Artie

B: Thank you.

Summary

A female e-rickshaw driver from Uttar Pradesh in India has received a prestigious Royal award from the UK, a trust set up by Prince Charles for her exceptional contributions to her community. This recognition highlights her commitment to empowering women and addressing transportation challenges in her area. The driver, who operates a pink e-rickshaw, has become a symbol of resilience and inspiration for many, showcasing the impact of women in typically male-dominated professions.

Questions

1. What do you think is the value of this kind of award – can it make a difference?
2. How can large cities develop sustainable transport solutions?
3. How can the issue of gender equality be addressed in more traditional societies around the world?
4. Is real social change best accomplished by determined individuals and charitable organisations, rather than governments?

A: Hello Tim.

B: Hi Patricia. What's up? Still living in Sydney with your husband?

A: Yes, I am. It's a great city, we love it. And you, do you like living now in Australia?

B: I love it. Australia is a great place. You look a bit worried, what's up?

A: Do you remember Alex?

B: He's your nephew, right? How old is he now? Twelve?

A: Thirteen actually. But he's kind of addicted to social media. It's become a real nightmare

B: We were also addicted to video games at his age, don't you remember? He'll be fine.

A: Well, there's a big difference between our generation and his. Yesterday I peeked at his phone and I've seen particularly violent scenes and images. I told him to stop watching these things and delete his account on that platform, but he didn't listen to me at all!

B: Well, I might have some good news for you.

A: I'm all ears!

B: Australia wants to ban kids from social media.

A: How's that possible? Will the law include teenagers?

B: The social media ban will be for all under-sixteen kids and teenagers. They won't be able to access platforms such as Facebook, Instagram or X. The Prime Minister said that « parents are worried sick about the safety of our kids online ».

A: He's right. However, is it a bit too much? I mean, I really wish my nephew could be protected from harmful content, but I'm not sure a total ban is the solution.

B: I agree with you. However, according to the bill, the ban will apply to all children under 16. There will be no exemptions for existing users, or even those with parental consent.

A: What do people think about this law? Have you heard anything about this?

B: Australians who were interviewed generally think it's a good idea. However, some of them are not sure that a total ban would solve the main issue.

A: Personally, I'm quite sure my nephew could easily bypass all the restrictions. He knows a lot about computing.

B: I'm afraid you might be right. I've read that France introduced legislation requiring social media platforms to block access to children under 15 without parental consent. Research indicated almost half of users were able to circumvent the ban using a simple VPN.

A: See! Did other countries try the same thing as Australia?

B: Yes, the article also said that a law in the US state of Utah, which was similar to Australia's, was blocked by a federal judge who found it unconstitutional.

A: I don't want to be pessimistic about it, but it seems that our Australian laws are going to fail. Nevertheless, I can't decide to turn a blind eye to this subject. It's way too important.

B: Why so?

A: Have you ever heard of cyberbullying?

B: Yes, I have.

A: A 12-year-old Australian boy, had had a disagreement with a friend, and one night before bed, the boy added him to a group chat with two older teenagers. Almost instantly, his phone "started blowing up" with a string of violent messages. The boy was terrified.

B: This has to stop. Your nephew should play video games instead of being on social media all day long. It won't solve his addiction issue but at least he will be safe.

A: Will the ban apply to video games too?

B: No. Messaging services and gaming sites will not be restricted.

A: Well, that's a problem too. Kids can text each other and talk to each other while playing video games. These games could also turn into a cyberbullying platform in the blink of an eye.

B: Well, I think all the big companies should do their part by cleaning up their platform. They must find a way to stop harmful content. AI tools might be very helpful.

A: True. They should do more.

B: Remember too that plenty of teenagers use social media as a platform where they can express themselves. They can be creative, make friends, share ideas and content. Social media has become a way to feel seen. Or find an identity.

A: Well, we'll see if Australia's ban works.

Summary

Australia's Prime Minister plans social media ban for under 16s. These laws aim at mitigating the "harm" social media was inflicting on Australian children. People on the streets of Sydney reacted with mixed feelings to the new law. Some say it's a "great idea" while others suggest responsibility for children's social media use should rest with parents. The two speakers tackle different topics related with social media like cyberbullying and inappropriate content. The role of social media companies in restricting harmful content is also considered.

Questions

1. Should under 16s be banned from social media?
2. Will young people find a way round the ban, and make it ineffective?
3. The Australian prime minister said that the problem is sufficiently serious, that doing nothing is not an option. Do you think he is right?
4. Are big companies doing enough work to protect kids from cyberbullying and inappropriate content?

A Hello everyone, welcome to *The Clean Energy Show*. I'm Sarah Sanders. As always, we are looking into major advances related to climate change, renewable energy, and the transition to a better and cleaner future. In search of an endless energy source, scientists around the world have been working for decades on nuclear battery technology. Today, we are glad to host Brian Clark of the UK Atomic Energy Authority. Welcome Sarah.

B: Thank you, Sarah.

A: Brian, you have some good news, I think. An innovation which could reshape the future of sustainable energy solutions.

B: That's right. It's a game changer, a carbon-14 diamond battery.

A: You work in atomic energy fuel development, Sarah, so can you tell us about this, and explain a bit how it works?

B: We are currently developing the UK's first prototype nuclear fusion energy plant. It's in northern England, and we aim to be operational by 2040. So, our overall work is in sustainable energy. And solutions are on their way. As part of that, we've been experimenting with diamonds.

A: So tell us about this diamond technology,

B: I'm proud to say that we seem to be the first to have produced a coin-size battery. It can provide continuous energy for over 5,700 years. With no maintenance required.

A: That's astounding! It's forever! On our human scale I mean.

B It is. What's more, we can encapsulate radioactive nuclear waste within a synthetic diamond structure. This is safe and prevents any leaks. So, it addresses one of the main issues of nuclear production, the waste management. We use the decaying process of carbon 14 in nuclear waste to generate energy.

A: OK. Have I got this clear? You put a little bit of radioactive waste into a diamond, to make electricity for a battery. But where exactly does the energy come from?

B: We use what is called the beta voltaic effect. Without getting too technical, the diamond as a semiconductor converts the emitted electrons from the carbon-14 decay into electricity.

A: As simple as that! But in some research I did before our interview, I found that there are other people working on the same idea. How does your innovation compare with theirs?

B As you say, the idea behind this technology isn't completely new. Quite a lot of attempts have been made worldwide to develop it. What makes ours unique is the lifespan, the size, the safety, and the absence of maintenance. The Chinese Betavolt project promises a lifespan of about 50 years for their battery of about the same size. They were working on a more sustainable alternative to traditional lithium or alkaline batteries used in phones and watches. costly and bulky.

A: You have been collaborating with researchers at the University of Bristol as well, I believe? They have a unit developing new materials and new devices. They want to change the paradigm of atomic energy.

B: That's right. We want to use this new technology to advance the human race. Our micro power is safe and nearly endless. There are a large range of applications. Maybe in extreme environments with difficult access, like space, or the bottom of the sea. And of course, medical use in bio-compatible medical implants, like hearing aids or pacemakers.

A: All impressive, Brian. So do you think your technology is perfect, and ready for mass production? Or are there still some hurdles to overcome?

B: We think the technology is ready, but the process is still quite complex. It's also costly to produce. We want to increase our output. So our main challenges are in the area of upscaling the production to produce high quantities, and also to improve the power performance. I'm enthusiastic and hopeful, but recognize the challenges.

A: Could you give us an idea of the current cost?

B: Of course. The technology is currently priced at \$ 20,000 per microwatt. Expensive for a small battery! We obviously need to reduce costs if we want to implement this technology at a large scale. But I'm sure it's just a matter of time.

A: Thank you for coming in today, Brian.

Summary

This dialogue discusses a breakthrough in the field of sustainable energy. The focus is on a revolutionary battery technology, in which a diamond structure captures energy from carbon 14 decay. This offers an almost endless energy source, lasting for more than 5000 years. It also addresses the issue of nuclear waste management, although there are challenges relating to its development and commercial production.

Questions

1. Why is battery technology so important in today's world?
2. Do you think of the nuclear industry as having a positive or negative effect in the area of sustainable energy?
3. What are some of the challenges in dealing with nuclear waste?
4. Is it too late to hope to stop climate change?

A: With me in the studio today is Sophie Jones, with an unusual story to tell us. Sophie, welcome.

B: Thank you, Jordan.

A: Now, you are very active in Tiktok, with 180,000 followers, leading a new trend in personal development. What's it called?

B: Rejection therapy.

A: OK. I think you need to explain to us what that is!

B: It's for people who are very timid, very shy, and who find it hard to speak up and talk to other people. People like me!

A: So what's the idea, how does it work?

B: It's simple. You push yourself to go up to a perfect stranger in the street, and you make a silly request. Ask a question that's almost certain to get turned down. For example, I approach a stranger and say, "Could you give me five hundred pounds?", or "Could I have your mobile phone"?

A: What's the point of doing that?

B: The person says "No", rejects you in a way, but you keep doing it. If you do it enough times, you desensitize yourself to rejection. You boost your self-confidence.

A: It all sounds a bit weird to me. How did this start for you?

B: I heard about it online. I was inspired to try it because I was always scared to speak up at work, or to make plans with friends. So I filmed myself dancing in a public park- something that would normally terrify me. But I did it, and in a short time I began to feel less judgment from other people. My whole mindset changed.

A: I watched some of your Tiktok videos. You have painted yourself green and walked around busy areas. And your most popular video is where you stand up in the middle of an aeroplane and loudly say to the other passengers "Have a good flight!" That one has 16 million views.

B: That's rejection therapy – you get used to other people's negative reactions, so it doesn't bother you anymore. I don't worry now about what people think of me, and I am a happier person.

A: Well, that's great for you, Sophie. But I have talked to some doctors about this, and they are more cautious about rejection therapy. One told me that she understood the idea of intentionally seeking out rejection so as to avoid the fear of it. It could help build resilience, but that doesn't mean necessarily it will lessen the sting of the rejection.

B: I've heard that. I've even heard some doctors say that rejection therapy can have the opposite effect, and make you retreat a little bit more into your own comfort zone. I don't think that's the case either.

A: Another doctor told me that there isn't any published scientific research to show that rejection therapy actually helps people. He called it more a kind of self-help technique. It's not a medically accepted form of therapy.

B: I think that's just because it's new, and researchers haven't had long enough to do those medical and psychological studies.

A: But the same doctor told me that rejection therapy is not tailored to individuals the way other kinds of therapy are. Those therapies are well established, and have good evidence behind them. For example, there is one called "cognitive behavioral therapy", used for treating stress, compulsive behavior, and anxiety issues. They are targeted to specific problems.

B: Of course. Rejection therapy is more general, and is aimed at a mass audience. I accept that more studies need to be done.

A: A psychologist told me that anyone with severe social anxiety should seek deeper, personal therapy to work out where it comes from. She said there has been some progress from people taking on rejection therapy, but that you also need to understand where the fear of rejection comes from.

B: So what's her idea?

A: Simply this: if you are told "no", you should understand it's about the other person's circumstances, and not your own worth.

B: Of course. But I've been contacted by thousands of people who have been inspired by rejection therapy, and are now much happier.

Summary

The discussion is based around the idea of 'rejection therapy', where a shy or timid person can approach strangers, or do weird things in public, suffer a certain rejection and are thereby desensitized to it. They become more confident in themselves, and less anxious about being rejected. The main speaker, a Tiktok influencer, has had her life transformed by this; the other speaker expresses some reservations from the medical profession.

Questions:

1. Could you go up to a stranger in the street and ask them for five hundred pounds?
2. What is your view of rejection therapy – positive or negative?
3. Is there a danger in psychological theories and practices being promoted on social media?
4. Do you think that doctors and psychologists are being unnecessarily cautious about something which seems to help a lot of people?

A: Hello, and welcome to our daily show, *The Things That Matter*. I'm Stacie Martinez, and tonight, we're joined on set by cybersecurity expert Jay Davis.

B: Hello Stacie.

A: Jay, our phones follow us everywhere. Apparently, we're being listened to and even tracked in our movements. We're all familiar with the algorithms that seem to know us better than we know ourselves. So, what exactly are the risks?

B: First of all, I'd like to point out that smartphones are indispensable today, and help us in our daily lives. You can't manage without one in the modern world. However, it's essential to protect yourself, and your data, as much as possible in an increasingly open world.

A: Recently the FBI warned iPhone and Android users to use encrypted messaging apps, instead of their phone's default messaging applications. What's your take on that?

B: I think it's absolutely necessary to follow that advice. Encrypted messaging apps are far more secure.

A: Are all encrypted messaging apps reliable?

B: Not really. For example, Telegram doesn't encrypt messages by default. Other apps such as WhatsApp, Signal, or Facebook Messenger, do encrypt.

A: What dangers could users face?

B: Unencrypted messages can be accessible to hackers.

A: Who are today's hackers?

B: Sometimes they're isolated individuals. But we've also seen cases of foreign interference in recent years. There was an incursion by Chinese hackers into American telecommunications networks. Others suspect Russia, North Korea and Iran of similar activities. They all deny it, of course.

A: So, are these messaging apps the complete solution?

B: It's a bit more complicated than that. There's a dilemma when user data is encrypted end-to-end. Let's take Apple as an example.

A: What happens with them?

B: According to Apple, users' conversations are encrypted end-to-end. They can only be accessed by the users themselves, via their account and password. Even Apple itself doesn't have access to this data.

A: Well, all that seems completely normal to me.

B: Yes, except when a user's data is required for a legal investigation, for example. Police officers often get frustrated by being unable to access a criminal's phone records. This data could be very useful in solving a case, or even saving lives. Apple can't, or won't give them the information.

A: That's a pretty major issue.

B: Yes. Malicious individuals can hide, and can mask their conversations with complete impunity. There's an urgent need to find a solution to this issue.

A: But if encrypted content becomes accessible to the platform owner, Apple, say, it's no longer truly encrypted, right?

B: Exactly. What would users say if their supposedly end-to-end encrypted conversations were actually accessible to Google or Apple at the discretion of these companies?

A: It would definitely break the trust between users and the brand. It's a dilemma. Should we only be wary of our messaging apps?

B: No, you also need to be cautious about how your phone uses tools like the camera, microphone, and geolocation.

A: How do we go about that?

B: First, every app must request your permission before using one of these tools. Deny access if the app doesn't have a valid reason to connect to them.

A: Are the tech giants taking action to protect their users?

B: Some measures have been taken to limit apps' access to your data, including geolocation, contact lists, camera access. Apple has started implementing changes, and Google has followed.

A: All this sounds very negative. What can we tell listeners who are worried about this situation? I guess users have to be vigilant? For example.....

B:by not downloading unknown or suspicious apps. Also, check your smartphone settings to review the permissions granted to apps.

A: Is this difficult to do?

B: Not at all. Interfaces today are simplified and accessible to everyone. Ideally, you should grant as few permissions as possible to apps from the start. Then, as we've mentioned, use encrypted messaging for communication, especially when sensitive or confidential data is involved.

A: Thank you very much, Jay, for all your valuable advice. We'll see you soon for a new edition.

Summary

In recent years, numerous cases of foreign interference through the espionage of private data have been reported, particularly in the United States. The discussion centers around the warning issued by the FBI to smartphone users. The FBI advises users to stop using standard messaging apps and instead switch to encrypted messaging apps to protect their data from potential hackers. The dialogue highlights the dangers users face as well as useful actions to safeguard against them.

Questions

1. Do you feel that the data on your smartphone is well protected?
2. What are the risks of weak security on connected devices?
3. Has espionage taken on a new dimension with the advent of new technologies?
4. Would it be better to return to non-connected means of communication?

A: Rob, thanks for joining me on the podcast today. I know you're leading a groundbreaking lawsuit against ExxonMobil for its role in the plastic pollution crisis. Can you tell me why this lawsuit is so important?

B: Absolutely, Anna. This case is crucial because ExxonMobil, along with other petrochemical giants, has spent decades promoting a wrong idea that plastic recycling could solve the global plastic pollution crisis. The truth is, they've known all along that plastic recycling was not a feasible solution. In fact, they misled the public in order to increase plastic production and boost their profits. They ignored the severe environmental and health impacts.

A: You're accusing ExxonMobil of deliberately deceiving the public about the effectiveness of recycling plastic?

B: Yes, exactly. For years, they've claimed that plastic could be recycled. This led many people to think that using single-use plastics was somehow sustainable. The reality is that plastic recycling is not just inefficient, but also economically unviable. Only a tiny fraction of plastic ever gets recycled. Most of it ends up in landfills or the ocean.

A: ExxonMobil has responded by saying that California's recycling system has been ineffective for decades. They say that the state, rather than the oil industry, is to blame for the crisis. How do you respond to that?

B: It's a classic deflection. Yes, California's recycling has problems, but ExxonMobil and other plastic producers flooded the market with cheap, single-use plastics. They pushed recycling as the solution. Years later, blaming the state is just passing the buck—they need to take accountability for their role in this crisis.

A: Some critics argue that recycling was never going to be a perfect solution, especially with the sheer volume of plastic being produced. Is the problem really about the recycling systems, or is it about the overproduction of plastic in the first place?

B: That's exactly the issue. The focus shouldn't have been on recycling as the solution to everything. The real problem is that plastic production has skyrocketed over the last few decades. The oil and gas industry, including ExxonMobil, has been a major contributor to that. The production of virgin plastic is much cheaper than recycling. The recycling infrastructure can't keep up. Recycling was never going to solve the problem if we kept producing plastic at such an unsustainable rate.

A: In your complaint, you mentioned that ExxonMobil falsely promoted the "chasing arrows" symbol on plastic products, making consumers believe that their plastic waste could be recycled. How did this impact customer behavior?

B: That symbol, along with all the messaging about recycling, led people to believe that throwing their plastic bottles in the recycling bin meant they would be reused. This created a false sense of security. It made things worse. The more plastic people used, the more it ended up as waste, because the recycling rates are so low.

A: ExxonMobil has also been promoting “advanced recycling,” which they claim can solve the plastic waste problem. What’s your opinion about this?

B: Advanced recycling, or chemical recycling, is mostly a marketing tool. Despite promising claims, it's plagued by technical and financial issues. The plants often close or cause environmental damage. It's far from a reliable solution, yet ExxonMobil continues to promote it as a breakthrough.

A: ExxonMobil says it’s advancing plastic recycling beyond traditional methods. Is collaboration with them possible, or is litigation the only solution?

B: We're open to collaboration, but ExxonMobil and other plastic producers must be held accountable. For decades, they've pushed the myth of recycling without real change. Litigation is necessary to address the root issue—plastic overproduction—and to drive genuine accountability.

Summary. This dialogue discusses California's lawsuit against ExxonMobil for its alleged role in fueling the plastic pollution crisis by promoting the myth that plastic recycling is a viable solution. A legal representative argues that ExxonMobil deceived the public to boost plastic production and profit, knowing recycling wouldn't effectively manage plastic waste. Despite ExxonMobil's defense, blaming California's recycling systems, he insists the root issue lies in overproduction. He highlights how symbols like the “chasing arrows” misled consumers about recycling. The lawsuit aims to push for accountability, reduce plastic production, and inspire broader legal action for real change against plastic pollution.

Questions

1. Are lawsuits and legal action the best way to reduce plastic pollution, or does it need direct government(s) intervention?
2. Is plastic pollution the biggest environmental crisis facing the world today?
3. Do you have the impression that general recycling of glass, paper, bottles, food and so on, is effective in the place where you live?
4. What are some of the major challenges facing the establishment of a thorough and comprehensive recycling programme?

A: Richard, nice to see you. Your family all well? I think the last time I saw you your daughter was learning to drive. Did she pass her driving test?

B: Yes, Laura, it took her two attempts, but she now has her license.

A: So I guess she's pretty happy, out in the car now.

B: Well, yes and no.

A: What's the problem?

B: Two things. The first is that she likes taking some friends with her when she goes out for the evening. But she's worried about the new campaign that's starting. She's afraid it will really limit her social life.

A: What campaign is that?

B: It's the people who say that new young drivers should be prevented from carrying passengers of a similar age for their first six months as drivers.

A: So that a teenager of, say, 19 years old wouldn't be able to take friends of a similar age in his car?

B: That's right. But my daughter says she has now the proof that she is a qualified driver. She should have the right to take in her car whoever she likes.

A: Well okay, but it's risky, isn't it? I think there are a lot of accidents where young drivers, without much experience, end up damaging their own lives. And their friends. I think it's a very good idea for under 21s to be forbidden to take other young people in their vehicles.

B: Well, **my** daughter sees it as a restriction on her freedom. She's a careful driver, and wouldn't endanger anybody.

A: Though some youngsters are a lot less careful. I think a UK motoring organization said a kind of graduated driving license, with restrictions for younger drivers, would save many lives in the UK.

B: Maybe. But there's a second problem for her, a much bigger one. It's the cost of car insurance.

A: Yes, I do know that costs have gone up a lot in the last few months.

B: The prices of insurance for young people are just enormous, too expensive for most young people. One of my daughter's friends, aged 17, was given one quote of £9000 for a year by one insurance company! I think they gave that price because they didn't want to insure her. Insurance companies all think that young people are too much of a risk, so they charge exorbitant sums.

A: But it is true that young drivers have more accidents. The son of a friend of mine ended up paying about £3000 a year. By the way, have you heard of something called "fronting"?

B: No. What's that?

A: It's when someone is added to another person's policy as a named driver, when they should really have a policy of their own. People do it to save money, of course.

B: So I buy a car insurance policy – much cheaper for me as a parent – then put my daughter on as a named driver? Sounds like a good idea, a lot cheaper. I think I'll try it!

A: But hold on, Richard, it's actually illegal! If somebody is the main driver of a car, then the insurance policy has to be in their name. The law says the person who drives a car for the majority of the time must be the person who has the policy.

B: This sounds like a pretty grey area to me, Laura. How does the insurance company know who the main driver of a car is?

A: Good point, but "fronting" is actually fraudulent. If it is found to be true, it could invalidate your insurance policy. And could result in a criminal conviction.

B: OK, risky. Another thing is that the insurance companies have overall rules which don't allow for individuals. My daughter has a friend of 19, who has a full-time job driving for Ocado. He drives professionally for 8 hours a day, but now can't afford to keep his own car. He was quoted £8000 a year for insurance. He's going to buy a bike instead to get to work.

A: That's tough. With more restrictions, and high insurance, it's not easy for young drivers.

Summary

The dialogue deals with two major issues facing young drivers. One is the potential limit being placed on the ability of young drivers to carry passengers of a similar age to them. This idea is in response to a number of recent high-profile accidents, where several young people in the same car have been killed. The second is the high cost of insurance, putting car ownership out of the reach of many young people. The practice of "fronting", where parents buy the insurance in their own name, but allow their children the right to be effectively the main driver, is discussed.

Questions

1. Do you think it is a good idea to prohibit new drivers from taking friends of their own age with them in their car?
2. In the UK, the number of young people interested in taking a driving test is falling. Why do you think this might be?
3. Are you concerned directly by the cost of car insurance, or is having a car of no interest to you?
4. Does the practice of "fronting" – parents being the 'front' for their children in buying their insurance policy – seem wrong to you, or is it ok?

A: Welcome to Environment Today, looking at hot topics in the world of the environment. With me today is Gerry Baron, who is a deep-sea miner. Welcome, Gerry.

B: Thank you, Emma.

A: Gerry, tell us about your firm.

B: It's called the Metal Company, and we extract metal from the ocean floor. We use remote-controlled machines to scoop up the rocks sitting on the seabed. We crush and process them to produce key minerals, which the modern world badly needs.

A: What kind of minerals?

B: Many which are in high demand for the production of batteries for cars, mobile phones and so on – cobalt, nickel, copper and manganese especially.

A: I want to come back to that, but first let me challenge you with the point made by your biggest critics. Aren't you causing terrible damage to the marine environment with your invasive mining? I read that the robots you use on the seabed are the size of trucks! How is that acceptable?

B: Well, I want to make three points in response to that, Emma. The first is that anything we do has to be sanctioned by the International Seabed Authority. This is the United Nations body that regulates the seafloor in international waters. They....

A: I'm going to interrupt you, Gerry. At the moment no commercial extraction at all is allowed by this UN body!

B: Please let me finish. This seabed authority is meeting soon to finalize rules that will allow mining to start. This requires agreement from the 169 countries in the ISA, the International Seabed Authority.

A: But about 30 major countries, including the UK, Brazil, Canada, France and Germany, have said they want the ban on mining to continue.

B: Yes, though other nations including China, and many political leaders in the USA, want commercial mining to be permitted. And this may surprise you – just recently Norway became the first country in the world to allow future deep-sea mining in its territorial waters.

A: All right. So, your first point is that you will only act when you have some international approval. What's your second point?

B: The transition to clean energy requires a lot of minerals which are called "rare earths". We are producing the key elements needed to power all the batteries needed in the modern world. Replacing the use of fossil fuels is vital, and our mining can be an important factor in that.

A: Some people question the need for deep-sea mining in the first place. It would produce a lot of manganese, which we are not short of. And for the other minerals, like cobalt and nickel, even the European Commission says we have good sources of these. There is no risk to the supply chain for those materials.

B: We're going to need a lot more of them in the future!

A: OK. What about the third point you wanted to make?

B: Our deep-sea mining will cause less environmental disturbance than existing mining on land. For example, look at current nickel extraction in Indonesia and the Philippines. There is has a huge impact on rainforests in both countries, caused by surface mining.

A: What about the marine impact of your mining?

B: We want to mine an area of the north Pacific. This zone is situated between Mexico and Hawaii. It's called the 'abyssal' zone, because it's so deep. It's perpetually dark down there, between 3000 and 6000 metres below sea level. There is zero flora. And the amount of fauna, animal life, is around 10 grams per square metre. That compares with more than 30 grams where the world is pushing for more nickel extraction, in the rainforests.

A: One marine biologist I spoke to said that the intensity and methods of deep-sea mining could destroy entire habitats and species. Many species living there are found nowhere else. The World-Wide Fund for Nature says that commercial mining presents an unacceptable risk to marine life.

B: I think the dangers are exaggerated by the professional environmentalists. We will produce vital minerals, at little or no environmental risk.

A: Gerry, thank you for answering our questions.

Summary

The owner of a deep-sea mining company is asked to justify his activities. Concerns are raised about the legality of what he is planning to do, and he responds that a UN body will soon be pronouncing on deep sea mining. He also points out that the benefits for clean energy from the rare earths that will be mined are vital for the transition from fossil fuels. He refutes the accusation that this type of mining will cause significant environmental damage, pointing out that little life exists in the areas where the mining will take place. Surface mining is more damaging to the environment.

Questions

1. Is deep-sea mining an economic necessity?
2. Is the United Nations the best body to enforce agreements on deep sea mining, or would it be better to have a separate authority with real powers?
3. Is the increasing use of batteries for cars and other transport in itself an environmental danger?
4. Do you think that mining at depths of, say, 6000 metres on the seabed is really a risk to the marine environment?