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Podcast: Process Transformers

Episode 34: Narrative Intelligence: How Storytelling Shapes AI & Transformation | Feat. Susan Lindner



Fig. 1 – Cover art of Process Transformers podcast

Figure description – A square cover image with decorative geometric designs representing workflows and connections with blocks, circles, and arrows in varying shades of blue. The title “Process Transformers” is featured at the top of the image, and logos for “SAP” and “SAP Signavio” are featured underneath the image

Transcript

Lukas Egger: Hello and welcome to *Process Transformers*, the podcast that talks about business transformation at the intersection of processes and AI. For those of you who have listened before, welcome back, and if you're new to the show, thanks for tuning in. My name is Lukas Egger. I'm the head of innovation at SAP Signavio, and I'll be your host for today's episode titled, "*Narrative Intelligence — How Storytelling Shapes AI and Transformation*", and I have the perfect guest for that topic. Susan is the CEO of Innovation Storytellers, and she is one of the leading voices on how narratives can mobilize innovation. Susan Linner combines a background in anthropology and communications to help big organizations make complex ideas resonate. She has helped multiple big companies like GE, Corning, and others to turn ideas into momentum. Susan, welcome to our show.

Susan Lindner: Thank you so much for having me.

Lukas Egger: Well, it's a pleasure, Susan. While reading up about your background, I came across I would even say a little bit provocative statement. You said that, 'Storytelling is not a nice to have, it's a survival skill for innovators'. Can you expand on that a little bit? Why is it so critical for organizations and innovators in particular to be good at narratives?

Susan Lindner: Well, there are three main reasons. Number one, innovators are in a constant state of failing. If we're doing it right, we are testing assumptions. We are involved in risky behavior. We are trying out new things that we don't know if it will work, and we need to explain to the people around us that failures lead to learning, which lead to amazing outcomes. And that part of that process is telling the story around why failure is necessary. Otherwise, in the corporate landscape, we look like we are just always losing, and we need to translate failure into success for all parties involved. So that's step one. Step two is innovating requires imagination and requires us thinking about things that are outside of the box. Even if we're just iterating on a product or creating a product extension, we're trying to move people from what is the status quo into an unknown future, and the only way you get people from the status quo into something new is through story, you allow people to imagine something that hasn't happened to them before. And the last part is: people don't like change. In fact, we're terrified of it, right? We know that, you know, early adopters make up a very small portion of the population. And if you ask anyone, don't you think disruptive technologies are cool? They might say yes. Does anyone actively want to be disrupted? Hell no is the answer. And so moving people from into a great unknown, a scary state to change their behavior requires a story and emotion that will generate action. Story is the thing that takes us from inertia into action and really results. So those are the three reasons: Failure, imagination into the unknown, and then getting people to act, to actually change their behavior.

Innovators drive behavior change, and if we can't compel people to do that with the story, chances are they won't move.

Lukas Egger: Makes perfect sense and I love how quickly you set the scene with those three topics or factors. I wonder, and that's maybe an open question, but why is it that so many people, when you ask them, what do you want out of innovation or decision making or how to transform, they will revert back to show me the data. It's not like story is the first thing they think about. Do you know why that isn't? Maybe a second question that in my head came up right afterwards is, also because of that, we don't think of storytelling as such an important part of what we're doing and more of like an art form. Some people are just gifted at it or good at it. Right? And I don't know, maybe you can help us get some insight into that?

Susan Lindner: Yeah. So, we want the data because we want to feel grounded in what's coming next. We want to believe that the decisions that we're making are based on facts and figures. The reality is most human beings are pretty fickle creatures, and we make a lot of decisions based on emotion and not necessarily facts and figures alone. Otherwise, we'd all be driving the perfect Volvo that's absolutely safety tested, right? We wouldn't be driving a Lamborghini, chances are. We'd also eat right, exercise, wouldn't smoke, wouldn't drink, right? We do all of those things because we were grounded in data. But the reality is, story and emotion are the factors that drive action and behavior change. So, we want to be grounded in data, but we, our human brain, our operating system requires more than that in order to make decisions. And by the way, stick to those decisions. We typically wanna gravitate to what we think is solid and concrete before we act, and that's why we crave data. But our brain is craving emotional regulation as part of the story. So anybody that we tell a story to, they are already coming to the table with an emotion log logged in. So, let's say you have a meeting and you're about to announce a new product or a new service, or you wanna at least have a conversation about it. Your listener probably is already coming in with some feeling about what's on the agenda item today, right? Maybe they're nervous, maybe they're excited, maybe they're skeptical, so our listener is already coming in with a bag full of emotions. Are you as the teller equipped to confront those emotions and hopefully change them so that they'll see your way of thinking? That doesn't happen with data alone. I wish every meeting could be solved with three bullet points and an Excel spreadsheet, but sadly, our human operating system is not geared for that. We're waiting to hear the story and one particular story, a goodwill story, one that makes the listeners life better. When our listener says, I'm skeptical, but I can see how I might get a raise of promotion, I can see how this would really help my team. I can see how this would further our mission, our vision, our corporate strategy. I can see that thing and I feel the benefit to myself. Now. I'm locked and loaded to actually hear the proposition. So that's a goodwill story, and it literally changes the chemistry of the brain. So, for all of your listeners out there, when is the last time you went into a meeting and thought, I wanna care about what happens to the listener? And how I'm going to

make their life better with whatever it is I'm presenting. We don't stop to think about that often enough.

Lukas Egger: So, is that maybe also a way to get good at it? Because again, like I think a lot of people conceive of. Storytelling or maybe even before of, 'Hey, how do I get an important point across in an important meeting as I need to get my data right? It needs to look wonderful, and I need to present it.' Well, you're almost like offering up an inversion of that in a sense. don't over obsess about that part, that needs to be there. Sure. But you need to understand where the people are coming from and how to connect with them, their incentives. And also, then maybe bit more about the rendition and how you do it. So, is that maybe a way of getting better at it? Because I wanna also offer something for people who connect with what you just said but find it hard to get to a point where I say like, hey, I too can be an amazing storyteller.

Susan Lindner: Yeah, so let's back up even further than that. Step one, before you ever start writing a story or thinking about that next presentation, even your next agenda, is, think about who you're meeting with and use an empathy map, and I'm happy to share it with your listeners. An empathy map was designed by idea. It is part of design thinking, and it asked the question, what is influencing my listener before I ever got there, before my topic even came up, what is my listener thinking? Thinking about on a day-to-day basis, what consumes their thinking? What are they actively hearing from the marketplace, competitors, et cetera. What are they seeing out in the world, and even what are their friends and fellow executives in other companies doing? What are they actively researching in the market that might give them some bias or presupposition before they step in the room? And the two biggest questions is, what is my listener? Most agonizing about that my innovation can help solve, right? The goodwill part and the other is, what does my listener hope to gain from this innovation? Like, not what I wanna get out of it, what's in it for them? And if I could map out those different re potential reactions to my idea before I even start with the story, you'll have a baseline in empathy. That allows you to tell a story that's really geared toward the listener. So that's step one. When I get in the room before I start telling my story, is I try to connect with my listener around the good, the bad, and the ugly of shared experience. So where have we maybe worked on innovation projects before that have gone well and those who have failed miserably? Because the reality is, as humans, we connect more around tragedy than we do around triumph. Even if we can commiserate about stuff that we've tried before that hasn't worked and now, we're gonna go forward and try something that will, that connection point is really where humanity meets itself. When we can be a little bit vulnerable with our listener and they can too, where opening the window, just a crack for us to see each other, not necessarily as rivals or even co-creators, but rather just as people. So those two steps are really helpful before you ever start crafting the story. It great storytelling starts with great listening.

Lukas Egger: I really love that you put a focus on understanding where the people come from and also putting the onus a bit on the storyteller. It's not just you telling a story, it's a shared experience, and you need to understand where the rest of the room is at in order for this story to unfold. For people who are maybe not used to going about, like, what do you wanna get out of it? asking people about their motivations or trying to figure it out. Are there some other tools, or ways how this can be done maybe in a non-threatening way, like you can tip your toes into the water of, empathy without like feeling it being too much or too hard.

Susan Lindner: Yeah, well prepare yourself to do a little stalking, I would say. So, check out your listeners LinkedIn profiles, right? Check out the kind of things that they're posting and liking and seeing what they're responding to. Take a look at the headlines recently that might impact, the news cycle that's going around an initiative that's similar to yours. So, if AI is the topic du jour, what's getting posted on the intranet in your company? What are things that people are being bombarded by these days that might be impacting your listener's life too? And if you can get even a little bit closer to some of their colleagues and say, what's John or Jane's thinking on the following? Have you heard him talk about these kinds of things in meeting? I'm curious 'cause I really wanna meet him or her where they are. So that's helpful to talk to fellow coworkers, Sue, who might've seen these scenarios pop up in their experience in the last couple of months. So, I would always do a little recognizance work first, think about yourself as am I six or a little bit of a spy?

Mm-hmm.

Lukas Egger: That's wonderful story to tell yourself, right? That you always undercover finding out like what's really at play and, figuring out the motivations of your audience.

Susan Lindner: I need better gadgets. That's what I'll say.

Lukas Egger: There's maybe one potential misconception I wanna preempt. 'cause when we talk about stories, I think for a lot of people it's easy to immediately shortcut to, oh, that's the vision and mission statement. But this one little word is not just contained to whatever is on the strategy slide, your version of a story is neither TikTok clip, nor just like the board office vision ambition statement. It's really about. The stories we tell in order to collaborate and talk about what we want to achieve together. Right? So, what a story is it's more than just a snackable content on social media, nor is it just something executives do, right?

Susan Lindner: Yeah. Well, I mean, given our short attention span these days, we need a bit of both. Nobody wants to read "War and Peace" in the middle of your, 12 o'clock lunch and learn. But I think the greatest viral storytellers ever were the prophets. So, Jesus, Buddha, Muhammad, Moses, whether you are a believer or not,

these prophets are told stories that we are still telling 5,000, 2000 years later. And it's because they told stories in a very specific way. That allowed us to hear the story, the vision, the mission, right? The values. These are the core elements that the prophets were trying to convey to us, and we take them in, in a way that allows us to retell them in our own words. So, if you're trying to spread a vision, mission, values story, take a lesson from the prophets, and you wanna give a high-level story where we can relate to the moral of that story. There's a story arc that ends with a '...and the lesson of the story is', and then you turn it back to your listener and say, 'Can you tell me about a time in your life where these values showed up for you? Can you tell me about a time at work where these values around consistency, speed, efficiency, customer service, whatever it may be, showed up in your work in a way that was really meaningful to you', and someone stops for a minute, takes it in and goes, 'I actually remember when I was a kid, that value of speed of me getting the paper to the front door of my neighbor wound up yielding me the biggest tip, you know? And there were other kids delivering newspapers, but I always got there first'. And suddenly that personal story winds up tracking back to the story of the company or the department or the initiative. And suddenly you go, 'I get it'. And it locks in. This is called mirror neurons. When we have the experience of someone speaking to us about our mission, vision, and values, we take it in for a second. We think about our own lives, and you go, oh, I get that. That happened to me and now I'm locked, and those values are in my body. They're not just in my brain. And so now I can go back and the most important part of innovation storytelling, I can repeat those values to someone else using my story and then the story continues. And that's how the prophets did it. It's not just a one and done story. It's thinking about how do I get my listener to tell a story in their words so that the story continues and thousands of years later, that's how these stories are still getting spread because we keep spreading them with our version of the story.

Lukas Egger: I love that you are pointing out that for stories to be successful, they need to deeply connect. So, in a way, if I get it right, that they can be retold in an authentic way and not just be carbon copies of what has been written somewhere else.

Susan Lindner: Yeah.

Lukas Egger: Is that also a fair assessment to say that most companies don't have a problem with putting out mission, vision, and value statements, but they often fail with storytelling. And it is because they don't really connect with your audience. Is that the principle reason why a lot of the stories that companies try to tell are falling flat ultimately?

Susan Lindner: It's actually because they're not doing the second half, the listening part. Some of the greatest things I see are oftentimes in healthcare settings. Like when someone says, 'been caught caring', you know, where you can call out a nurse, a doctor, or anyone in the hospital who's living the values of the hospital, which is to

care for its patients. When a patient says, 'I wanna recognize my nurse who went above and beyond when I came into the emergency room, because she brought me water and she also brought me a piece of cake that was from the staff lounge. You know, because some other nurse was celebrating their birthday, but she knew I hadn't eaten in six hours, and so I got a piece of birthday cake and really that made me feel great'. When you actually catch people in the act; so, I often ask leaders, where's your staff? Where are all other employees outside of your team? Where can you catch them? In the act of innovating. Even when they were just trying to speed up a process or make something easier or better and recognize that innovation is something that's taking place all the time in the organization. It doesn't just happen at the hackathon or the employee event. And then, propel the listener. Give our audience a forum to share stories where they see other people using those values in action. That's how the prophets did it. It didn't just stay with them, you know, Jesus had 12 friends to take the message forward and the Buddha took 40 other monks into the forest with them, and they went out and spread the word in their voice, and that changed everything.

Lukas Egger: Yeah. Makes a lot of sense. I do wanna get back to something else you said in the beginning about storytelling. Namely that we're working on things that are not familiar and that we need to change the point of view. So, I guess that connecting with the audience makes perfect sense. But there's also this aspect of trying to create sustained change in behavior and maybe a new perspective. And we had guests like Helen and David Edwards that pointed out that currently all of the stories about change, especially as it pertains to AI and processes, is a story about productivity. But essentially that's a boring story. We want a more captivating, interesting story about things that. Couldn't have otherwise been achieved or done right. New stories. So how can we think of, and how can we get a story across that not only connects and explains maybe values and missions and all of that but also tries to create lasting change. In what way should we think about these kind of stories?

Susan Lindner: Well, I mean, behavior change and change management, right? That's a bazillion dollar industry to begin with. But let's go back to the emotional side of things for a while. How many times have we held a meeting and ever thought I need to think about each slide that is gonna be in my presentation, and ask the question, what emotion do I want this slide to generate in my listener? Rather than thinking about all the facts and figures that go on the slide, how do I want them to feel when they're receiving this information? So, if I'm talking to them about change, I'm thinking about an action movie. I'm thinking about James Bond running across the screen a hundred miles an hour with people chasing him and not even knowing why he's running. Right? It's an action movie. Immediately, on the viewer side, my adrenaline is going through the roof. My heart is pumping and I'm right there with Bond, James Bond. And then so I might have some news that says we need to hit productivity measures. You know, we need to increase our productivity by 25% over the next two quarters. And your listener is going, crap. I don't know how to squeeze

any more productivity out of my people. They're already at capacity. And by the way, we have a hiring freeze going on. Ugh. Now the bad guys come out, right? There's people with guns now chasing James, and it's scary. So I am very readily aware that I am raising the adrenaline level for all the people in the room, but I now have to be cognizant of how I take people on journey to get them to a place where they are releasing serotonin, dopamine, and gaba, those things that calm people down because I'm giving them the tools. So, if I'm working in an AI environment, I say, I wanna introduce to you now the tools that are gonna help us get there. Let's talk about ChatGPT, or Gamma, or Grok, God forbid, or whatever new AI platform, that we're walking through. And then I as a storyteller, need to take people through the process of not just change management, but transformation. Because our desire, with these initiatives, is that something fundamentally better happens for us; that goodwill story pops up one more time. If I want the momentum and change to happen, I have to prove that transformation is a possibility. So even if it's on a small scale, so I'll give you an example. My first time using chat GPT in earnest was maybe about a year and a half ago when I went to Vienna. I decided that I was going to build out an entire itinerary for my trip on chat, GPT, and I said, you take the reins, build me a five-day itinerary to go to Vienna. Here are the coffee shops. I find me the best coffee shops for Cafe Clutch at four o'clock. The best bars, restaurants, and I wanna go on this tour. I wanna see these three museums and the art galleries. You choose them now, put them in order by transportation. Now make it so that I'm not walking 60,000 steps per day. Right? So, it gave me that opportunity. and I had a really nice trip. My job now, as a storyteller say, Now I need to show the before and after to my listeners about the transformation that took place, the opportunities of people I got to meet, of objects that I found along the way. Great paintings and that Klimt museum that I got to go to. And as a result, I got to have a conversation with a professor of art in that museum that I never would've had ordinarily, and we wound up having Cafe Klu after that, right? And having a nice piece of cake. So, like the transformation process as the storyteller, we have to take people on that journey so that they smell it, feel it, touch it, taste it in a way that it becomes real for them. The process of getting people from just boring productivity to now feeling like that my world has changed. Try to think about an Oprah Winfrey makeover. What does the before and after look like? So, I can really feel the tangible benefits. Now. You asked the question about making it last. We, as leaders need to keep compelling people and asking the question. What's the next thing that will allow the evolution of that change to take place? 'cause we don't have transformation just once. And frankly, it's not just one story. People wanna have a transformation story or an innovation story. That's one chapter long. Well, I've never met a great in one chapter and people are convinced for life. You need to add subsequent chapters that build on the first one that say. Then we wound up opening an office in Vienna, and then we wound up, opening markets across Europe and then we wound up so that the cha, the storytelling continues. It's never a one and done. And the more stories that I can capture from that professor, from the conversation I had in the cafe with, or the concierge at my hotel, now I'm building chapters. So, I'd ask people to think about who else needs to be incorporated in the story. What other people, places, objects

and events, all great topics for stories lend themselves to the productivity change. Maybe we incorporated a new tool. Maybe there's an event that happened like a summit or an offsite, maybe there are new people that got added to the team. All of these things wind up adding chapters that allow for sustained change to take place.

Lukas Egger: Oh my God. There is so much to unpack I'm not sure if you wanted to tell that story, but right now I want call. Coffee and cake and I would love to be in Vienna. Like you, you certainly managed to tell that story very convincingly. I think the first aspect of what you just told us I wanna unpack is you are using chat, g, PT or AI yourself and I, I would say very often instead of just listening to people saying, oh, you should do this, and this will help or improve your innovation abilities. Going through experimentation and feeling for yourself how it works out for you can be quite helpful. Right? So, just as an example, it doesn't make sense to talk to an AI and like hand over the innovation process, but what it does really well is coming up with an idea and then getting a world-class devil's advocate and shooting it down. And I really enjoy that because I, now, at any time of the day, I can have a different instantiation of a business minded or like an entrepreneurial minded or whatever minded, like devil's advocate and really like, test drive my idea and shoot it down. What are the ways in which you found AI can help you with storytelling, that maybe also are a good first start for people to say, Hey, I connect with Susan's message, but what will be a good way of, testing it out and feeling like how it can get better, right? What are the good use cases and the bad use cases maybe?

Susan Lindner: So, here's an example. Like everybody gets on a team's call, right? And you wind up recording it and you get a transcript. So, from your next meeting, take the transcript and take it to chat GPT and say, write a blog post. Write the most interesting blog post you can about this fantastic meeting I just came from. Include quotes from people around the table. Highlight their best ideas. Back up their ideas with research, if you can, from Premier Scholars around the world who back up what my colleagues had to say. Suddenly your colleagues are gonna come off sounding like the most interesting and erudite people that you've ever met, step one. But then take that and one step further and say, I want this to sound like Steve Jobs was reading it to me and say, now write it in the voice of Steve Jobs. Write it in the voice of Barack Obama or Bill Gates. You can play with different narrators and authors, and it will help you also find a voice that feels comfortable or interesting or inspiring to you. Um, I've taken almost all of my content, and I've uploaded it to chat GPT, and so I'll start writing something and then I'll ask Ja Chachi pt make it sound more like me. Well, I just wrote it. How do I make it more me? Sometimes it gives me a really good feedback. Now, the worst thing that I've asked chat, GBT to do is make it sound funny, make it sound wittier. And let me tell you, it is just a collection of dad jokes that make you cringe. So, I would warn your listeners or try it for yourself. You might like that humor. It does not work well for me as a standup and an improviser. I don't like it at all, but. But try it and see. Maybe it will bring a little humor to your day at a minimum, but those are the, those are different ways that you can play around with it. Just to give your sense of perspective on how you can instantly turn content into

something that sounds maybe like you've never seen it before and offer a little bit more respect from the meetings and the participants of those meetings you've been in too.

Lukas Egger: I think a lot of our listeners will say, well, to make my colleagues sound really smart, we need a lot of hallucination. Uh. But, uh, let's, let's exactly, let's see how, far we can push the narrative in that regard. But without that, that joke aside, I think what I've heard between the lines that I found very interesting, what you just said is that asking for an artifact a result and outcome maybe is not the right way to go. Where a superpower of this AI lies is in. Leveling up your taste spots and your understanding what good looks like and making you more comfortable with maybe your own voice, even if you can't articulate it. Because I remember once myself doing like an immersion course in in cooking, and I thought it would be a lot about cooking, but the first thing we learned was more adjectives, adjectives for colors and tastes. Cause essentially what they told us is you need to. Be more discerning first and then it, everything else will be easier. So, I guess what I'm reading between the lines here is if you want to become a better storyteller, you need to maybe build the muscle of what voice you wanna bring out and why and need to be able to describe it. And that's why you wanna reflect on it and not just tell the AI, do the job for me. Is that fair?

Susan Lindner: Absolutely. Absolutely. That's a great way of putting it. Yeah. I dated an artist once and I remember saying, wow. I love that color red. And he is like, that's not red, that's watermelon. And I was like, oh, of course it is. It's watermelon. Why didn't I think of that?

Lukas Egger: No, so it makes a lot of sense, and I think you are helping us already a lot in terms of like how we all can level up in terms of, becoming better storytellers. But we focused on, let's say the storytellers themselves. What are maybe the things, the cues or the signals that's one should look out for, to see, hey, I'm connecting with the audience. This innovation, like how I position it, how I try to rally the morale or whatever, right? Or convince somebody to get budget approval that it's working out. So not just about myself, but really the connection with the audience. How would you advise for somebody to, to pick that up, like the right cues?

Susan Lindner: Yeah. So, you know, there are parts of innovation storytelling that are designed to get buy-in throughout the course of the story. So, you probably wouldn't start with, we have a new product. Let me tell you all about it. This is gonna be great. We need to frame that cool new product or service in a way that gets people nodding their heads. as we talked about, shared history is a great first step. Step two is acknowledge a shift. You have to be the person who says. Why this innovation is required and why now? So, answering upfront why this, why now? There's a shift happening in the world and people need to be aware of it. We need to get buy-in around that. And so, the reason that we need this innovation, you need to get buy-in from that up first upfront before you even announce what this new

product or service might be. Can we all agree that climate change is a factor? Impacting us right now. Can we agree that economic shifts, political shifts, whatever is macro changes, right? That might be the motivator for your new innovation. Or it could be micro shift, changes in strategy, changes in leadership, changes in direction, new markets opening or closing new hires or people getting laid off. So those are the micro shift that's taking place. So, you have to get the listener around the table to agree that there's a shift happening in the world. We all see that shift. We have to agree to do something about it. The second half of that piece is there will be winners and losers on either side of this shift, and for the innovator, standing still and doing nothing is always the losing side of that equation. So, point out who's actively winning right now in the face of these macro or micro shifts. If you can point them out as examples, other departments, other companies, even other industries that are already tackling the AI challenge, let's say, then you get people nodding their head and saying, I agree. This is a thing. We have to deal with it. I see who's already winning. What do we do next? So that's a source of buy-in and you wanna wait for that buy-in. If people say, I don't think climate change is an issue at all, then your hypothesis for your story was wrong. You have to go back to the drawing board before you wind up unveiling this beautiful thing. Until you get people to buy in to say, the reason why we need this thing is critical. If we can't get that, it's very hard to proceed. So, you have to look for places to for buy-in. One other place is don't allow the story to proceed without getting feedback about what the intended future looks like. Right? The shift is about this where we are today. You wanna ask questions like imagine if or what, if and when you can start projecting a potential future, the promised land, as I like to think of it or what heaven looks like. Get feedback from the audience. Say, what would a better future look like for you? And when we start sharing ideas about what a better future looks like, now I can talk about my solution in the context of what's in it for them. Just like going back to the empathy map. What is the pain and the gain? If I can get a clear sense of what the gain is, of what heaven would look like for my listener, I can now talk about my new product or service in the context of what heaven looks like for them and how this new product or service is going to serve them too. We're making a future together. We're co-creating together. If we can't do that, then you might, people might feel like they're getting left behind. Well, he has a grandiose vision. I don't see my place in it. I don't think I'm gonna help execute on this. I'm gonna ask for a couple more quarters. I'm gonna put this off a little bit. I'm gonna ask for research around this. Ugh. And suddenly we get stuck in the permafrost of status quo.

Lukas Egger: Yeah. You just pointed out, let's say the positive stories, right? But there will be also a lot of stories where just the reality of how a business operates needs to change, and maybe it doesn't feel genuine to spin it into something positive. But I think you also gave like a clue of tackling that. Namely, not trying to turn it into something different, but acknowledging what is there, connecting with the audience and speaking about it truthfully. Right. Is that a fair assessment? It's matchable that a lot of people will say like, I would love to tell more of those stories,

but unfortunately, so many of the stories I have to tell are less about the best case outcome but just doing what was mandated. But also, storytelling can help, right?

Susan Lindner: Yeah.

Lukas Egger: In those cases.

Susan Lindner: So where are places though? There's a technique in innovation storytelling called bread crumbing, where we look backwards in order to move forwards. So, if I know that I have 10% layoffs coming up, or I have budget reductions of 20% over the next two quarters, where can I look back in time? Historically, where those same experiences have happened that have yielded good outcome? Or at a minimum to say, we've gone through this before and we'll get through it again. Do you remember that time five years ago when X, Y, Z happened? Because a lot of innovators will tell you that it is constraint that yields the best innovation, right? When we have parameters where we have to think inside the very tight box to figure out how to get our way out of it. So, I would start by looking backwards. Where have we experienced this problem before? Because there's nothing in human history where this hasn't happened before. Where can we pull positive examples from where we've gone through tough times and succeeded. And on the other side is why are we constrained? Where are the places where we can say, okay, we have budget cuts for this and team cuts by this for this amount. So now what? What do we hope to gain out of those constraints? Can you paint a picture of the future for me where we're going to gain something? Because it isn't necessarily all rosy, but the hope is that we're doing this for a greater outcome. At a minimum can we say what that greater outcome could be, so that at least we're all working toward a better future, even if it's tough today.

Lukas Egger: That's so helpful and also really what I hear very strongly is: No matter where you think the current landscape will be evolving to, whether with AI or just change management, it's kind of already a given that we will have to adopt a lot of new processes or technologies or maybe even reduce them and consolidate them. And stories are not just like some superfluous added thing there. What really drives and makes the entire like act of doing more or like bringing that to the people possible so it's not just an added-on top. It's really a baseline skill that a organization needs to master in order to get good at what then ultimately sounds or looks like an innovation story. So, I think that's really extremely instrumental. We always like to ask one story, uh, sorry, not story. One question at the very end. Namely, if you could rewrite or change one business process or part of how businesses operate, in order to better support storytelling and everything we talked about, what would it be and why?

Susan Lindner: Oof. You know, I had a call from an IT executive at GE Poland. Who asked me our senior managers are putting our junior managers to sleep? Can you

help? Our meeting culture is deteriorating so quickly. Can you help us with this? So, I think one of the dreaded events of corporate life is endless meetings. And so from a process standpoint, the way that we communicate to make these meetings better so that we actually get stuff done. I'm gonna encourage all of your listeners to bring storytelling to your meetings, not to make them longer and more annoying, 'cause you can tell a great story in four sentences, I promise you. But what I want you to think about each time you make a meeting agenda, ask yourself, four questions. Number one, what do I want them to remember at the end of this meeting? Number two, how do I want them to feel at the end of this meeting? Number three is what do I need them to do very specifically? And the last is, what do I need them to say to the next person of consequence when they leave this meeting about what we just did here? If you can pre-program your meetings to answer those four questions, I guarantee you that you will have better outcomes from those meetings, and as a result, all the other processes will work better. Those four questions, the Big Four -- Think, Feel, Do, Say -- are game changers and it starts with having empathy for the people in the room and how you want them to feel. Cause the feeling drives the action; and the saying: if you can pre-program, thinking a little bit like an advertising executive, what do I want them to repeat to their colleagues, coworkers, and senior management about what just happened here? Stories are 22 times more memorable than facts alone, so you will have fewer repeat meanings about the same stupid stuff if you just allow yourself to tell a story and you think em about what the people in that really need.

Lukas Egger: Susan, I love how you made your case -- and very convincingly I might add -- that good storytelling not only will alleviate most of our working pain, but also that it's a critically important component of getting innovation right. Maybe even more so than most of the other stuff that people put in their top three of innovation enablers. So, I really, really thank you for being here today and sharing all of that with us. Thank you so much.

Susan Lindner: It is my joy and my passion. Thank you for having me here. I'd think not one innovation should fail because it didn't have the right story to accompany it to its finish line.

Lukas Egger: Perfect sentence to end. Thank you so much. With that. Thanks everyone for listening to another episode of Process Transformers. This podcast is brought to you by the dedicated effort and hard work of an entire team. So, a heartfelt thank you goes out to Beyza Kartal, Jahanzeb Khan, Reagan Nyandoro, Erica Davis, Cecilia Sarquis, Fouzi Mourad, and Julien Thevenod. If question or comments as always, email us at processtransformers.com and until next time, for hopefully another transformative conversation.

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