

Overview

In this special episode of The Collators, Mark and Howard speak with Carmen Medina, former Deputy Director of Intelligence at the CIA and one of the most respected reformers in modern intelligence analysis.

Carmen’s career spanned three decades at the heart of U.S. intelligence, leading analytic teams through the end of the Cold War, the information revolution, and the challenges of a world where secrets collide with the open internet.

Together, they explore:

- What it means to think critically inside large institutions.
- How bias and diversity of thought shape intelligence work.
- The tension between secrecy, sharing, and truth.
- Why categorisation, curiosity, and dissent are vital to good analysis.
- The impact of AI and automation on human judgement.

Reflective, candid, and often funny, Carmen’s insights reveal the reality of analysis as both craft and calling, and a human attempt to make sense of the world.

External Links

Link to Carmen Medina’s podcast - Pandas Playing Cello -
<https://www.youtube.com/@milouness>

Transcript

Mark

Hello everybody, welcome back to the pod. It's a very special edition of the podcast today. I'd like to introduce a very special guest, a lady called Carmen Mandina, as a retired senior federal executive with over 34 years experience in the Intel community.

And she's a former deputy director of Intel at CIA and the director for the Center of Study of Intelligence.

She's a recognized national and international expert on intelligence analysis, strategic thinking, diversity of thoughts and innovation. And she's also the co-author of a great book, Rebels at Work, a handbook for leading change from within.

She has a lot of content out on the internet. I can't recommend that content enough. And yeah,

so we'll just crack on with the show. So welcome, Carmen.

Carmen

Hey, thanks, Mark. Good afternoon. I know it's afternoon out there. And Howard, how are you?

Mark

It is.

Howard

Great to see you and the chance to have a face-to-face conversation with you is gold to me it's one of my bucket list moments so I'm delighted. Welcome.

Carmen

Thank you.

Mark

Likewise, it is the kind of the unofficial UK fan club, I think. So Carmen, do you mind for our listeners just maybe taking us just on your journey, just how you got into the whole Intel thing and just your journey throughout and where you got in? And small question, I guess, but if you don't mind, yeah, just take us on that journey.

Carmen

Wow, yeah. Well, I'll do my best. I often get asked the question, did you always want to work for the CIA? And the answer is no. I'm Puerto Rican. That's my heritage. I was born in Puerto Rico. Technically Spanish is my first language, but I never really studied it or used it professionally.

It's not the language I'm most comfortable in. I am an army brat, which I don't know if that translates into Great Britain.

Mark

It does.

Carmen

So my dad was a sergeant in the army and we lived all over. I don't think I spent more than two years at any school up until the time I was 11. And that included

Well, actually, this was the longest, a two and a half year stint in Germany, where I picked up my third language, very rusty now, Deutsch. I ended up somehow being a good student. I'm not really sure why. I mean, it's a mystery to all of us, you know, how our cognitive skills develop, I think.

And when I went to high school, actually, this is a great story, so I'll tell it. In the eighth grade, which in the American system is your last grade before you go on to what we call high school. In the eighth grade, I had this teacher whom I didn't particularly like. I didn't have warm and fuzzies about her, Mrs. Bunsen, who I guess on the last day of class said to me, Carmen, you know, you're going to high school and you're really smart. But you, know, English was not your first language. And so you speak too fast and too loud. It's just a physiological artifact of Spanish being your first language. So take speech when you go to high school, because it'll help you with that.

So I did. And that I learned by taking speech that I was very good at argumentation and debate. So now the link, the first link is created in this story. And when you're a debater in high school and college, you naturally think you're going to be a lawyer.

In the US, that's the natural progression, or barrister or an attorney. And so I ended up on the East Coast going to a university called Catholic University in the district, on the full tuition debate scholarship. And that university had lawyers.

And so I started meeting lawyers and I realized I did not want to be like them. What was I reacting to? Well, they were at that time, late seventies, they were mostly men. They were pretentious. I felt they overly serious and the big technology at that time was digital watches. The watch face was just numbers and they were overly attached to their novelty of their digital watches.

I searched around, well, what am I gonna do now? Luckily I'm in DC and the only other thing I'm interested in is the world. By which I mean the fact that there is a world, that it's composed of all these different cultures. I personally experienced cultural differences in a very significant way.

And so I applied just to one school, Georgetown, for their masters in Foreign Service, and I got in. My dad was a sergeant in the army. My mother, at that time, had never gone to university. She ended up in her 40s getting a degree.

So I didn't have any kind of cultural or family background to draw upon. So went to Georgetown and I tell people if you want a career at the CIA, the best thing you can do is go to a university where the CIA recruits a lot. And that is Georgetown University. They come all the time. They showed up my first semester. They liked me, I interviewed, I got in and that is the sum total of my story.

I got in as a summer intern, which is a 90 day limited contract, but you get fully cleared. And that's one of the best ways to join the intelligence community through that internship because the intelligence community is not for everyone. And it's a good way to test drive it.

I, at the end of my 90 days, so this was the summer in between my first and second year at grad school, they say, hey, we like you, why don't you just stay full time? And so I did. So I never quite got my master's from Georgetown. I ended up being two incompletes short of it. Because I tried, you know, I started work and tried to finish it at the same time.

This was 1978 and I spent 32 years physically at CIA. So I retired in 2010. At the time, the analytic program was small, certainly compared to what it is now, and kind of traumatized from the experience of Vietnam.

All these analysts, so I joined 78, Vietnam is just a few years past us. The analysts kind of had seen Vietnam for what it was, know, likely impossible situation to win, but they were not listened to. They were dismissed. Some of them, it became so traumatic that they left the agency.

Many of them were bitter. You know, sort of if you think about it, all my mentors, the people that were training me at the beginning, were all people that had been very embittered for the most part by this Vietnam experience. Just kind of interesting.

This is the Carter, Jimmy Carter administration, Stan Seale Turner. He's the director of CIA. And the CIA is not just traumatized by Vietnam, but traumatized by the Senate hearings on all of the things that the CIA had been doing that were totally illegal or wrong, like involvement with the US citizens or US persons, various assassination attempts, you know, just a litany of stupid covert operations, just a litany of things.

So the CIA was traumatized by that as well. I started off working in the operations center, just, you know, exactly what it sounds like, 24-hour watch office. And then they recruit me after a year to work on Africa. I didn't know anything about Africa. That was okay because pretty much everyone who worked on Africa didn't know anything about it because it was not a place that was considered important to U.S. interests.

But it was kind of at that time that it was becoming more important because we realized that Cuba and the Soviet Union were sort of fighting proxy skirmishes in the Cold War in places such as Angola. I spent about three years working on Southern Africa. Just, by the way, you were talking about my content being available. I run a YouTube channel called Pandas Playing Cello and our most recent interview is with a colleague, with someone who was a colleague during the South African times in the 1980s. And so we reminisce a lot about that period.

I think the conversation is really good. And I did that for about three or four years. All organizations are mismanaged in equally the same way. one of the things I learned after I retired from CIA, you know, pretty much I had worked before I went to CIA, but in little jobs, you

know, like a secretary or whatever, flipping burgers. And after I left CIA and started working for other large organizations, I realized that all the things I thought were uniquely stupid about CIA were not unique at all. They were all just symptoms of large organization disease.

So for whatever reasons, I got disenchanted with my management in South Africa. And I was pretty good. My background as a debater and argumentation is the one thing I can point to specifically that helped me be a good intelligence analyst. Because in the American debate, high school collegiate debate, you either have to take the negative or the positive on any particular issue based on the flip of a coin.

And so there might be, let's say, 100 arguments around that topic, sub-arguments you could make. And we had to, as debaters, we had to know the inside and the outside, the pro and the con, the good and the bad of every single argument.

And it's hard for me to think of a training that is more relevant to being an intelligence analyst than that experience. So the Middle East office came looking for me because they were always looking for analysts. We didn't have enough. So I got poached and then I went to work on the Middle East for three years and I worked on Lebanon and the Palestinian issue.

I worked on Lebanon the year that everything went horrible in Lebanon, where the 240 plus Marines were killed in Beirut. In fact, I was awakened around three o'clock in the morning when that happened and told that I had to come into work immediately. So it was summer. I put on clothes, but I still had my flip-flops on.

And I spent, you know, cause I was trying to save any moment and I spent the whole day at CIA briefing everybody, including William Casey with my flip flops on. That was, that was great. So, so that, you know, that's, that was my Middle East experience. And then in 1984, so we're six years later, I get asked to return to Africa and they offer me a kind of a premier sort of account. I return.

Soon after that, become the South African, actually, wrong. Soon after that, I'm offered the opportunity to lead the South African leadership account, which was actually my first management job. And then after about a year of doing that, become the South African manager and so forth and so on.

So from that point on, I'm a manager of analysis. And I spent three years overseas in London in the early 90s in a liaison position. And I think it was that experience during which it was the first Iraq war, that I was involved in. And it was that experience, I think, that got me to be a lot more introspective about analysis.

And I really began to understand between 10 and 15 years into my career, that there were lots of problems with intelligence analysis. And we'll get into that. I'm not gonna interrupt my chronology about that.

Mark

You can if you want to go for it.

Carmen

Well, I mean, it had to do with... There's so many issues. I actually will tackle those separately.

Mark

Okay, cool.

Carmen

So I come back. What happens a lot in any larger organization is when you leave the mothership reentry is difficult. They forget you. And I had a hard time getting back into the analytic stream and to get hired for the kind of job that I thought I was ready for.

And also this critique had been building in my mind about the future of analysis. And it was after the Cold War and there was a lot of sturm und drang and angst about, know, what do we do now that we're not analyzing the Soviet Union? I mean, it's hard to imagine how traumatic that really was for intelligence analysts. And I become cynical and negative.

I mean, that's what people call me, you're cynical and negative. And I'm not a cynical or negative person, but I obviously projected that. And that got me into trouble in terms of my competitiveness for other positions.

But I finally got a position in 1998 involved with improving the security of our products that were constantly being leaked and also exploring digital technologies to see how that might revolutionize the way we did our work.

And that was what I wanted to do because that was one of the reasons why I was tagged cynical and negative because I was like, Cassandra, the internet is going to change everything. For all knowledge organizations, we are a knowledge organization. We must begin to adapt. And nobody wanted to hear that, or almost nobody. I mean, it was an amazing thing.

And when I look at my, yeah, go ahead.

Mark

And sorry, when you say no one wanted to hear that, is that because internally it was, I think I've heard you speak about this before, it was kind of the complete opposite of the culture at CIA at the time.

Carmen

Exactly. it was heretical. The CIA is built on secrets. The CIA is not built on easy access to information. And, and what the stupid thing that I did was that I didn't think it through and I didn't realize that I was, that of course they were not going to hear me because the internet was against the prevailing orthodoxy. And no organization easily accepts new ideas, particularly those that are clearly antithetical to the prevailing orthodoxy.

But I finally got this job in 98, and I succeeded with the help of a lot of great people. And I finally entered the senior intelligence service, which is the equivalent of being a flag officer, which was my goal, I guess. And I became an analytic manager of large groups. then after 9-11 and after the failure on Iraq WMD analysis, there was a new CIA director, Porter Goss, and he had the mandate to just clean up analysis.

And the story that they told me, Porter Goss's assistants told me is that they interviewed, I don't know, dozens of senior managers in the analytic directorate, of which I was now one. And he said, they told me that you were the only one who said that there were real problems with intelligence analysis.

I'm just quoting what they said. And I was like, really? How can that be? How could I be the only one? And so that's how I became deputy director of analysis. I was actually fleeted up. I skipped like two levels to do that, or maybe one and a half levels.

And I did that for a couple of years. I wanted to do it longer, but I was asked to take on another job. And I don't often talk about this part, but there was a change and the new deputy director of the CIA was like, well, you're just not hard enough as a manager.

And I consider that a compliment because my goal was never to be hard. And it reflects some kind of old, what I think of as an old idea of what an effective manager is. But then I became the director of the Center for the Study of Intelligence and was doing a bunch of like special projects for General Hayden.

But that's sort of determined me that I was going to retire as soon as I was eligible, which was when I was 55. I turned 71 next week and I retired. I went to work for Deloitte for five years. I still have my clearances.

So over the years I've done some things for the intelligence agencies, spoken in public and

currently served on boards and currently I'm on the Public Interest Declassification Board, which is a board jointly appointed by the President of the United States and Congress to think about the, well, to ensure as best it can that the classified materials are declassified in a timely fashion for the public interest.

And there's actually a blog for the Public Interest Classification Board. And if the government shut down, doesn't interfere, we are actually having a public session at the end of October on sort of the things that we need to think about now that the documents linked to the 9-11 disaster are becoming eligible for declassification.

So there's actually a law in the United States that all classified documents must be declassified 25 years after their date. But there's pages and pages of exceptions and, know, god is in the details and sometimes people, agencies, for good reasons, pay more attention to the exceptions than to the spirit of the law, one could say.

So I've continued to write. I wrote a book, as you mentioned, *Rebels at Work*, about my experience being kind of a heretic in a large organization. I co-wrote it with Lois Kelly.

I remain very interested in analysis and most occasionally will put myself, my mind together to do something on an analytic problem. I'm kind of mulling one over right now. So we may kind of discuss it while we continue the conversation.

But most of my new content, I've decided that YouTube, that visual content is kind of where we're going. And so I have a YouTube channel where we post one interview with an interesting person on average once a week, where we just try, I think like you all are trying to have really interesting conversations on important topics.

Mark

Well, thank you for being so open and taking us through that. I was surprised at some of the things you said. I don't think I've heard you speak about them before. It's like you your decision to leave. The thing about not being hard enough, it strikes me that, you know.

Carmen

Mm-hmm.

Yes, yes. No, I usually don't talk about that one.

Mark

Yeah, you should strike me as somebody who's very robust and very kind of, you you can't be that critical. Anyway, we'll leave that to one side.

Okay, so I'll explain a little bit about the pod and then why I'm leading up to this question about Intel analysis, right? So I'll be honest, when I had kind of an interesting childhood and kind of, ended up in the police in, I kind of skipped a bit of academia along the way, I to go back and retrain.

So I've always had a little bit of imposter syndrome, right? And so when I got into Intel, I basically wanted to go into the fundamentals of, the way I combat imposter syndrome is I try and go to what are the fundamentals, the first principles, who are like the big thinkers in that space.

And I've tried to really do a deep dive into Intel analysis. And Intel analysis is a long story, right? Cause obviously we go back all the way to the forties and the Bill Donovan setting up the Center for Research and Analysis. have Sherman Kent and then this evolution of this thing that we call intelligence analysis, big I, big A.

And I'll be honest, sometimes I found it quite an obscure subject because I think sometimes if I was to take a random sample of biologists from around the world, chances are they'd probably... speak in the same similar ways about similar things and have similar experiences for other certain types of professions, I would have the same thing.

But I think Intel analysis now granted I have a law enforcement in the UK bias, but I tend to find that when you talk about Intel analysis in a global context, if you had to grab a random sample of Intel analysts from across the globe, and sometimes this changes over time, right? You wouldn't necessarily get a lot of similarity in their speech, in their work, in the outlook. And that to me says that Intel analysis isn't like a very specified forensic thing.

If this do this, it's more of a broad area. And I just wondered if you could take us through your take on Intel analysis for an audience that maybe are not from the Intel community or from a further, not from our background.

Carmen

Yeah, so, well, I agree with everything you said. Before I try to offer my own definition, it's not the right word, but my own description of intelligence analysis. I'm sure you know Stephen or know of Stephen Marin

Mark

Absolutely.

Carmen

What's the name of that university? Why am I blanking?

but he's at an important university here in Virginia. And he was an analyst at CIA. And I remember he would come to talk to me. You've looked up his university affiliation and it is.

Mark

I'm going up Google it now, trying to find it for you. It just failed miserably. Hang on, because there's too many Stephen Marrins. on. I'll try to it on LinkedIn.

Howard

You're an intelligence analyst you should have your hands open source get on with it

Carmen

James Madison University? JMU, James Madison. Well, no, I think it's James Madison. It's coming back to me. But anyway, he was an analyst and I remember him coming to me with all of these papers and ideas and thought pieces he was writing about what was wrong with intelligence analysis. And he would show them to me because, you know, by reputation,

I was one of the managers that was receptive to these ideas. And that's when he developed an idea very similar to what you were saying that, you know, are we really a discipline? Are we really a profession? You know, because we're not like doctors, you know, we're not like, like you said, you know, everybody would be sort of speaking from the same script and they would be interchangeable, right? And we're not like that at all.

So I agree with everything you said. So how would I describe intelligence analysis?

Well, there's one category of intelligence analysis that most people when they talk, when they use that phrase are referring to, which is individuals, who are cleared to go through all the secret information that the government collects to make sense of it and use it to answer the questions that policymakers have and use it to warn policymakers about problems that might be emerging and altogether too rarely could use it to help policymakers identify opportunities.

And this is all based on these categories of 'ints' that have been developed largely since World War II. And that's one definition.

Mark

That's like hum-int, sig-int. We say ints, is that what you mean? Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, sure,

yeah, yeah.

Carmen

Yeah, human, SIGINT, ELINT, MACEINT, know, now OSINT. It drives me nuts. Open source intelligence.

This description of intelligence analysis, the one that I just described or articulated, was attempting to be so precise and so self-contained, that when the internet came out and all the other information in the world that was available, that had always been available but now was practically accessible, when all that information became usable, intelligence agencies all over the world, in the United States, and I imagine all over the world, have argued whether or not intelligence analysts should use open source.

I consider this the most ridiculous conversation. I understand why it happens bureaucratically, but it is an absurdity. And I just recently saw something over the interwebs, maybe on LinkedIn, where I think it was some kind of US military intelligence activity had put out an official policy saying that it was okay for the Intel analysts to research open source.

And I was like, what? So this continues. But that's that one definition of intelligence analysis or description. Yes, please.

Mark

At that point, I just, so I think you've, because I've heard you speak about this before in other lectures. I think you've done an exercise in the past where you talk to your students about there's everything that can be known about a situation in a room.

And obviously, and in your example, maybe the secret intel is one box. But in what you've just explained, right, it's the whole notion that you have to give permission to look at the rest of the room, right?

Carmen

Yes, exactly. Well put, well put. It's absurd. And so it was admittedly kind of late in my career. I'm embarrassed, but it wasn't probably until after 2000, let's say, that I had this realization that we look at that flow of secret or secretly acquired information or proprietary information that comes across our computer inboxes as an Intel analyst in government.

And the big assumption that we're making is that this information flow accurately represents reality. And I can still, I don't remember the exact moment, but I remember the feeling I got when the thought entered my mind, my God, it doesn't accurately represent reality at all.

And even worse, we don't even understand how much of reality it does represent. Does that classified information flow represent 10% of reality or 30% of reality? I don't care. Except for maybe a few small domains like biological chemical warfare programs or something like that.

It definitely is a single digit number in terms of what percentage of reality it represents. And yet we take that information and we massage it and we draw conclusions from it and we present it to our policymaker customers as if it is an accurate representation of reality.

Mark

Like it's a forensic DNA test, right? With almost that.

Carmen

Like it's a forensic DNA test. And I was like, this is the most absurd thing. it's one of the things, that's why I use the example that you mentioned all the time with analysts. would ask them, okay, imagine this room represents everything that an omniscient god would know about al-Qaeda. At the time that was the example I used.

What part of the room represents what we actually know? We being the CIA or the Counterterrorism Center. I had one guy once just hold up his coffee cup. This is it. So this is a fundamental flaw is not the right word, but it's a fundamental defect in this concept of intelligence analysis.

So, but I think this is sort of the operational definition that runs all governments for the most part. I mean, there are some changes, but that runs a lot of government intelligence organizations.

So, but intelligence, as the modern world has become more complex, more and more companies, institutions realize that they need some activity that whose singular purpose is to organize and make sense of all the information that that activity needs to be aware of to operate effectively in the world.

Whether you are, you know, staging live concerts, whether you're a police force, whether you make refrigerators in Nebraska, it doesn't matter. There's a flow of information that you need to be aware of to make the best optimum decisions.

And as the volume of information has exploded, and I would also argue the complexity of the world, I don't know that the world has become more complex, although I do think that the numbers have become higher.

I think we just become aware of this complexity. I think that they realize with all this information that they just can't count on Joe, the chief operating officer of the sales division to somehow magically absorb it all and have it in his mind as some kind of background that informs his

decisions.

That you can't count on Joe or Elizabeth to do this and that you have to have a dedicated team to do it.

Mark

Because the world is big, complicated and constantly changing every day. I think you spoke about before in different lecture about how, can't remember if was in the eighties or nineties, but there was this idea that all our analysts or case officers had to do was kind of read the inbox traffic and they'd have this, finger on the pulse of what's going on, but actually, yeah, yeah.

Carmen

Yes, yes, exactly. I mean, I could I can talk about this topic. I become a daffy duck on it. So I tried to avoid that. So that activity, putting together some people whose sole purpose is to organize and make sense of the information flows that are important to your organization, to your mission.

They have, I think, confusingly also been called intelligence analysts, right?

Mark

Absolutely.

Carmen

You know, risk, sometimes they're called risk. Sometimes they come under the security umbrella of their organization

Mark

I think intelligence as a word has been co-opted, the word analyst has been co-opted and in conjunction. And it's because I think I tend to find that there's people in those jobs and in those agencies and they don't really perhaps think about too much about what the titles mean once they're in post.

But I think sometimes when people leave the organizations and leave that world and then they find themselves in a world where they have to market their transferable skills.

It sounds cool, right? You say I'm an intelligence analyst at CIA or I'm in law enforcement. And I think that's the problem is that sometimes it's led to this over decades, people commodifying intelligence, commodifying analysis. And now there's so much commodification over decades

now that it feels like a meaningless term sometimes.

Carmen

Yeah, it does feel like a meaningless term. And now we've got the big bad AI coming. Or maybe it's the big good AI coming. And I, I was brought into conversations, let's say three years ago about the impact of AI on intelligence analysis. And I said to one person, you know, if you give, and this is three years ago, if you give an AI engine a fixed set of documents, i.e. you control its inputs, they sift through it and it sifts through it, identifies patterns, anomalies. It can do all this sort of basic organizational, what I call categorization of the information so fast and just as good as any human analyst can.

And this is the kicker. And then I said, and frankly, I think for maybe 50% of our analysts, that's all that they really can do professionally. Because we didn't have AI. So we hired people who were good researchers who could filter large, dumps of information quickly and reliably and pick out what was new and interesting and put things into categories.

And so AI can do that. And we are, I mean, we're just silly if we don't accept that, that that's what AI can do. So, but by my estimation, that un-employees 50% of intelligence analysts in large government organizations. That's the group that I was talking about.

So, I mean, I think that the human mind is an incredible thing. And I think we have incredible capabilities beyond that categorization. I actually think that, you know, categorization is in the scale of things an analyst or sense maker, putting whatever words you want to put in there, can do.

Categorization is manual labor. It's really important manual labor, but on the hierarchy of things, value added things we can do, it's still manual labor.

Mark

I'm with you hundred percent. I'll be honest in my agency, but even privately, I think the AI tools that the large language models specifically, I've seen them automate many of the things you describe quite well. I mean, it's interesting, right? You look at LinkedIn and LinkedIn is either AI will save us all and it's amazing or if we build it, we're all dead. And I've also seen a lot of kind of dubious content about whether it can, I say replace the analyst, I think it can replace some of the analytical function.

I'm not suggesting it can replace the entire analyst, but actually me and Howard have played with this. When you feed it certain types of data, it's quite good sometimes at parsing large volumes of information, doing some very rudimentary judgments. And you kind of think you might give that to a junior analyst or anything. If you can automate that, well, actually it's the same story of automation, right? In that, okay.

Now we don't have to do it all. We can get the computer to do some of it for us. That doesn't mean we abandon everything. We can still do some stuff. Sorry, Howard. know you've been, I've been...Go on, Howard, sorry.

Howard

Sorry. Wow. What a lot of gold in terms of insight and perspectives. Carmen, thank you. I'll touch on the Intel and analysis bit first just to kind of close that bit off because we could talk on that for years before I get into the management stuff. I love the idea you use a phrase that Mark knows I use a lot. Sense making.

I like you I've had a journey now I'm 68 I'm a little bit younger than you...

Carmen

Aww, you're a puppy.

Howard

But only just of which 50 years has been a career in well 34 in law enforcement and then beyond but my law enforcement career was far more than just law enforcement. I've worked all over the world, I've worked with every level of organization. If you wanted to do a diagram of the various Intel structures within organizations and the differences, you know, the what you might call the state intelligence services, the special interest groups, big data movers, private sector.

I've interfaced with most of them at some point with the work that I've done including the private sector and the big non law enforcement organisations and I say law enforcement with a small L and a small E.

What that's taught me, like Mark, started out wanting to and you I wanted to learn about this process because I'm a great believer in humanity and human skills.

But what really interests me is how we collect and process information to inform decision making, whether we're the ones making the decision or helping somebody else. So the phrase sense making is music to my ears. Because I hate, and I've been as guilty as anyone of coming up with and teaching definitions. And every time I come up with anything, it's not complete or it's not appropriate for every sector.

So I've gone through the full swing of the bell curve from early practitioner student to be practitioner to be manager to be writer and sort of thought process leader shall we say to try and make a difference in my profession to realizing it's not a science it's it's maybe somewhere between an art and a philosophy but in that situation you can if you accept that that gives all of

us the chance to A. Contribute B. to bring into the broad church of Intel and analysis all the outlying organizations and players but also to plan and be ready for the future because the moment you come up with a definition, it's a definition at a moment in time and tomorrow's data is going to be a different problem for the Intel analysts of tomorrow and organizations to deal with. One of the things that you said early on was this idea that you were having problems being seen as difficult and that really echoed with me.

I was always a company man and law enforcement in the UK certainly but perhaps more so than America. It's very structured it was built on quasi-military structures. Rank and this idea of seniority or superior, your superior was superior. No they're not, they're just higher managers than me managing bigger pots of resources maybe with bigger problems to solve. Doesn't mean they're superior mentally or ethically or you know physically even. Says he as a fat bloke from you know a fat old man.

But one of the things that I always got as a company man, like you I came from a scientific background that was my graduate training before I joined the police and I joined the police because it gave me a job, when science couldn't give me a job. It was the way of the world. You've to put a roof over your head and food in your belly.

But my skill throughout my service has been my ability to assimilate and assess information from any source and within law enforcement, organisationally and legally there are restrictions put on that culturally. They certainly are. Everything you talked about I recognize all of that but my start point as what you might call a human being and an analyst is no data is out of bounds and as you say from a scientific point of view if you've only got a small sample of a large population of data, even if you've got a hundred percent of all the data in one form but none of the data in other forms and Mark and I have discussed large language models and the limitations of that data set even if it was 100% of that data the system's blind to other data.

What I've always found is I always thought my role and that of my teams was to like you say make sense of the information to inform and alert more senior managers or organizational reps who have the role and the responsibility to make decisions but didn't have the time or the skill set to properly assimilate the data to do so.

We don't make the decisions but we pull the levers that make the decisions. And I always found the way to do that was to recognize their limitations and always manage the managers.

Carmen

Yes, absolutely.

Howard

An effective intelligence analyst has to manage their managers and try and like you talked about

predicting every outcome in a debate. You're predicting how the discussion will go and how you would respond because you're dealing with sometimes human sensitivities and frailties, sometimes organizational and cultural.

And you can't let that divert your role and your duty to that scenario, that group discussion from

what your role is which is to deliver the information and reassure people that you've thought about these things you're not telling them the decision to make but you're telling them what they need to think about and the bits that are more important and what they might lead to and not so you're almost doing some of their thinking for them and in that situation I'm a company man I've never been one to go outside but like you in my career I reached a point where I thought everybody's as bad.

They really don't get this and there's a resentment that becomes a barrier to being an effective team player. Not from me or my team but from the customers and I found it outside law enforcement since I left in the fields that I worked in.

I always remember at one point in the police service I wanted to I was considering going for promotion in law enforcement in the UK there are certain grades where you become purely a manager rather than having any involvement in operational policing and I never wanted to take that step because I loved doing I liked being practically effective as well as I had a lot of power in terms of influencing the key decision makers in the organization way above my rank if you will. But one of my colleagues who had gone through it said, well Howard you need to look at yourself. You are what we call a troublesome priest.

Carmen

That's a great phrase.

Howard

You are this person who has a belief, an ethics and an approach to duty that whilst commendable can cause us problems politically. Not that you're going to go outside and be the rogue player for the team but you can you sometimes raise uncomfortable data and uncomfortable questions that we don't want to consider. We ought to consider them but nine times out of ten we don't want to.

So we kind of want you for when the proverbial brown stuff hits the fan, but the rest of the time when we're playing our little interdepartmental and interorganisational games and politics and even interpersonal, we don't want to go there. So we need you, but you're never going to be that kind of influencer because you're not prepared to play the game when actually it's against what the weight of the data and the reasoning shows. Does that kind of make sense?

Carmen

Absolutely

Howard

I've found since I left, been like you I was always and still am like you've still got your clearance mine's probably expired for law enforcement it's different to the security services but certainly I've maintained some of my other professional links and skill sets and access and legally I'm still bound.

We have something over here you'll know about it the Official Secrets Act that lives with me to the day I die. I don't have an issue with any of that. I would never breach any of that. It's hard wired into me. But in the right setting with the right people who are able to listen to and hear what I say, I can speak up. But even outside of all of that, I feel much freer now to be able to critique. But in a positive, I'm not coming from a place of negativity. As a law enforcement officer, as UK police officer, I carried a badge for 34 years. I am tremendously proud of what the best of us do in that job. I'm proud of what I did, what my teams did.

But Mark will tell you I'm known here in the UK as one of the biggest critics of the police. Not because I'm anti-police. It's because I see areas where it's making organisational systemic mistakes that could be easily fixed and they're blind to it. Sorry Mark

Mark

No, just wanted, sorry, if finish off, if you've got something to carry on with that thought.

Howard

No, was just, even though we come from different, very different intel worlds, I don't think we do. I think we're all part of this big Venn diagram where we go off into specialisms, but there are certain values and approaches in terms of how we collect and collate and use data to then reason and form reasoned outcomes that are common, whether that, like you say, you're the guy on the production line at Ford or whether you're in the CIA or whether you're in a local health authority or whether you're flipping burgers at McDonald's. Even human beings, know, the decisions what clothes you buy, where you go on holiday, which route you take to work, what kind of car you buy. They are all survival based or values based decisions. So every human being is an analyst.

Carmen

Right? Yeah.

Howard

It's just some of us naturally a sort of self introspective to realize that there's a process going on I'm not aware of kind of like breathing you know most of us don't think about breathing most of us don't think about thinking and how we analyze data for information so what I was going to ask you was, so I've been going on about that Mark, sorry. What I wanted to ask you this this troublesome priest idea, which is what you are you are another Howard in that, or I'm another Carmen in the role of managing analysts and you know I have the book you know it's full of underlining pencil bits and other things it's one of my go-to's because I believe in transformational leadership and transformational organisations. It's future-proof some in ways that others do not and I no matter, It's also better for the people inside. But the prime goal is it better prepares the organization to defend itself and survive going forward rather than transactional leadership. What's in it for me? What's in it for us?

When you've gone through all that process, the problem for us as Intel managers or Intel analysts, we're all one group, is persuading our customers, our clients of the value of our product when there's this natural cultural aversion sometimes and even personal to putting it to use. And that's quite a different skill set because you may be a great analyst coming up with products and they're really good products. But if you haven't got the ability to communicate and kind of rightfully sit at the round table of decision making and have an influence you will fail.

Good product bad communication is failure. How have you found that in your career at different times? Are there any particular features that you would emphasize to would be Intel operatives to actually be effective communicators and therefore effective operatives in this team game?

Carmen

That's a difficult question and I have not been as successful as I would have wanted to be. I will tell you a few things that come to mind. Aviation, a field that I read about a lot because I think there's a lot of lessons for intelligence organizations in aviation. And when you talk to a pilot about particularly a long haul flight, what it's like to be a pilot, they say it's like 95% total boredom and 5% sheer terror.

I think that that applies in a slightly slanted way to being an intelligence analyst. So we have to train the people that we hire to develop their sophisticated thinking skills. And the fact that none of us know how to define sophisticated thinking skills is a huge problem for us. Because if you can't define it, you can't teach it. If you can't describe it, you can't teach it. But I think the best we know is that if we give Joe five years of these experiences, the average Joe at the end of those five years of those experiences will be a pretty good intelligence analyst.

I think that's kind of what we know organizationally. And so to make their job seem important to them, to motivate them, we create all these documents or briefings or findings or whatever and we present them to policymakers.

So we insist on presenting to our customers, our policymakers, 95% of the material which is sheer boredom. That's really what we're doing. It's a very odd, bizarre situation.

And so when we do that and the policymaker, she gets tired of the 95% of sheer boredom stuff. She becomes immune and therefore is unable to process, when the information is actually in the 5% sheer terror category.

So I think we've always had this problem, and this is a very practical problem being a manager of an intelligence organization. We've always had this problem of how do we train them to be of a high enough quality of intelligence analysts, which incidentally, we can't actually define in a rigorous way, how do we train them and keep them motivated if they don't feel some satisfaction that they are being recognized by their customers as providing some kind of an important service?

And AI is just gonna make this problem worse. Because you already, and this I consider quite a valid point about AI and I don't know how to solve it, but a lot of people say, well, the problem with having AI do all this sort of manual labor part of the intelligence analysis work is how are we gonna train our new analysts? They have to learn, they have to start somewhere in learning how to be a more discerning thinker.

And if we take away all this rudimentary stuff from them, exactly what's gonna happen? I don't have an answer for that.

I think that's a real problem. One of the reasons why we lose influence or we don't have the influence we should have with our policymakers is that we inflict upon our customers all the training data. we can't reimagine that model. Okay. How would it work? I mean, I think I could reimagine it, in different ways. I think we all could reimagine it in different ways.

The thought that entered my mind was what if we, you know, which is actually something that I was trying to do at CIA, what if we're writing for each other and then your colleagues sort of vote up or vote down a piece and somehow your rewards at the end of the year reflect how your colleagues thought of your work.

I know, I can hear all the objections to that, but it's probably preferable to insisting to our policymaker that this piece on current events in Slovenia is really important for you to read when it so clearly isn't. There isn't anything new in there. So that's one thought I have.

A second thought I have is, and this is drawn from a real lesson.

We have to be psychologically way smarter about how we use language with policymakers in communicating our conclusions. Way, way smarter. I know now because since I left the CIA, I've read a lot into cognitive theory and all of these fields, which oddly enough, as a manager at CIA,

I was never introduced to them.

I mean, Sherman Kent, and if you know this name, Jack Davis, they were like the two people, the fonts of wisdom on intelligence analysis. And it's only when I left CIA that I realized, my God, there's this whole other huge discipline about cognitive models and how people receive information. And for example you know, we spent all this time anguishing about whether it should be 'probably' or 'most likely' or whatever bizarre thing we're trying to dissect. And cognitive theory will tell you that it doesn't matter, that the policy, that the person who reads it at the other end will absorb it at some much more fundamental level, that your choice of words makes no difference, right?

Howard

Absolutely.

Carmen

But so we're so, I recommend that all people who want to become analysts or analytic managers immerse themselves as much as they can in how our mind works, how our mind interprets information, and that will therefore inform them on how they communicate with their customers.

The value of graphics, the importance of images, the relative clunkiness of words, all of that has to be taken into account. But the one specific example I wanted to point out was, and I talk about this a lot, is our use of the phrase worst case scenario, which is endemic among analysts.

And I know firsthand because I heard this from a policymaker and we were talking, an important policymaker, and we were talking about the insurgency in Iraq, after Saddam Hussein was overthrown and the policymakers said, you didn't warn me about this.

So that's the 5% of sheer terror, right? He didn't feel warned. And we said, au contraire, we did. Point number one, if you're arguing with the policymaker, you have already lost.

Howard

You've lost.

Carmen

One of my favorite phrases is, if you're explaining, you're losing. There's no explaining to win. It's like, stop digging, please. Just stop the digging. so, but we said, oh no, but we did look, here it is, we told you. And the policymaker says, oh, you said it was a worst case scenario. I'm quoting. But then in the back of my mind, I was like, when I write “worst case scenario”, the

average human thinks unlikely. are testing, you know, this is cognitive theory. They're immediately coupling those two things.

Mark

They're not trained Intel officers. not from that background.

Carmen

They're not from that background. When they hear worst case scenario, they go, that's like if all four tires on my car went flat at the same time. That's not going to happen. Right? So I realized we got to stop using these phrases. And so this is not my idea. But when I talked to people about this, someone suggested, they said, yeah, I learned the same lesson. And now I just say most dangerous. The most dangerous outcome is x.

I'm not sure that's... Well, in fact, I know that won't solve all these problems, but I do think that's a better formulation than worst-case scenario. So, best case, worst case, all of that should be obliterated from our vocabulary, should all go away.

Let me see, what more would you like me to say about this Intel management? this is, know, communicating with customers. You've got to understand cognitive theory better. You have to stop sending, you have to be more selective with the material you send your customers. You have to stop using the providing products, the customers as the training ground for your new analysts, because you're just you're just asking for irrelevance when you do that. And three, you've got to be psychologically way smarter about how you use language and understand the limitations of language because language is very, very clunky and open to constant misinterpretation.

Howard

That's absolutely brilliant. It matches exactly how I feel. One of things that stands out is we had a guest on who is a very respected medical practitioner being involved in, although medicine is his background, he found Intel analysis as a medical practitioner was of value to him in dealing with major global medical issues.

In his case Ebola and then COVID. And he's again from the US. Lovely guy. Very insightful. But one of things he said was as a medical practitioner when he communicated with his customers, the patients and clients, he was very limited in the information he gave because he would have done loads of tests or maybe have lots of qualifiers that were going on in his head about the state of the diagnosis at that time based on the data that he had and potential outcomes, talking about people's life and death here.

But he says, if I give that out to these people, they will run with it and maybe come to

conclusions that are completely incorrect and contraindicators. They're actually likely to do more harm to their health than not knowing and I just thought that was such a great analogy for our world where you're almost thinking well I've always been a great believer in I agree with you totally don't put numbers don't use phrases that other people misinterpret I've always been a big fan of limiting what you say. I've always said you can have all the Intel databases, reports, you can put it in a fancy binder, loads of IT pictorials.

It's all useful supplementary information but the best and most effective delivery of Intel to a decision maker is face to face where they say well what do you think you say 'X' literally one phrase know what's the most significant and I like significance and risk rather than major threat or really you know what I mean

Carmen

Right. Yeah, I do.

Howard

Because you could have really significant data about a null theory you know I've done loads of work that proves that that group are not likely to act in that way there's no indication that they're doing anything and the management will say well why are you telling me that because it means you don't need to divert resources and attention to that right now in terms of operational intervention. But that doesn't mean you give up looking at them or collecting data and managing that potential risk because we know there are potential risk.

And that that links me back to I remember watching one of your presentations on analytic heuristics, which I love and I'll freely admit I have stolen citing you and delivered it very effectively, my own take on that to UK intelligence managers and it's very receptive so you might have got a few more hits than from the UK

But one of the things that you said in there was this idea when you're talking about creating what in law enforcement we would call a jeopardy surface

Carmen

Yes, right.

Howard

We got this basically a landscape of the data where you're using that landscape to direct in your case, if I remember correctly, was the flight paths of various aircraft. In law enforcement, we would use that to direct the patrol route of foot officers or vehicles. You know, the statistical probability of dropping on something or being of service. That really stood out to me as a good

way to have this conversation.

Carmen

Yeah. So I want to say just a few things about what you just said, Howard.

One of the things I would say as an intelligence managers, I would say we are just too hung up on our products.

If we have an effective relationship with our customer, we, the sign of a really good relationship with our customer is when we can answer their question or provide what they need in like a couple of sentences. They don't want a huge paper, and we shouldn't insist on providing it, although we often do for our own internal bookkeeping reasons.

So, you know, if the policymaker asks you, how are things going in Slovenia? And you say, you need to become, I am more worried and I think you need to, hopefully you've been part of their contingency planning. I think it's time for you to think about some of the steps in contingency plan B. That's really all you need to say. You don't need to say.

Howard

Job done. Job done..

Carmen

All the other stuff. And in aviation, one of my favorite examples, in the modern airplanes, when it becomes a moment of sheer terror, when it becomes a 5% moment, the modern airplanes totally change the instrumentation the pilot sees. Because usually the pilot has all the stuff that can distract him or her. But when they've lost an engine or it's demonstrable moment of emergency, the screens go blank and the only thing the pilot sees are the three or four critical inputs he or she must see at that moment.

That's a tremendous lesson for intelligence analysts. One which I don't think we have absorbed because we're caught up in this dynamic that we think we have to justify our existence, and that is a dynamic that exists. And we think we justify our existence by doing more. And that's, I think, the problematic conclusion that we're drawing.

Howard

I really agree with you. That's a really good take on where I was coming from. Can I ask you a different question? One of things I've always valued in UK law enforcement, because we are we're not military like, America, who were a civilian police force and we represent the public.

We are employed to enforce and deal with issues of law as one of our roles by the public who through democracy, parliament, our political leaders decide what the law should be. We don't get to decide that but one of things that UK law enforcement says is we want to reflect society so we want our personnel to come from all sectors of society be that race, religion, age, culture, creed, nationality.

Now that's something I've always believed in strongly as a manager especially as an Intel manager because if you're going to go out and go fishing amongst data sets that are new and unknown, rather than having a hundred analysts all of whom think the same way and do the same job with the same kind of data.

Comms data for example. If somebody said to me and I've had it what would you do if you got more staff? I'd say give me somebody from a different background, give me somebody from completely outside who will maybe not only look at what we do with new eyes, but make us look in areas at data or perspectives on data that we don't hold.

And I've always found that strength in a varied team. But the downside of that as a manager is you often have to juggle and create comfort zones and places where all these staff with all their personal and cultural and whatever other factors come together and compete.

It's like a safe working environment, kind of like a safe learning environment in teaching they're going to feel comfortable to engage and I wondered, obviously you are from a very important and influential organization with data sets and levels of access and resourcing and influence that we aren't from.

But here you are, a highly successful leader and manager in your profession, proven by your record. You're a lady.

I've often wondered with my teams, my first instruction when I was a police officer was a lady she was my mentor. We have a two-year process called probation whereby this person takes you around and teaches you what the real job is about rather than what's in the book and I still think now 50 years later of some of the perspectives that she had as a woman that I...

We both carried warrant cards, we both police officers. She thought differently to the way that I thought as a man. And I'm not being sexist here. It's not about that. It's about different perspectives. And I wonder if you'd ever seen that, because you've clearly got a different perspective to myself and Mark. Maybe because of sex, maybe because of age, maybe because of culture, maybe because of country, maybe because of sphere of influence. All of which is good, but has it ever made a difference to your work? Because it certainly has to mine and my effectiveness.

Carmen

Absolutely. mean, one experience that I talk a lot about or have talked about is when I worked on South Africa, it was during the 80s, the decade that led to the end of apartheid. The analysts, there's about 10 of them maybe, were pretty much equally divided as to whether or not they thought Black majority rule could emerge as part of a more or less peaceful process.

And the other half thought it was just going to be a horrific bloody civil war. As our manager, I spent a lot of time trying to figure out what the heck is the dividing line between these two groups.

And one that I observed in an analog way, I didn't test them or anything, but one that I observed was that the ones who were optimistic about black majority rule were just generally optimist in nature. They were optimists about everything. And the ones who were pessimistic about black majority rule were just pessimists by nature.

So lesson, you can't help but bring your prevailing cognitive style, your prevailing personal psychology, however that develops and we don't know, into your work and it interprets, or sorry, it affects the way you interpret data.

So that was one issue. But I eventually had a colleague call out when he, this is a colleague who had been part of the pessimist group, Bob Gates actually was interested in his view. He goes and takes a trip to South Africa, comes back, actually writes a memo that says, I think Carmen's right.

I think things are changing there in ways that we don't quite understand. And because this guy was sort of had a lot of ego, he's a dear friend of mine, but he has a lot of ego. He actually wrote, well, why didn't I see this when Carmen saw it?

A topic frankly he did not have to address, but only because he had a lot of ego he felt he had to address. And he said, he actually wrote in the memo, maybe it's because I'm not Puerto Rican. And I remember reading that and going, my God, what is he saying? And then also reflecting on it and I go, okay, well, I wish he really hadn't put it that way, but I can see how the sum total of my experience might have made me more sensitive to indicators that he just simply overlooked.

And, you know, I'm a brown skin person, a term I actually almost never use, because I kind of dislike it. I dislike all skin color references, period. But I, you know, grew up never being particularly consciously aware of this, but nevertheless subconsciously it must have been part of my mentality. I grew up as part of a non-dominant group in whatever society I was in. Going to kindergarten in Georgia, going to third grade in North Carolina.

And I could tell you little moments where it was clear that people were viewing me only through the color of my skin. It's very sad. But all that subconscious impact on my mind, amateur

psychologist here probably contributed to my ability to pick up things about the black resistance that members who had had dominating life experiences would never have picked up on. This is really annoying them and they are really getting mad, know, kind of stuff, right?

Mark

Is this like non-verbal cues or more written stuff or what? Is this non-verbal cues do you mean or written material?

Carmen

It could be non-verbal cues. Well, I'll tell you one in specific, which involves actually the European community. I remember one of the events that I placed a huge importance on was somewhere in the maybe 1985, there was a garbage worker strike in Port Elizabeth. And it went on for weeks and weeks and weeks.

And to the point where the European city council decided we've got to solve this. So they actually sat down and negotiated face to face with the leaders of the colored and black garbage workers unions, whatever they were. And I remember reading this and I go, wow, this is significant. The fact that the Europeans are sitting down as basically equals with the colored and black leaders of the labor union is gonna have an impact.

It tells you something about the European mentality shifting and it will have a huge impact on the colored and blacks, those are the terms they use in South Africa, the colored and blacks perception of their own power and what they can achieve.

Now, I'm not like reinventing history, that's actually what I thought at the time. I would tell people this and they would just dismiss it. People who were, had always been part of the whatever the dominant culture was in their group, they say, that's not important at all. But for me, I interpreted it completely differently.

Howard

What really stands out to me, that's music to my ears, is that regardless of the issue, good intelligence operatives, good analysts, almost have a sixth sense by whatever their training and background or natural skill set is and their life experiences. To be sensitive to data that's maybe marginal, questionable, not clear. The number of times I've looked at something and thought there's some kind of pattern here.

I don't know what it is, I don't know what significance it is, but there's something and it's kind of like well we've got two lines of inquiry here. One let's go out and find out is there a pattern because it's an anomaly in the way that we collect the data or the sample that we've taken or two is the potential pattern the meaning in it a real pattern?

And what does it mean? Because patterns in data get interpreted always. We anthropomorphize data sometimes when it's not actually related to anything of shall we say human interest. So that's music to my ears and that kind of goes back to my argument of you need this variety of thought in a team to be effective in this group because often our customers won't be.

I'll give you one example, this is one I've shared with Mark but never in this context. Many years ago as a detective and a trainer I was tasked and I'm going back to the days of apartheid in South Africa I was tasked with a group of carrying out an attack on a South African bank. They'd built a new security system and they came to us through UK military and government services to say, would you attack it and see if you can break our security? Bear in mind we're sat in the middle of England many thousands of miles away and we broke it within about eight hours and they went nuts. They said well how did you break it? We've got all this sophisticated physical security, IT security systems, barriers, cameras.

All we'd done we'd identified a chap who was a cleaner at the bank, very low-grade employee and they had a certain level of security pass and we paid this individual a small amount of rands a fortune in his world but we basically bought his access, and they were they said well you've cheated you've attacked you know you've gone round the back and I said well if you if you you asked us to attack the castle, only a fool would attack the walls the fact that we found a little back door your potential opponents criminals will do the same

But what really surprised me was at the time they weren't as much offended about the way that we'd done that, that we'd not attacked what they wanted us to attack, test their security, new systems, the walls, the shields. But the fact that we'd gone to a working class, black South African cleaner, lovely guy, well how could that person be involved?

They almost... He wasn't on their radar and this was the big lesson we tried to take back to them. You're not looking in the right place.

Carmen

Yes, you're not asking the right questions.

Howard

Criminal crime or influence as a business is about finding the most efficient route and the unexpected routes. And if you're not thinking like that you will fail as a business. Does that make sense? Sorry Mark.

Mark

No, I just want go back to Carmen's point about her colleague saying, why didn't I see that? Because I think that that's an important point that underpins a lot of what we've been talking about today. I'm going to try and keep it as succinct as I can. There's a little bit of a short walk to the point I'm going to try and make, but stick with me. So basically Carmen, about 10, 15 years ago, I worked for Howard, I joined Howard's team.

I was in a similar situation where Howard actually had to take me to one side and said, look, you are making a lot of correct predictions, but you're just saying them and you're not. And I don't really need a psychic analyst, I need an analyst who can explain to me why they think what they think. Cause I was quite passionate in my, sometimes people would say something and I would say, well, it's obvious. And truth be told, I didn't understand enough my own thought process then when I think about what you were saying about your experiences.

There is a late Victorian lady called Constance Naiden. If you ever have a chance to, I don't know you've come across her work before. She's a very criminally overlooked philosopher from the Victorian England. She was basically the Daniel Kahneman of her day. She's called Constance Naden. Yeah, she was a philosopher and a poet, but she basically, in the same way, Kahneman came up with a binary model of system one and two.

She had a slightly different take on it, and this is back in 1890. She said that human beings have two fundamental ways of processing things. They have cognition and recognition.

Cognition is where you come across something that you've never really experienced before and your mind plays with it and tries to kind of make it make sense because it's unusual and it's new. Recognition or recognition is where you think you know what it is and you kind of categorize it and you file it. But she said that basically these two things are in interplay all the time and they kind of, they are two distinct separate processes, but they kind of it's not one than the other. can kind of feed off each other because the world is complex, right?

There are things coming in. So her system one and two were completely different. Her system one and two were stuff I've seen before and stuff I've never seen before. And when you were talking about your example, I'm thinking, what is it that you've seen before? And you were talking about little anecdotal, the other kind of, not the literal writing on the wall, but the kind of the metaphorical writing on the wall, the signals and stuff you're picking up.

And I wonder if that's what was happening. I wonder if that's why your colleague didn't see it was because in some ways there was no way, he had not been on your life journey. He couldn't recognize, he couldn't recognize the thing. So his company is not these not he might be a very bright guy, super experienced, very intelligent, but essentially it was all cognition to him, not a lot of recognition where perhaps your process...

Carmen

Mm-hmm. It's very useful.

Mark

...was more, it was probably more recognition than cognition.**Carmen**

Yeah, that's really, that's very powerful. I will say you were talking about how you couldn't explain why you thought what you thought. And I couldn't convince my colleagues that this Port Elizabeth moment was important, significant. And it wasn't until five years later when I started reading about complexity theory that I finally had the intellectual structure that could explain why this is significant.

You know, that small, that significant change can start from very small things, but if enough of these small things happen, you have a step change into a totally different level of activity. That I didn't have that language five years earlier, cause I just didn't know it. Right. And that's another reason why intelligence analysts have to remain current on so many fields beyond whatever their particular domain is.

And it frustrates me to no end that most of them don't. They're just not curious enough.

Mark

Well, I think this goes back a little bit to your concern about AI, right? Because for me, think, and sorry, I say this as a UK law enforcement who I've never worked for CIA. I'm completely divorced from perhaps true intelligence analysis. I can only speak by intelligence analysis as I see it. But from my perspective, intelligence analysis, if done honestly, is kind of like a battleship with many roles performed by many crews. So the notion that you could have one analyst, you might be able to perform every duty on that ship, but not at the same time. there's going to be natural. So for instance, you may be great at digging into data.

You might be great at kind of parsing that you coping with boredom and passing difficult things. You might be a great communicator. There's all sorts of different strengths and weaknesses there. And I'll be honest with you a few years ago, I kind of shared this with Howard and said, look, I'm not entirely sure intelligence analysts should be a thing. And what I mean by that is without a fundamental redesign about what's going on in intelligence analysis.

In our circles. This omni-trained analyst, this omni-aware present, it can't happen. think intelligence analysis, the function can happen. I think organizations have to be very mature about how they steer that battleship and who's on the bridge and who's in the engine room. But the notion that one individual can do that, I see that's where AI can potentially plug in because maybe you can configure that, right? Maybe you can say, right, we can account for these

different roles.

And I think I'm somewhat more optimistic about AI than some of our colleagues are because yes, I'm sorry. I'm with you a hundred percent. think a lot of governments will say we can fire half the analysts. mean, when Howard and I were in posts, we had analysts that all they ever did was put dots on maps. That's what their role was.

Carmen

Right, yeah, we've all seen that, yeah.

Mark

And they were the first to go right when the tech matured. I wonder if maybe the base level thinkers in intelligence analysis, they are the dots on maps folk who are about to go maybe.

Time wise, do you have enough time to go into the idea that you wanted to talk about or would you prefer to start from there?

Carmen

I don't, I think that my idea would be, very difficult to develop in 10 minutes.

Mark

I'm really sorry about that, that's our fault entirely.

Carmen

But I will say it's, it's consistent with what you just said, which is I've been thinking about who, what are all the different roles that you need in a successful intelligence analytic team, or rather what it's, what are all the different types of expertise and knowledge that you need in a successful team.

So obviously you need, I'm using the image of the pipe. You need the person who understands the pipe, who knows everything about the pipe. But you also need people who really understand well the environment that the pipe is sitting in.

And there's like several stages of that environment. There's the conventional environment. There's the environment that everyone thinks about when you think about where that pipe is. But there's the further afield environment. Something that's going to happen next year that's going to be a brand new thing, but it's going to affect the pipe.

And so you could keep going with these layers and layers and layers of people that you need to use their knowledge to understand what's going on with the pipe. And that's really the idea that I want to develop.

Because I've said many times that a good intelligence analyst is part of a good intelligence analyst team, that you can't separate these two concepts. But I was thinking I really need to spell that out in little bit more detail, that's kind of what I had. to, you know, there's a lot there.

Mark

Well, if you have time to come back one day, we'd love to have you back and then maybe can maybe explore that. is there anything else you want to say in closing before we wind this up?

Carmen

No, well, other than that, I really enjoyed it. It's always reassuring to talk to people who see what you see, understand from your perspective, and yet offer some other angle as well.

Mark

Carmen, I can't thank you enough for coming on today's show. It's been absolutely fascinating. I hope we speak to you again soon. Take care and thank you to everybody that's listening. We'll speak to you again soon.