Welcome to the **Week 7** podcast for the course *Creating Sustainable Solutions Through Systems Thinking*. This week’s topic is “Systems Thinking as a Tool for Generating Sustainability.”

The Planet Earth, with its plants and animal life, resources, and beauty is an excellent example of a system. When in balance, the system continually recreates and refreshes itself. Without careful planning, however, the environment may become polluted, overused, and mismanaged, causing a clear disruption of natural cycles and systems. Individuals have become increasingly aware of the impact that humans are having on the environment, both in positive and negative ways. Careful planning is necessary to ensure that the natural cycles are sustainable for future generations.

One organization that is concerned with the sustainability of the environment is the **U.S. Green Building Council**, a non-profit community of leaders whose shared vision is to make green buildings available to everyone within a generation. As part of the organization, a certification program examines “any building lifecycle phase.” It promotes a whole-building approach to sustainability by recognizing performance in the selection of sustainable building sites, water efficiency, energy use, the use of materials and resources both during building and during operations, indoor environmental quality, innovation in design, and an awareness and education program. Ponder all of the different systems that are interdependent in creating one green building and how the careful consideration of each individual system is necessary for sustainability of the larger system to occur.

This week, you will focus on sustainable business practices and tools. You will be introduced to the concepts of leverage points and self-limiting behaviors. Finally, you will have the opportunity to work with your team to communicate your plan for ensuring sustainability in your course project.

By the end of this week you will be able to:
- Determine applicable tools for an organization to sustain business operations
- Analyze the different systems that need to be considered for organizational sustainability
- Develop an organizational plan to apply systems thinking for long-term sustainability

Let's look at an overview of the resources that you'll be using this week. This week's topic is “Systems Thinking as a Tool for Generating Sustainability.”

Read Chapter 6, titled “Leverage Points–Places to Intervene in a System,” from the course text Thinking in Systems. Chapter 6 focuses on the importance of changing the structure of systems to produce more desirable leverage points. In addition, the chapter discusses balancing and reinforcing feedback loops, and the ability to self-organize as the strongest form of system resilience. While reading this chapter, focus on places that you can intervene in your own system. Also, read Chapter 7, titled "Self-Limiting or Self-Sustaining Growth," and Chapter 14, titled “Strategies,” from your course text The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization. Chapter 7 focuses on the differences between self-limiting and self-sustaining growth. Consider which category your system falls under and how the tips provided for self-sustaining systems can assist your system. Chapter 14 presents an overview of what it means to think strategically and then outlines different strategies that have been used successfully in creating sustainability within a system.

This week, there are two articles. The first is titled “Shaping Sustainable Value Chains: Network Determinants of Supply Chain Governance Models.” Businesses differ greatly in the extent to which they incorporate social and environmental issues into their supply chain management model. With this in mind, the authors of the article develop four sustainable supply chain governance models to foresee this variation along the value chain. The second article is titled “The Moderating Effects of Institutional Pressures on Emergent Green Supply Chain Practices and Performance. This paper details a study’s results concerning the practice of green supply chain management, economic
performance, competitive institutional pressures, and other factors. Responses provided by 341 Chinese manufacturers revealed increasing environmental pressure to adapt “green” practices, which have in turn resulted in improved environmental performance.

Your Optional Resources for this week include an article titled “Flexibility and Sustainability of Supply Chains: Are They Together?”

This week, you will participate in one Discussion. Here is the prompt for the topic, “Implementing Sustainable Practices”:

As the resources have highlighted, systems thinking can be an excellent tool for promoting sustainability within an organization, but that can only occur if the organization actively and intentionally engages in planning for sustainability such as the organization highlighted in this week’s introduction.

As you review the Learning Resources this week, continue your research in the Walden University Library, and prepare your Discussion posting, contemplate the following.

"Successful companies of the future will be those that integrate business and employees’ personal values. The best people want to do work that contributes to society with a company whose values they share, where their actions count and their views matter."

-Jeroen van der Veer, chief executive of Royal Dutch Shell

- Consider your own organization. How well does it fit the characteristics described in the quote?
- How is this type an organization an example of a sustainable organization? Why?

Note: You do not need to directly answer these points in your Discussion post as they
serve only to begin your thinking process; however, you must explain your reasoning as you formulate your formal response.

Now post by Day 3 a cohesive and scholarly response based on your readings and research this week that addresses the following.

In this week’s resource, Meadows comments on self-organization—an organization’s ability to change itself by creating new structures and behaviors. Moreover, Meadows notes that self-organization is the strongest form of system resilience and sustainability.

For this Discussion, address how each of the following relates to the concept of sustainability and are important from a managerial perspective:

- Leverage points
- Self-limiting behavior
- Closed vs. open systems
- Communication

Be sure to support your work with specific citations from this week’s Learning Resources and any additional sources.

Respond by Day 5 to one or more of your colleagues’ postings in one or more of the following ways:

- Ask a probing question, substantiated with additional background information, evidence, or research.

- Share an insight from having read your colleagues’ postings, synthesizing the information to provide new perspectives.

- Offer and support an alternative perspective using readings from the classroom or from your own research in the Walden Library.
• Validate an idea with your own experience and additional research.

• Make a suggestion based on additional evidence drawn from readings or after synthesizing multiple postings.

• Expand on your colleagues’ postings by providing additional insights or contrasting perspectives based on readings and evidence.

**Note:** Please see the Syllabus and Discussion Posting and Response Rubric for formal Discussion question posting and response evaluation criteria.

**Return** to this Discussion area in a few days to read the responses to your initial posting. Note what you learned and/or any insights you gained as a result of your colleagues’ comments.

This week, you will complete one Application Assignment. The topic of the assignment is “Section 5: Sustainability Measures.”

You should familiarize yourself with both the "Comprehensive Systems Thinking" Group Project Rubric and Group Project section before you begin this project, referring to these areas as needed. Both the rubric and Group Project section are located under Course Home. You are strongly encouraged to thoroughly read the rubric prior to beginning each section of the project. Criteria listed in the rubric will be used by your Instructor in assessing your work.

The following Application Assignment will be a component in your "Comprehensive Systems Thinking" Group Project, due by **Day 3 of Week 8.** One of the premises of your group project is the idea that this improvement initiative would continue to evolve and improve from year to year. This continued success will not just happen; but rather,
careful planning must occur to assure that the necessary systems are in place to promote continual growth. This week you will describe the tools, assessment, and plans you are creating to ensure your initiative is sustainable for years to come. Include the following in your description:

- What systems are important to balance and reinforce in order to provide opportunities for continuous improvement in the initiative, stakeholder involvement, insight, and application of systems thinking?

- What are potential leverage points?

- For long-term sustainability, how will you support relationships with applicable stakeholders?

- How will you avoid archetypes?

**Note:** This is a section of your "Comprehensive Systems Thinking" Group Project. The completed project will be due by **Day 3 of Week 8**. Be sure to set aside time to prepare a hard copy of your team’s data and a brief media presentation (**Section 6**) as well as to create your Executive Summary and Reference List, as they are important components of your final deliverable. Be sure to ask your Instructor for assistance if you have questions about this project.

This week, you have a Forward Thinking note to keep in mind after you complete this week’s assignment.

There are two things for you to consider as you begin to prepare for next week. The first, please download the Reflections on the Group Process Ratings document linked within the course. The purpose of this is to help us make improvements to the process.
Your input is appreciated but will hold no bearing on your performance in the course. 
**Submit the document anonymously to the Week 8: Ratings Dropbox by Day 7.**
Save the assignment as a .doc or .rtf file with the filename **Ratings**.

The second, for Discussion 2 you will be asked to review another group's presentation. You will be reviewing the presentation as if you were a decision-maker determining whether the project will be implemented. Team members in Group A will review the presentation of Group B. Group B will review Group C, Group C will review Group D, Group D will review Group E, and lastly, Group E will review Group A. If you have any questions, please contact your Instructor.