Alkemio Presents: An Invitation to Bridge the Spaces Between Us.

Written, abridged and narrated by Paul Skinner.

Introducing Alkemio

When COVID-19 broke out, Neil Smyth and René Honig experienced the clear lack of a platform to enable cross-boundary collaboration in meeting the needs of a population facing the biggest public health emergency in modern history.

The context of the pandemic made clear that we needed to pull together across sectors, communities, regions and even nations to address a whole of society threat with a whole of society response.

But the experience brought a more universal perspective to life: the main hurdle facing humankind may be that we have shared problems but organisations, institutions and workflows designed for individual solutions. This means that we often fail to respond adequately to complex challenges that stem from multiple causes and that require the participation of a variety of actors, such as tackling inequalities of educational attainment or increasing food security.

Neil and René therefore set to work on developing a platform to enable effective collaboration across organisations and sectors, based on the premise that the focus should always be directed at the problems to be solved rather than just on the internal priorities of any individual organisation. This was intended to make it easier for people to contribute solutions from any stakeholder group or background and to navigate collectively towards shared goals.

Alkemio is the Netherlands-based steward-owned tech for good enterprise that they created to achieve this. Its beta-stage flagship platform now provides shared 'Spaces' for collective problem-solving. And the company is further building both the platform and an associated infrastructure capable of providing a European ethical alternative to yet more U.S. big tech.

Changing systems changes lives

Meet Sophie.

As mayor, she is leading her city region to greater sustainability but has struggled with finding ways to support the transition to clean energy because it's not something over which she has much control.

That changed when she established a set of Alkemio Spaces to accelerate the development and adoption of green hydrogen technology by fostering collaboration between academia, government and industry. A large multinational corporation partnered with the city to explore the deployment of green hydrogen with fuel cell technology, aiming to decarbonize public sites and strengthen research and innovation clusters. And a local university is partnering with a coalition of small and medium sized businesses to explore how green hydrogen can replace

natural gas in industry processes as well as how it can be safely stored and used to power the electrical grid when other forms of clean energy are less available. Other researchers and government leaders are now joining the Alkemio Spaces to learn how they can replicate this success. The project has incredible potential to improve people's health with cleaner air, as well as to create jobs and provide greater energy security and climate mitigation.

Citizens in Sophie's city region are also enrolled in a pilot programme to put users at the heart of public services. This began with a collaboration that supports people with mental health issues in accessing healthcare interventions combined with workplace coaching to tackle the issue of long-term health-related unemployment. A local marketing services agency has also shifted from supporting client enterprises in simply communicating to their stakeholders to instead enabling them to actively involve their stakeholders in co-creating a future that they can aspire to together. A community climate hub has led a nationwide coalition of similar hubs aiming to put climate education, volunteering and green rental and repair centres on every high street. And a cohort of older people are participating in a trial of new digital technologies to empower them to live independently for longer as part of an E.U. programme to support ambulant assisted living across populations with ageing demographics. In each of these cases, the innovation has come from working across rather than within stakeholder groups and organisational boundaries to reach outcomes that none of the organisations or groups could have achieved from working in isolation.

Today this sketch is illustrative. But Alkemio is already beginning to make opportunities such as these possible in practice. Through its early work with government, educational institutions and the private sector, it is providing dedicated digital homes for a growing range of pioneering multi-stakeholder collaborations and partnerships. These enable seamless participation in real-time and from all parties and allow goals to be reached that can only be achieved through collective action.

The need for new technology

The industrial revolution powered unprecedented economic growth but contained an inherent flaw: its carbon emissions and other pollutants created a physical environmental emergency or climate emergency that now threatens all human progress and demands a new order of cooperation.

The digital revolution has powered unprecedented opportunities for human connection but also contains an inherent flaw: its bias towards short-term profit maximisation, polarising algorithms, exploitative uses of data and capacity for spreading misinformation at the speed of A.I. have now led to an online environmental emergency or what we may call a 'digital emergency'. This may now also threaten all human progress by undermining our capacity for healthy cooperation just when we need it most.

The proprietary online tools that we currently depend on further reinforce assumptions that we work within enclosed systems. They are seldom optimised for collaboration among different stakeholder groups or to support partnerships and innovation flows across multiple organisations.

We therefore urgently need technology that brings us together, rather than divides us and opens the door to breakthrough ways of working that can be made much more widely accessible.

A mission to connect and empower

Alkemio provides online multi-stakeholder community Spaces for collective action, from co-creation to citizen engagement. These are underpinned by a technology infrastructure for secure mutual access to data that remains as open as possible and as closed as necessary; are complemented with advisory support and shared learning activities to foster expertise in leading collective action; and are supported by a programme of advocacy and outreach that works in common cause with allies towards a future in which technology truly empowers rather than threatens human wellbeing, economic progress and democratic development.

Alkemio's profoundly pro-human digital Spaces create trust by enabling all stakeholders to contribute openly to tackling shared problems. They provide environments in which collaboration can escalate upwards around common priorities, overcoming gaps, sharing situational awareness and collectively optimising progress for mutual benefit. And they also integrate the safe use of A.I. within controls carefully established by their users in alignment with the purpose that they are pursuing.

These Spaces can be used to identify emerging priority problems across society and the economy and to create dedicated homes for each to be addressed as a collective challenge. This will create new norms that can be replicated as increasing numbers of participating organisations and people adopt this new way of working. Ultimately, this will unlock powerful network effects that can meet the scale and diversity of the problems that we face.

Development pathway

Alkemio is already being used in a variety of settings including by a number of multi-agency collaborations backed by the Dutch government that are using the platform to support innovation for societal good while addressing their concerns over existing dependencies on a U.S.-dominated big tech environment.

Alkemio is now seeking investment in its mission that it will use to further develop and scale its platform and fulfil its greatest opportunities to drive systemic change.

The scaling of the platform will be driven by working with partners and clients to adapt Alkemio to their particular contexts and priorities, raising the potential of the whole system with each new initiative.

The bridge to change

As our technology environment rapidly shifts and interacts with the forces shaping our economies and societies, the threats to human wellbeing and even existence may never have been greater, but nor have the potential opportunities for progress.

Alkemio is therefore working towards a world in which technology brings people together across boundaries to create change that benefits everyone. Technology will be applied in the service of greater human flourishing, preserving digital autonomy and enabling the creation

of greater individual benefits in a way that also contributes to the building of societal resilience.

The time has come to create shared Spaces in which our most important problems can be addressed to the best of our collective abilities.

We must build a bridge to that future while the chance remains.

[Outro]

You have been listening to an Alkemio production of 'An Invitation to Bridge the Spaces Between Us', written, abridged and narrated by Paul Skinner.

The producer and editor was Peter Gallacher.

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Paul is also the author of:

The Purpose Upgrade: Change your business to save the world. Change the world to save your business, published by Little Brown, an imprint of Hachette, and by Hachette Audio, in 2022.

And

Collaborative Advantage: How collaboration beats competition as a strategy for success, also published by Little Brown, in 2018.