We are all aware – some more acutely than others depending on where you live or travel – of the impacts of the Great Demographic Shift underway in the world around us. The population is ageing, increasing, moving away from rural communities, having fewer children, and becoming more affluent. This, of course, has significant impacts on our consumption, the environments in which we live, and potentially puts the sustainability of our ecosystems in jeopardy. It should be clear to most observers that “business as usual” is not likely to lead to a good outcome.

Companies continue to profit from these demographic shifts, and for that there should be no need to apologize – people have needs and wants with respect to goods and services and, after all, delivery of these goods and services is the role of the enterprise. Indeed, economic factors are a critical part of the practical definition of sustainable, something frequently forgotten in some circles. But does this mean that sustainable development and economic profits are at odds? Conventional wisdom would argue this is nonsensical but recent social commentary would try to debate or overturn that convention. So, how can and should a research, development and engineering organization in a for-profit enterprise respond to these inputs?

In this talk, I will try to provide some practical examples of how companies have been and can continue to be successful by keeping an eye on all the things that matter – economic, environmental, and societal stakeholders working together as one, without compromise. We will talk about a few interesting challenges – some technical, most not – that have popped up along the way. I will finish with a few “headlines” we are working on either creating or responding to today – for a better tomorrow.