

Transcript | A Masterclass on Problem-Solving Techniques

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Jesse Samasuwo: Hi everyone, thanks for joining us. My name is Jesse Samasuwo. I am the Senior Manager for Policy and Insights here at AP Political. Really, really thrilled to have you all with us, joining us for today's event, on problem-solving techniques. It would be great to hear from all of you as you're joining, so please do post in the chat

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00:00:28.100 --> 00:00:32.149

Jesse Samasuwo: Where you're joining us from, and what organization you work for.

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Jesse Samasuwo: I'm here in East London, where it's a bit grey, but not too cold, so very grateful for the final, final ends of summer. So it'd be great to hear where all of you are joining us from. Feel free to share in the chat. We have two brilliant, brilliant speakers joining us today as well, so looking forward to hearing from them.

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Jesse Samasuwo: Today, we're going to be covering practical techniques to strengthen your problem-solving skills, and these will be tools that you can use to tackle challenges faster, with more clarity and less stress.

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Jesse Samasuwo: We'll explore how to move beyond quick fixes and tackle the root causes of complex issues, and apply proven approaches that work from policy all the way through to delivery. You'll hear from expert strategists that will help you get unstuck and approach weekly challenges with clarity and confidence.

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Jesse Samasuwo: For those of you who may be joining us for the first time, a very, very warm welcome to Apolitical. We are the world's largest network of public servants, used by over a quarter of a million public servants and policymakers from 170 countries, and very, very pleased to include all of you among us. So, let's see who we have in the room. Amy, calling in from Lytton in Colorado.

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00:01:36.260 --> 00:01:55.849

Jesse Samasuwo: Is that Lydon, Colorado? Madhu from Alberta in Canada, great to have you. Maria in Los Angeles, where else? Rifach in Birmingham. Sarah calling in from the UK Health Secure Health Security Agency, great to have you with us. And Julianne Afori from Canada.

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00:01:55.850 --> 00:02:10.990

Jesse Samasuwo: Isabel from the Scottish Government in Glasgow, amazing. Ambika calling in from Ontario. Emma from, again, from the Scottish Government. Nasis, joining us from Congo, Brazaville, amazing to have you with us, great to have you.

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00:02:10.990 --> 00:02:17.900

Jesse Samasuwo: Joanne from Washington, please do keep sharing. As you can see, it's a super global audience, so very, very exciting to have all of you in the same room.

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Jesse Samasuwo: We're also thrilled to an extended invitation to our Life in Government community, which is a collaborative space designed for apolitical members to connect with peers in the global public service, and ask and answer questions on life in government.

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00:02:31.790 --> 00:02:40.919

Jesse Samasuwo: This space is open to all of you, so the link in the chat that my colleague is about to share, and it's also in the resources tab at the bottom of your screen, which you should see.

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00:02:40.920 --> 00:02:52.050

Jesse Samasuwo: We'll take you straight there, and there are lots of people to speak to, and sort of conversations to get going on. So please do join that when you have a chance. Before we dive in, I'll get a couple of quick technical notes out of the way.

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Jesse Samasuwo: The event is being recorded for on-demand viewing on the Apolitical website, so please don't record it yourself. Contact details for privacy concerns are in the Apolitical homepage.

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Jesse Samasuwo: footer, and closed captions are available and can be toggled on or off in your screen settings. If you have any issues throughout the event today, please just jump there, feel free to add them in the chat, and we'll pick them up.

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00:03:14.280 --> 00:03:28.069

Jesse Samasuwo: Excellent. So, before we get started, let's do a couple of quick polls, just to get a sense of where everyone is joining today's conversation from. So the first one, which should come up in just a moment, says, what's your biggest challenge when solving problems at work?

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00:03:28.070 --> 00:03:38.479

Jesse Samasuwo: What's your biggest challenge when solving problems at work? Is it defining the problem correctly, coming up with creative solutions, implementing the solutions effectively, or something else? Please do feel free to share in the chat.

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00:03:38.600 --> 00:03:42.349

Jesse Samasuwo: So let's see how that's going. Okay, so...

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00:03:43.700 --> 00:03:48.330

Jesse Samasuwo: Currently a pretty even split, let's see how it turns out.

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00:03:49.190 --> 00:03:52.439

Jesse Samasuwo: What is your biggest challenge when solving problems at work?

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Jesse Samasuwo: And if you are saying other, please, please do share in the chat, and some of that detail we can pick up for our conversation a bit later.

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00:03:59.970 --> 00:04:03.209

Jesse Samasuwo: Okay, let's see what we've got.

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00:04:03.520 --> 00:04:21.349

Jesse Samasuwo: So, it seems like around 30% of you are saying that balancing competing stakeholder views, is a big issue, followed closely by coming up with creative solutions, interesting, very interesting there. And then a pretty even split between implementing the solution effectively, and then defining the right problem. So.

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00:04:21.350 --> 00:04:29.589

Jesse Samasuwo: I had a real interesting mix of challenges across the kind of decision-making cycle. Okay, let's see what we've got for the second question.

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00:04:29.910 --> 00:04:37.890

Jesse Samasuwo: when you get stuck on a problem, what do you usually do first? So those are the results. The first poll, which you can see.

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00:04:37.900 --> 00:04:56.319

Jesse Samasuwo: Excellent. Okay, second question. When you get stuck in a problem, what do you usually do first? Do you ask a colleague for input, search for examples or best practices, break it down into smaller parts, step away and come back later? It's always my favorite solution. Push ahead with a quick fix, or something else?

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00:04:56.750 --> 00:05:00.029

Jesse Samasuwo: What's your go-to move when you're stuck in a problem?

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Jesse Samasuwo: This is interesting, this one's a bit more clearly defined. There's a much more interesting split here. Very, very few of you are pushing ahead with quick fixes,

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00:05:13.150 --> 00:05:17.869

Jesse Samasuwo: Okay, so let's see the results, which come up on your screen just now.

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00:05:18.480 --> 00:05:29.700

Jesse Samasuwo: So around... again, around 35% of you saying you're searching for examples of best practice, and then another eblance split between asking for input from colleagues.

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00:05:29.700 --> 00:05:47.159

Jesse Samasuwo: Also breaking it down to smaller parts, again, 25% of survey there, and then stepping away and coming back later. There's only a few of us doing that. And pushing ahead with the quick fix is at 1%, interesting. You should see those on your screen, just coming up in a moment.

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00:05:47.740 --> 00:05:48.810

Jesse Samasuwo: There we go.

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00:05:49.090 --> 00:05:53.629

Jesse Samasuwo: Okay, so, excellent. We've got the polls out of the way. I'm very, very thrilled to say... there you go.

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00:05:53.860 --> 00:05:55.209

Jesse Samasuwo: Here are the full results.

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00:05:55.410 --> 00:06:12.370

Jesse Samasuwo: I'm very, very pleased to say that we have two brilliant speakers joining us today. Cheryl Strauss-Einhorn and Matt Ethels-Jones. Cheryl is the founder of Decisive, which is a decision sciences company that trains people and teams in complex problem-solving and decision-making skills.

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00:06:12.390 --> 00:06:24.229

Jesse Samasuwo: Cheryl has spent two decades as an award-winning investigative journalist and as a long-time educator. She's also the author of three books, with a fourth scheduled to be published in 2026. Cheryl, really, really great to have you with us.

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00:06:24.260 --> 00:06:40.040

Jesse Samasuwo: Matt is a strategic problem solver and former public servant whose career spans policing, health and social care, local and central government, the third sector, and higher education. He has led work across strategy, technology, operations, and policy to reduce crime, improve outcomes, and save lives.

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00:06:40.040 --> 00:06:54.710

Jesse Samasuwo: You can see both Matt and Cheryl's bios there in the, kind of, resources tab at the bottom of your Zoom screen, and we'll be hearing from them just in a moment. But before we launch up to their panel, I thought we'd start off with a quick icebreaker for them both.

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00:06:54.910 --> 00:07:08.139

Jesse Samasuwo: So Matt, Cheryl, outside of work, what was the last disaster you had to fix on the fly? The last disaster you had to fix on the fly? If you've got an answer in the chat, please feel free to share as well. Matt, I'll come to you first.

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Matt Etchells-Jones: Sure, well, alongside my work, in my day job, I'm also a committed volunteer in the Scout Association, so...

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Matt Etchells-Jones: Couple of weekends ago, one of my roles in scouting is, I'm a canoe instructor, paddle sport instructor, sailing as well, and there was an outdoor center in the next county over from us in Leicestershire, I'm based in Nottinghamshire, that had over 500 young people arriving on site, but had not enough instructors to actually make the event occur. So, on a Friday, I got a phone call saying, we need paddle sport instructors, can you come and help us?

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Matt Etchells-Jones: And I was able to rustle up myself, my son, and a cluster of other young people that are training to be instructors, and we went down, and we made sure this event happened for over 500 young people in Leicestershire. So that was a little bit of a panic, quick phone round. So, you know, you're doing the thing this weekend? If you are, is it really that important? Because I need to stick you all in a van and get you down to Leicestershire, but it was a fantastic, fantastic period.

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Matt Etchells-Jones: Where we ended up pulling in favours from other units from all over the district and making this happen. So it was a great event, but yes, it was a little bit skin of the teeth, and there's nothing like a little bit of notice, and that was nothing like a little bit of notice.

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00:08:18.320 --> 00:08:21.250

Jesse Samasuwo: Cheryl, how about you? Last disaster?

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: Well, Matt, that was a great example, and I'm a big outdoor fan, too.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: Mine was something that mostly impacted me a couple weeks ago. I was outside biking, it started to rain, and then it rained heavier, and I fell off my bike.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: I landed in the ditch on the side of the road, and I was all by myself. I had slowed down to take the hill a little slower. Everybody else was ahead of me, and so I had

to think about what was I gonna do? Was I okay? Was I able to get up? And I realized that I didn't feel terrific, but I was really pretty lucky, and I got back on my bike.

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00:09:03.630 --> 00:09:17.640

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: And I finished the ride. So, I took something that was not a good situation, and I assessed it, and then I thought about the fact that I really didn't want to let one bad event

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00:09:17.740 --> 00:09:20.169

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: Disappoint the rest of the day.

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00:09:20.890 --> 00:09:30.529

Jesse Samasuwo: Amazing. Well, that's, much like me, this morning I woke up without any milk for my coffee, and I decided just to power with a black coffee, and much like you, I powered through, too.

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00:09:30.530 --> 00:09:47.610

Jesse Samasuwo: Well, amazing. Well, Cheryl, Matt, so great to have you with us. We're gonna hand over to Cheryl just in a second, but if you have any questions for Cheryl or Matt throughout the conversation today, please feel free to post them in the chat, we'll pick them up, and we'll have plenty of time for Q&A afterwards. But Cheryl, handing over to you to present just now.

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00:09:47.930 --> 00:09:51.709

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: Okay, let's get the slides all set up here.

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Jesse Samasuwo: We'll give you a second just to get, yeah, just to get the slides up,

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Jesse Samasuwo: No rush at all.

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00:09:59.070 --> 00:09:59.960

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: Okay.

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Jesse Samasuwo: Jordan says that when you've lost something, it's usually in the least expected places, which is, I find to be true as well. Excellent. We can see your screen now.

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00:10:14.300 --> 00:10:17.979

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: Now do... now are you in presenter mode? Are we in the right place?

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00:10:18.100 --> 00:10:18.870

Jesse Samasuwo: Perfect.

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00:10:19.480 --> 00:10:21.350

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: Okay, well,

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00:10:21.440 --> 00:10:32.310

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: I'm excited to be here with you today, so thank you very much for that, and I'm going to spend some time today on a couple of key moments and tools

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: that I think can be incredibly useful, not only in times of uncertainty, but in your day-to-day lives as well. Let me give you just a little bit of background. You heard that my career began as an investigative journalist, and that's actually how I ended up in decision making and complex problem solving. I spent over a decade working for the business magazine Barron's.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: At Barron's, we wrote about mainly publicly traded companies, because the target audience were those people who were interested in Wall Street and investing. And for me, I ended up specializing in what you might call the bearish company story. Those are stories that take a skeptical look at a company's finances or at their strategy, and when the stories came out.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: there was often a really outsized reaction. Often, the stock exchange would have to halt the shares from trading until there could be an orderly order flow resumed. Half a dozen companies went out of business because I raised questions about how they were conducting their practices.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: For one company, the CEO was actually sentenced to 10 years in jail.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: After a series of articles. And what I realized is, although journalism does celebrate truth to power, behind all of these stories are real people. People who are not only invested in the stock market to make money, but because they have their retirement account, or because they work at these companies and they need it as a stable place for them to earn their livelihood, or maybe you buy the

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: product and services of these companies, and if I'm raising questions about whether or not the company is using good practices, this could cause you to have concerns. For example, one of the companies was the largest maker of diabetic test kits.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: And this is a product that many people use multiple times a day to test the baseline of their health. So what I started to think about is, how do I know that I'm telling stories that are true, that should be told? How am I also questioning

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: my own assumptions and judgments about the data that I'm collecting. And so what I realized is, in this effort to make sure that I was doing an ethical job at work, was that there was no decision-making system that really focused on these mental mistakes, these assumptions and judgments that we bring to our everyday work.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: And so, with my background in research, I put together what I now call my area method for decision-making to do just that. To pry open cognitive space, to check and challenge our cognitive biases, and to really think about how do we expand our knowledge while improving our judgment.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: Today, I teach with the Area Method and with other decision-making tools and strategies to help individuals and teams get better outcomes.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: So, we're gonna talk about today

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: decision-making and the idea that we can never control the outcome, right? The future's always going to be unknown. But what we can control is the process. So therefore, it's not just about choosing, it's about how we choose.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: So, much of the stress, therefore, doesn't actually come from the uncertainty, but it's how we handle it. We often default to internal patterns and habits of behavior that we don't even necessarily know. We all have this recipe inside us

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: that combines 6 different things in different ways. Whether or not we think speed is a detriment or an asset, the type of information that we favor when we're problem solving, the quantity of information that we rely upon, whether and when and how we want to include other people in our process, our ability to identify the next logical step in the

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: progression, and then our confidence that that next step that we've identified can actually work out for us. So building our awareness and improving our ability to understand

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: and investigate our decision process can actually help us to have better problem solving overall. So I'm going to take you through 3 different areas within complex problem solving, where I'm going to offer you a strategy that you can use.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: The first part is at the very outset, and I call this seeing beyond the problem. Oftentimes.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: We assume that we know the problem that we're solving. And from there, we jump and rush to a solution.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: Which means that we may end up not solving the right problem, only partially solving the problem, or identifying a solution that seems good, but actually isn't workable in the real world.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: So, I'm going to suggest that we not only spend time defining the problem, but identifying what I call a vision of success and critical concepts. And this is going to shift the center of your thinking.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: on what's truly valuable about solving the problem, and then the critical concepts are the criteria that clarifies the guardrails that define that. So let me just give you an example

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: of an organization that I worked with. We recently worked with this international journalism training and development group, and the program team was really struggling to figure out, well, what should we build next? They were a small, scrappy team, they don't have that much resources, but they serve countries all over the world, and they had many different requests for types of programs.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: They had countries that were asking for something hyper-specific to what was going on in that particular country, and then they had other regions that had basically gone through the modules that already existed, and they really were just asking for more content. And so the program team really wasn't sure, with all these different potential paths forward, what is it?

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: that they should be building. And they were faced with this open-ended question, which is how we view problems, which is, what should we do next? So let's see how vision of success works for you. The first thing that it does is it takes the open-ended question and it inverts problem solving to flip it to something that is

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: close-ended. So you're moving from, I'm deciding if...

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: I should build XYZ, to I will be successful when. And when isn't a time component, when are those

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00:17:06.310 --> 00:17:19.389

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: few things, the one to three components that are important to you and to your problem, that are specific to it, and that you can actually measurable. So let's go back into that example, and I'm going to walk you through.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: So we asked the programming team.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: Okay, if you decided that the curriculum for the next module was successful, what does it look like? And the team discussed as a group, and they came back. The module was going to be successful if it was able to be designed and executed within the time and the resource constraints of the current team.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: If it was relevant to a majority of journalists, not to a specific country.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: And if it was something that was broad enough that it could have staying power and

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: that it could maintain its relevancy for up to 5 years. So those 3 components, completed in the current time and resources, relevant to a majority of people using the tools, and staying power for the future, helped them to actually have great direction. It gave them a vision of success and critical concepts that they now could actually explore.

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00:18:12.500 --> 00:18:33.760

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: So they could take all of the different program modules, and they could sort them into a pile that was going to be relevant to fit that criteria, or those that were outside of the particular constraints. And that gave them direction and process. Instead of, what should we do next, they knew what was going to be successful.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: So that's at the beginning of complex problem solving, vision of success and critical concepts. The second one is really seeing beyond our perspective. Both when we are beginning our research and when we're drawing our conclusions, we are using these cognitive biases that I talked about. We actually see the world, the Talmud said, as we are, not as it is.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: Which means that we bring all these assumptions and judgments in our past to everything that we are looking at, meaning that instead of reality, we're sort of viewing the world through a dirty windshield.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: And so...

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: what I'm going to suggest to be able to pry open cognitive space when you are doing research and analyzing it is to use a tool that I call the BIAS Framework. BIAS is an acronym for Behavior, Information Analysis, and Structure. Let me explain what it is, and I'm going to give you just a brief example.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: So your behavior is, how are you normally going to go into a problem-solving situation? Are you somebody with an overwhelming sense of optimism bias? You think it's going to work out for you? That would be a good thing to recognize.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: And therefore, to be able to say, you know what, I should be thinking about the downside as well. And for your information, what are your expectations or your assumptions about how easy it's going to be to get something with diagnosticity? For some of you, it may be the idea that you don't need a lot of information. Well, acknowledging that and recognizing that you may want to

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: Make sure that you collect enough that you can see how information could conflict with one another. That would be useful. For analysis, the A in the word bias, how confident am I that I'm going to actually be able to analyze, synthesize.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: and understand the information. And then finally, the structure are the constraints on the environment. Maybe you have a very urgent situation. You have a very short amount of time. Recognizing that and recognizing how that could impact the problem that you're solving becomes very useful. So, let's see it in action. Say you've been asked to draft a new budget outline for your Health and Human Services Department

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: that cuts about 10% of the community initiatives that have lower impact, so that the department can be more nimble and responsive to community needs. Let's say you've spent time going through the currently funded programs. You feel pretty clear about what

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00:21:04.940 --> 00:21:18.449

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: line items you're going to reduce. How do you use the bias framework? Well, the B, I might assume that I'm going to be able to find a clean... a clear answer, and that means I really feel like, in my behavior, I can move very quickly.

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00:21:18.450 --> 00:21:38.940

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: I may want to be checking that. For the eye, for the information, my assumption, the kind of information I found diagnostic is numbers. So maybe I went right into the data set, and I looked at what seems to be heavily used, which programs are underused, those are obviously going to be the ones, if I am focused on numbers, that I think I'm going to cut.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: Now I get to the A analysis.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: And what I realized is that although I can clearly see from the numbers those programs that have underutilization, I can also recognize that the numbers may not tell me at all about the impact to the community. So let's say I've identified two different programs that seem to be underused. One checks lice in children, the other delivers prenatal care.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: Well, those don't have the same impact overall on community health.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: So, as I go into S, and I look at the structure that I need to present my findings this week.

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Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: running through this bias framework has showed me that the numbers are not the full story. And instead, I can decide, I'm going to talk to the program committee, I'm going to identify those coordinators that run

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00:22:25.410 --> 00:22:46.949

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: lice checks versus prenatal care. I'm going to make sure that before I suggest a cut, that I have a much better understanding about how the community is using these different programs. So that's the bias framework. You can use it before you conduct your research to think about your expectations, or after, before you think you're really coming to a conclusion.

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00:22:46.950 --> 00:22:48.560

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: And the third tool that I'm going to.

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Jesse Samasuwo: Cheryl, just to say a quick 4-minute notice.

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00:22:52.070 --> 00:23:15.399

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: Thank you so much. The third tool that I am going to recommend is to consider failure. Right before you are ready to get into execution, we tend to have sort of an optimism bias, and we think that now that we've thought through everything, we have a pretty good idea that we've settled on a path that's going to succeed. A nice, useful tool that I want to recommend

113

00:23:15.460 --> 00:23:17.279

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: It's called the premortem.

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00:23:17.280 --> 00:23:40.760

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: This is where you consider failure before you've begun. You tell the failure story, and this can really strength test your path forward. So, we recently worked with the county government that was working on restoring and getting up to code core buildings throughout their community after getting some infrastructure funding. The team had done research, decided that the local historic library.

115

00:23:40.760 --> 00:24:02.740

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: which was a favorite of the town, was due for refreshing, and the team thought of all the reasons why the library was a good choice compared to other options, but they hadn't considered failure. So to use the pre-mortem, you imagine that the decision or project has failed, and then you can identify which variables within my solution have the greatest sensitivity.

116

00:24:02.740 --> 00:24:21.289

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: And once you've identified where failure can occur, now you can shore up and set up some pathways to prevent the failures that you've identified. So let's look at the library situation. So, they were getting ready to go ahead and begin

117

00:24:21.290 --> 00:24:34.099

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: the idea that there were going to be these upgrades, and in telling the failure story, what they realized is that if current programming for the library, which was very heavily used by the community.

118

00:24:34.100 --> 00:24:36.630

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: If that was not rehomed.

119

00:24:36.710 --> 00:24:54.089

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: they could miss out on really being able to connect with the community over the next couple years of programming. And so what they recognized is that they really needed to make sure that the rehoming was going to be a place that was easily accessible, and that it was going to be able to accommodate

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00:24:54.130 --> 00:25:08.540

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: the community to really continue to engage with the library's activities. The second way that they identified failure was although the budget had line items for the infrastructure upgrades.

121

00:25:08.740 --> 00:25:32.650

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: That wouldn't necessarily be true in the future. And so what they were able to recognize is maybe they should look for alternative sources of funding so the project didn't get short shrift. So you can see that by identifying the different ways that the project could fail, and using this tool, they were able to actually strengthen the likelihood that the solution was going to be successful.

122

00:25:32.670 --> 00:25:43.089

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: For them. So that's at the end of problem solving. As I close out, what I hope that you recognize here is that all of these strategies help you focus on the process.

123

00:25:43.140 --> 00:26:07.269

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: You can't be sure of the outcome. You can't eliminate uncertainty. But each of these tools provide clarity to you. They take what might be ambiguous, and they help you to give it specificity, and that also can create alignment and buy-in. The other thing is these allow you to recognize that as you are enacting a solution, you're going to need

124

00:26:07.470 --> 00:26:13.619

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: to experiment and adjust. As you get new information, you should update and iterate.

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00:26:13.620 --> 00:26:29.549

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: And then just a word on AI, quickly, as we're all beginning to incorporate this powerful tool into our workflows. All of these tools can be used with AI, so you continue to bring the human edge, your own judgment.

126

00:26:29.620 --> 00:26:31.259

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: Into your work.

127

00:26:31.340 --> 00:26:34.489

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: and into your solutions. Thank you so much.

128

00:26:34.670 --> 00:26:35.819

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: For having me.

129

00:26:36.360 --> 00:26:46.650

Jesse Samasuwo: No, thank you, Sharon. Really, really fantastic presentation, and such great insight, especially the idea about thinking about failure. Really love that. Matt, very happy to hand over to you if you're ready to go.

130

00:26:48.450 --> 00:26:58.530

Matt Etchells-Jones: Thank you very much. Yeah, fantastic presentation, really enjoyed that, thank you. It's, to give you a little bit of a background about myself, I sort of came into problem solving

131

00:26:58.530 --> 00:27:12.979

Matt Etchells-Jones: sideways as, I don't have quite as an exciting background as Cheryl. My background was, was music and events management, but if you can... if you can organize an event, if you can organize a gig, you know, I started out very early, sort of 16, 17,

132

00:27:12.980 --> 00:27:29.439

Matt Etchells-Jones: you know, if it's 9 o'clock, and you've got a full house, and you realize you haven't got a drum kit, and that sort of thing, and you've got 3 bands, and the nearest drum kit is 4 miles away, solving those kinds of issues kind of gives you a good background in dynamic responding, and that's kind of how I started out. So, I'm just going to,

133

00:27:29.950 --> 00:27:31.759

Matt Etchells-Jones: Share my screen here.

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00:27:32.620 --> 00:27:34.210

Jesse Samasuwo: I'll let you know when it comes up.

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00:27:37.310 --> 00:27:38.279

Jesse Samasuwo: Yeah, I'm good.

136

00:27:38.280 --> 00:27:40.879

Matt Etchells-Jones: Okay, fantastic. Okay, so my...

137

00:27:41.330 --> 00:27:52.600

Matt Etchells-Jones: My contribution today is discussing around problem statements, how we frame stuff, so it's kind of the front end to the delivery work that Cheryl was taking us through.

138

00:27:52.600 --> 00:28:03.250

Matt Etchells-Jones: And so, to sort of kick off with my immediate slide here, why does a problem statement matter? Why, you know, why am I talking about problem statements when they're just one element of problem solving?

139

00:28:03.250 --> 00:28:15.559

Matt Etchells-Jones: And that fact is that a problem statement is your shopfront. It's the peg that you hang everything else around. It is the brand in a large, complex organization that you are using

140

00:28:15.560 --> 00:28:25.110

Matt Etchells-Jones: to appeal, and appeal is a strange term, but it is something that you have to use. A lot of problem solving is around getting people to buy into the concept of the problem. So.

141

00:28:25.110 --> 00:28:36.930

Matt Etchells-Jones: It sounds contradictory, but you have to sell that problem to people as a problem, and your problem statement is how you do it. It's how you frame it, it's how you get that engagement, and it's very important

142

00:28:36.930 --> 00:28:49.089

Matt Etchells-Jones: that you frame it appropriately, because you need to make sure that you don't fall into any pitfalls, but also you need to make sure that you get the appropriate engagement. So, from my perspective, why does a problem statement matter?

143

00:28:49.090 --> 00:29:04.079

Matt Etchells-Jones: It matters because it's the foundation, it's the start, but it's the solid start. It's the actual foundation. Foundation, in its literal sense, is the solid point where you start going. When you have your problem statement, that's how you're defining what you're going to be doing.

144

00:29:04.300 --> 00:29:16.799

Matt Etchells-Jones: it ensures shared understanding, as I was saying earlier. It's your shop front. It's the bit that you put out there so people start to buy in to what you're doing. It clarifies exactly what the problem is.

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00:29:17.120 --> 00:29:23.830

Matt Etchells-Jones: And it clarified... sorry, I've got two dogs at the side, I have a scrap just behind me, I hope you can't hear that.

146

00:29:24.550 --> 00:29:49.460

Matt Etchells-Jones: it helps... it brings in your stakeholders. In the organization that a lot of people on this conference are going to be working in, you're working in huge organizations. You've got to get buy-in from different and diverse areas. You've got to get buy-in from finance, potentially, to help finance your problem, buy-in from those that are going to deliver it, buy-in from those that are subject to the problem, in averted commas, who don't even think you've got a problem and are quite happy with the status quo.

147

00:29:49.460 --> 00:29:53.920

Matt Etchells-Jones: Perhaps benefit from an iniquitous situation that is serving to be a problem.

148

00:29:53.920 --> 00:30:06.080

Matt Etchells-Jones: from other people, and it facilitates that accountability, the transparency, it allows people to know, well, this is where we started from, so it gives us an insight as to where are we going? What are we going to do about that?

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00:30:06.170 --> 00:30:07.180

Matt Etchells-Jones: And so...

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00:30:07.790 --> 00:30:18.850

Matt Etchells-Jones: How do we define it? What is the definition? So, it succinctly describes it. It's not paragraphs and paragraphs. It's boiling it down, which is sometimes really difficult when you've got a highly complex problem.

151

00:30:18.860 --> 00:30:32.139

Matt Etchells-Jones: you have to sort of bring in your, your lean five whys to help boil it down. Why is this a problem? Why has this happened? What is it, you know, what is the nub of the situation? It needs to focus on

152

00:30:32.140 --> 00:30:49.409

Matt Etchells-Jones: collaboration, it needs to focus you in, it needs to give people an idea of where they fit in in that. If your problem statement already sort of suggests an immediate answer, some people are going to switch off. Well, that sounds like technology to me, I don't do

anything about technology, I'm not going to get involved, that sort of thing. So it's about saying, what is the actual problem without, sort of.

153

00:30:49.540 --> 00:31:06.889

Matt Etchells-Jones: voicing what the potential solution is, because the solution is where your stakeholders come in to help guide you to it. And it sets that roadmap for decision making. It articulates the context, it allows us to look at what is the impact, gives people sort of an insight, a slice into the picture, into the problem.

154

00:31:06.890 --> 00:31:21.270

Matt Etchells-Jones: that you're trying to solve, and so it's very, very important. It's the first step, it's the first positive step. You've got your foundation, you're standing on that foundation, and you're stepping off from it, and that's what it enables. That's how it fits in with you there.

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00:31:21.380 --> 00:31:25.750

Matt Etchells-Jones: So, in terms of, in terms of key examples, how it all fits together.

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00:31:26.140 --> 00:31:38.040

Matt Etchells-Jones: you've got to look at the context, where is this happening? Look at... think of your five whys, where, what, who, how, when, etc. It identifies where the issue is, so, you know, where is it occurring, but what is... what is the issue?

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00:31:38.560 --> 00:31:46.150

Matt Etchells-Jones: it looks at what the impact is, it implies where it is occurring, what's the impact, what's happening around there. It's sort of several

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00:31:46.170 --> 00:31:50.869

Matt Etchells-Jones: Structured statement, kind of like a series of steps that build into a single statement.

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00:31:50.880 --> 00:32:10.330

Matt Etchells-Jones: And it hints at a desired outcome. We're not talking about the solution, we're talking about the outcome, not the output. So what is... what is the problem? What is this outcome? What is the... what does success look like? It's, you know, not necessarily focusing on what the journey is, what the solution's going to be, but what is the actual outcome? You know, seeing the

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00:32:10.330 --> 00:32:15.270

Matt Etchells-Jones: how it affects Those, that the stakeholders are subject to within it.

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00:32:15.310 --> 00:32:19.009

Matt Etchells-Jones: So, something to avoid, key things not to fall into.

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00:32:19.220 --> 00:32:37.209

Matt Etchells-Jones: Don't be too vague. Got to be specific, and this is why it is an art form. This is why it takes difficulty. I imagine quite a few people on this call will be used to looking at, sort of, vision, mission, and objectives, and you've been in those workshops, you've been in those away days, or you've looked at every word and the importance it serves.

163

00:32:37.230 --> 00:32:53.979

Matt Etchells-Jones: That's what... that's what your problem statement is. It's your vision, it's your... it's your V. It's, you know, so you need to avoid vagueness, so it needs to be specific, we need to sort of understand where we're fitting in, but also not to be solution-focused, saying the computer has broken down immediately.

164

00:32:53.980 --> 00:33:08.689

Matt Etchells-Jones: what's our focus? Our focus is on digital, it's on IT, we've got a problem with the computer. You know, as if we say, you know, there is an issue extracting data, or, you know, our data is inaccessible. It's okay, you know, the data is the nub of what we're trying to get to, the computer, you know, the IT system

165

00:33:08.690 --> 00:33:19.429

Matt Etchells-Jones: is just simply a function around it. So, avoid solution-first thinking that's not sort of saying, we need a better IT system, or we need central hilding in this building, or we need

166

00:33:19.520 --> 00:33:23.789

Matt Etchells-Jones: to improve clarity for, you know, it's about taking people

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00:33:23.890 --> 00:33:35.049

Matt Etchells-Jones: on what is the problem, so we can then work as bringing all the different resources, all the different sides to our organization to help us solve that. And that's where the stakeholders come in. We need to involve stakeholders in it.

168

00:33:35.050 --> 00:33:45.319

Matt Etchells-Jones: It's bringing people in. We're back to our, sort of, our away day, our vision, mission, objective sort of situation, where again, we're bringing in the stakeholders and letting them share and collaborate and establish exactly

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00:33:45.320 --> 00:34:07.120

Matt Etchells-Jones: what the issue is, who is being affected, how does it affect them, what are the risk advantages, what are the advantages of the situation we've currently got in, so how do we frame this appropriately? We need to bring those stakeholders in early days, rather than two people sitting in a room deciding what the problem statement is going to be, and out to the stakeholders and saying, this is your problem, we need to bring those stakeholders in there so they can

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00:34:07.120 --> 00:34:10.920

Matt Etchells-Jones: Absorb and engage in discussing, well, do we have a problem?

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00:34:10.920 --> 00:34:12.389

Matt Etchells-Jones: What does it look like?

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00:34:12.590 --> 00:34:13.050

Jesse Samasuwo: mattresses.

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00:34:13.050 --> 00:34:13.690

Matt Etchells-Jones: So...

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00:34:13.699 --> 00:34:15.389

Jesse Samasuwo: Three or four minutes, just to say.

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00:34:15.389 --> 00:34:30.559

Matt Etchells-Jones: Okay, no problems. So, in terms of how we define that problem statement, we bring those stakeholders in. As I say, we're talking about our ROA days there. We collect supporting evidence. Do we really have a problem? How does it work? What is... what are those issues? We use a structured format.

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00:34:30.689 --> 00:34:35.379

Matt Etchells-Jones: to boil it down. We look to validate and refine. Does everybody agree with this? How do we say?

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00:34:35.469 --> 00:34:43.399

Matt Etchells-Jones: someone at the back who hasn't said anything, what, you know, what are your thoughts on this? You know, you've been very quiet throughout. Do you think, you know, we're wasting our time giving people an opportunity

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00:34:43.399 --> 00:35:07.919

Matt Etchells-Jones: to engage with that. Now, as I said, every single word in that statement matters. There is power in words. If you're saying... if you're using a definitive term, this is broken, is it really broken? Is it just not for serving its customers? It's focusing on the power of every single word in there, because people will hang on those words, they will use them as an opportunity to defend themselves, they will use them as an opportunity to say, well, there isn't really a problem, or they'll use those as an opportunity to say, that sounds more like it

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00:35:07.919 --> 00:35:13.589

Matt Etchells-Jones: problem for that department there, not my department here, because of the words used. It's how you frame it.

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00:35:13.589 --> 00:35:20.019

Matt Etchells-Jones: So people feel involved in that. So to give a couple of examples of work that I did, when I was with the Home Office.

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00:35:20.079 --> 00:35:22.659

Matt Etchells-Jones: We had an issue whereby

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00:35:22.739 --> 00:35:39.419

Matt Etchells-Jones: over a hundred different locations involved in the UK Home Office, different people doing very different jobs all over the place. Things ranging from people in heavy boots and raincoats coming in off a windswept shoreline, through to people sitting in offices in Whitehall. There was...

183

00:35:39.739 --> 00:35:53.059

Matt Etchells-Jones: an element across that community where people were sort of saying, there was a perceived iniquity. We held a week-long discussion around how we were going to improve that, but we had to frame what the problem was. And the phrase that we came up with was.

184

00:35:53.059 --> 00:36:01.979

Matt Etchells-Jones: Home office employees feel isolated when they can't influence their environment, because that was what the problem was. The problem wasn't so much that

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00:36:02.359 --> 00:36:21.679

Matt Etchells-Jones: some of the buildings were bad, some of the buildings were better, etc. We weren't looking to frame it like that, because that wasn't the situation. It was about whether they were fit for purpose, and those in those buildings felt isolated in the fact they couldn't influence, and they couldn't sort of say, I'm looking for better surroundings, I want to feel... I need things that suit my purpose, that suit my role.

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00:36:21.699 --> 00:36:38.989

Matt Etchells-Jones: And so we needed to sort of sum it up and look at how we put it together. We had diverse people, had arm's length relationships with those buildings, perceived inequalities, so the problem statement that we used to start solving that problem was around how the people felt isolated. They weren't isolated, they felt isolated.

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00:36:39.009 --> 00:36:48.949

Matt Etchells-Jones: And they felt they couldn't influence their environment. It was... it was about a feeling, it was around perception. How could we change that, and how could we change that engagement? And so...

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00:36:49.059 --> 00:37:03.569

Matt Etchells-Jones: Last slide here, before we hand back. Another element was home office business partners. There was a vision to unify the way that business partners operated in corporate services, the people who engaged across the organization to make people got their service appropriately.

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00:37:03.939 --> 00:37:10.499

Matt Etchells-Jones: The business partners themselves, very bought into the status quo. They were happy with how it worked, but there was a vision about how it could be improved.

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00:37:10.499 --> 00:37:35.089

Matt Etchells-Jones: But each of those business partners worked in a very, very different way. And it wasn't about saying, someone's got this wrong. It wasn't about saying, there is a best practice way, there isn't about saying, this person does it one way and everybody else should do

the same way. It was about taking people on a journey to decide collaboratively across the stakeholders about there was a level of uncertainty around what the roles were, because they didn't do the same roles in each area. And it took them on the journey. It was using that framing enabled us to buy in

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00:37:35.089 --> 00:37:48.609

Matt Etchells-Jones: go to the different stakeholders, take them on that journey, and say, what does a business partner really do? What do they look like? How do they work? Who are their customers? And how we could take people on a longer journey around developing and working with their own resources

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00:37:48.609 --> 00:38:01.499

Matt Etchells-Jones: to decide the most effective way of delivering an outcome along those areas. So that's two examples that I've used there, but I shall hand back to Jesse at this point and say thank you very much for listening.

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00:38:01.750 --> 00:38:15.430

Jesse Samasuwo: No, thank you again, Matt, really, really helpful, and I love that framing of using, your problem definition as a kind of shop front window. Yeah, fantastic presentations from both Matt and Cheryl, and very, very grateful for your time today.

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00:38:15.920 --> 00:38:32.329

Jesse Samasuwo: We have lots of questions that have come in, both from before the event and sort of, and a few that have come in during the, last few moments. To ensure your question does get seen and not lost in the chat, please do submit it via the Q&A. We'll spend the next few moments talking to Matt and Cheryl about their perspectives on some of the issues.

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00:38:32.330 --> 00:38:48.379

Jesse Samasuwo: Another quick reminder, that you can join the community of practice that we've got, around life and government, and you can join that after the event, or follow the link at the bottom of your Zoom screen, and, yeah, and that's a great place to kind of dig into some of these issues.

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00:38:48.380 --> 00:39:08.339

Jesse Samasuwo: Brilliant. Okay, so let's dive into some of the questions that have come through, in the last few moments. Natalie says, there are all very... these are all very useful tools, that you've mentioned, and a big thanks. Are there any tips on how to proceed when a

solution is needed very quickly? A solution that... a solution that is becoming, the normality, it seems?

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00:39:08.460 --> 00:39:16.200

Jesse Samasuwo: So what to do when you're kind of trying to do this process, at pace? Maybe I'll come to you first, Cheryl.

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00:39:17.390 --> 00:39:28.930

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: Well, that's a great question. You know, we all often feel like the day is only getting busier, so we want our solutions to come quickly. What I would say, though, is

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00:39:29.070 --> 00:39:52.419

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: each of the strategies that I was suggesting, they're a little bit unnatural, and that's the point, right? We want to interrupt the logical flow for how we normally engage, so we can make sure that we're actually seeing the full situation, and that we're solving the right problem the first time, and we don't have to revisit the decision. So, while it feels really good to

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00:39:52.420 --> 00:40:06.540

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: feel like you're moving quickly. I do think all of these tools that I suggested, it doesn't have to be something that takes a long time, but it's meant to be that unnatural beat, that strategic stop in your problem solving.

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00:40:06.540 --> 00:40:09.909

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: To make sure that you're making your work work for you.

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00:40:10.720 --> 00:40:13.800

Jesse Samasuwo: Yeah, really, really helpful. Matt, any reflections on the same point?

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00:40:14.770 --> 00:40:18.159

Matt Etchells-Jones: Yes, I mean, similarly, picking up from Cheryl's point there, it's...

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00:40:18.180 --> 00:40:22.800

Matt Etchells-Jones: Using framing, using words, things like that, it is a way of

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00:40:22.800 --> 00:40:42.059

Matt Etchells-Jones: hitting pause, and I appreciate, yes, the question sort of says when it's, you know, needed quickly, you don't have to pause for weeks, you don't have to sort of book a suite in a hotel and go away for an entire five days to sort of work your way through it, but it is around making yourself have that mental pause and unpick the situation that is ahead of you, and looking at, what am I really...

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00:40:42.060 --> 00:40:55.850

Matt Etchells-Jones: looking at here? You know, what is... let's step away from any obvious solutions, and let's entertain the idea that whilst I may appear to see a solution here, I am but one person, and how can I frame this in terms of what the situation

207

00:40:55.850 --> 00:41:08.909

Matt Etchells-Jones: is, is it that my car has broken down? To choose an example, what's happened to me on Monday, or is it that I can't get to where I need to get to? You know, what is the situation here? And then, how can I... how can I frame it, and how can I look for a solution? Because the

208

00:41:09.290 --> 00:41:32.049

Matt Etchells-Jones: framing both of those in two very different ways offers two different solutions. Do I get out recovery for my car, or do I focus on getting to where I need to be to? What is the actual impact of the situation I'm facing? And it's... it's that having that pause and thinking, okay, what are we looking at? And the more you train your mind with that sort of mental approach, the more it becomes natural, and the more it sort of kicks in. So, as I say, it doesn't necessarily have to be a long time, but it is around

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00:41:32.050 --> 00:41:36.230

Matt Etchells-Jones: Having that mental time out, just so that you can stop and pause, think.

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00:41:36.800 --> 00:41:53.620

Jesse Samasuwo: Yeah, really, really helpful. And Alexander builds on that same sort of focus, and they ask, what... so when we spend time thinking deeply about the problem, people can often get impatient, or think that it's an obvious solu- think that it's obvious because they've spent... they already have a solution in mind.

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00:41:53.620 --> 00:42:01.390

Jesse Samasuwo: From your experience, how do you create urgency and buy-in for staying with the problem, especially when people are impatient or indecisive?

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00:42:01.400 --> 00:42:05.080

Jesse Samasuwo: Say more again, I'll come back to you, Cheryl, and ask Matt for his reflections as well.

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00:42:07.090 --> 00:42:09.829

Matt Etchells-Jones: Okay, so, from my perspective.

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00:42:09.830 --> 00:42:13.670

Jesse Samasuwo: Sorry, sorry, sorry, but just to share them, but you might...

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00:42:14.030 --> 00:42:14.790

Matt Etchells-Jones: Apologies.

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00:42:14.900 --> 00:42:15.820

Jesse Samasuwo: Yeah, my fault.

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00:42:15.820 --> 00:42:38.150

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: So this is a question I've actually thought a lot about. My third book is on what I call problem solver profiles, and these are the different ways that people approach complex problem solving. We each have a profile that's our dominant profile, even though we can be pieces of all five. If anybody wants to take a free assessment to see which profile is theirs.

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00:42:38.150 --> 00:42:45.970

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: They can go to appap.areamethod.com, A-R-E-A method.com. And let me tell you.

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00:42:45.970 --> 00:42:59.879

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: why this is important. Some people are able to very quickly identify the next step in the logical progression. I call those people adventurers, they're optimistic, and they feel like the risk is not moving.

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00:43:00.030 --> 00:43:04.270

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: And for people who want more time in solving a problem.

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00:43:04.380 --> 00:43:19.649

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: Those are often people that are either what I call detectives, or listeners, or thinkers. They each engage in more problem solving than decision making, and those people can use their adventures to

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00:43:19.650 --> 00:43:32.969

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: Have something to react to. Asking the person who's able to move quickly, what is it that you see? Those people can generally tell you what the next step is and why they think so.

223

00:43:32.990 --> 00:43:48.540

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: And that can give all of us who need more time in a process something to actually add into our thinking that we can react to. And that's super useful, because for our detectives, listeners, and thinkers who want

224

00:43:48.540 --> 00:43:54.040

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: more process. We often need a way to think about

225

00:43:54.540 --> 00:44:06.279

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: prioritizing all that information that we've collected. And so it can help us actually be able to work together to have creative friction between these styles.

226

00:44:06.280 --> 00:44:21.840

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: And make it more useful when we're actually trying to all get together and identify why does somebody think that the next step is so easy to identify, and some people think that that next step is much more complex.

227

00:44:21.840 --> 00:44:29.679

Jesse Samasuwo: Yeah, I love that concept of, like, diverse approaches. And Matt, same question to you. How do you get people to stay with the problem?

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00:44:31.190 --> 00:44:36.529

Matt Etchells-Jones: It's a good question, and yeah, say this, It's... it's a very...

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00:44:37.230 --> 00:44:44.569

Matt Etchells-Jones: varied one. It's sort of... the question always is, you know, it's like the classic response to LinkedIn, it's always, it depends. And so...

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00:44:44.740 --> 00:44:53.940

Matt Etchells-Jones: it depends on what the sense of urgency is, and who the people are that are engaged with. I think in many respects, from my experience,

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00:44:54.100 --> 00:45:05.050

Matt Etchells-Jones: This is about managing people, this is about managing stakeholders, this is about taking value from what people bring, but also encouraging them to stay in the room, rather than leaving it and going off to sort of solve

232

00:45:05.090 --> 00:45:22.770

Matt Etchells-Jones: on their own, and it's about explaining the value that they are bringing, and also highlighting the fact that, through bringing the other stakeholders in, that every stakeholder has a different experience. Everybody sees it through a different lens, and it's about bringing that in, showing the value of what people are offering, but also focusing on saying.

233

00:45:22.840 --> 00:45:24.859

Matt Etchells-Jones: You think the solution is this?

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00:45:24.860 --> 00:45:46.999

Matt Etchells-Jones: you think the problem is this, yet here is another person who is equally affected by the same problem, yet they see the problem as this, and their experience is that. It's drawing that dialogue in, and getting people to understand and speak to each other, and learn to appreciate the different perceptions, the different needs that come out of it, so that we can then frame what is going to be a holistic solution that suits all, so that we frame it

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00:45:47.000 --> 00:46:05.679

Matt Etchells-Jones: appropriately, and we're not saying... we're not... we're not using one particular stakeholder's experience over another to steer where we're going, but it is difficult. There will be people. People are paid to be professionals. People will have professional viewpoints. The person who works in IT will immediately see an IT-orientated solution.

236

00:46:05.680 --> 00:46:28.170

Matt Etchells-Jones: the person that works in operations will immediately see an operationally orientated solution. And it's bringing those in, using the value that those people bring, and

working with those stakeholders to show your appreciation, and get them to engage, and say, well, tell me, what would you do from an operational perspective? How would we get that to work with the IT perspective? Would the IT-orientated solution improve your operational perspective, or would they actually contradict each other?

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00:46:28.170 --> 00:46:33.550

Matt Etchells-Jones: Taking people on that journey, so they see value, and they feel valued, but they see value in other people's

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00:46:33.550 --> 00:46:39.210

Matt Etchells-Jones: opinions, and therefore they participate in the process of melding those together. But yes, I say.

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00:46:39.250 --> 00:46:53.030

Matt Etchells-Jones: it is difficult to manage people sometimes, and I do appreciate that everybody will want to rush off and sort of solve things in their own way, but that's... that's the point where you have to act as the ambassador, as the chair, and keep people in that room, sometimes literally.

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00:46:53.370 --> 00:46:56.430

Matt Etchells-Jones: To get them to engage and understand the value that everybody brings.

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00:46:56.430 --> 00:47:14.730

Jesse Samasuwo: Yeah, well, speaking of literal and virtual rooms, Sarah has a great question, talking about dispersed stakeholders. What tools and platform have you used to gather stakeholders' views when you can't get everyone in the room? I'm actually going to pose that question to everyone here, because I'm sure everyone has kind of dealt with a similar set of circumstances, so please, if you kind of

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00:47:14.830 --> 00:47:28.510

Jesse Samasuwo: work through this on your own, please do share a reflection in the chat for Sarah and for the benefit of all of us, and we can kind of learn from that. But I'll pose that to you, Matt, first, and then Sarah, and then Cheryl, in a kind of rapid fire, just for that quick question, 30-second answer.

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00:47:28.890 --> 00:47:52.370

Matt Etchells-Jones: In terms of virtual tools, I love a good Miro board, or the Microsoft Teams whiteboard has now functions as well. Getting... because there's all sorts of tools you can do on that, all sorts of ways you can play. You can put up different options and get people to put virtual counters against them. You can put... get people to put different post-it notes up there. Brings everybody together. I've hosted international problem-solving methods that way, getting people just to interact with putting things on boards. It's like you're in the room.

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00:47:52.370 --> 00:48:14.929

Matt Etchells-Jones: But you're not, which I guess is the idea behind it, in some respects, but it's... those are certainly my favorite tools, is a way for people to find interactive elements, because it engages different parts of the brain. When you're moving counters around, or you're moving post-it notes, or you're writing one, and then you invite everyone to then decide which post-it notes to go in which order for importance, and things like that. It brings that interaction element there, which gives an element of engagement.

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00:48:14.930 --> 00:48:28.430

Matt Etchells-Jones: And also, you can sort of see the speed at which people respond, you can gauge engagement from your stakeholders that way as well. Who's the first on the post-it notes? Who's the first to move stuff around? And also, who's the last? And engaging people with what their decision-making process was around it.

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00:48:28.610 --> 00:48:30.909

Jesse Samasuwo: Yeah, and Cheryl, same question to you.

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00:48:31.280 --> 00:48:47.940

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: Well, Matt, I like your idea. I've liked all your ideas. So what I would say is that if you want a specific tool to actually make sure that you're understanding each of the stakeholders' vision of success, you can actually use that vision of success

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00:48:47.940 --> 00:49:06.509

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: and critical concepts tool. What do our constituents think in this one area? What's their vision of success? And actually use that tool across the different stakeholders, so you can see that each group might have a different set of incentives, and incentives drive behavior.

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00:49:07.180 --> 00:49:23.589

Jesse Samasuwo: Yeah, very, really helpful. And in case folks can't see it, Joe has responded to Sarah's question as well, mentioning Miro, Padlet, MS Whiteboard, Commonplace, which I

haven't actually discovered... heard of before, and Street Care as well. But yeah, please do if anyone has... anyone else has any other reflections

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00:49:23.590 --> 00:49:25.520

Jesse Samasuwo: Please do share in the chat.

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00:49:25.520 --> 00:49:45.690

Jesse Samasuwo: Shannon has a quick question for Matt. Shannon says, what do you think about a problem statement about... around updating an outdated strategic plan? Is it enough to say that the problem is an outdated plan, or is it more around the bigger picture, why we'd need to update it? Matt, maybe a quick answer there, and then if you want to follow up with any more detail, you can put it in the chat as well, responding to Shannon.

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00:49:45.690 --> 00:50:01.930

Matt Etchells-Jones: Definitely the bigger picture, boil it down, but yeah, essentially, frame-wide is out of date, there's been a change in political administration, or times have changed, or things mentioned in this are no longer, you know, no longer relevant to the situation, something like that. But yeah, frame it in context.

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00:50:02.370 --> 00:50:14.579

Jesse Samasuwo: Yeah, and Shannon, if you've got any further follow-ups on that, please feel free to add as well. Someone else has asked, can you both give any examples in your day-to-day roles where you've currently needed to solve problems or make decisions

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00:50:14.580 --> 00:50:28.510

Jesse Samasuwo: which has been difficult or did not go to plan. I'm assuming they don't mean falling off a bike or, needing to urgently, arrange a camping trip. But, yeah, I don't know, any urgent problems that kind of come to mind? Cheryl, I'll come to you first.

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00:50:29.540 --> 00:50:52.299

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: Yeah, so, we've been working on a strategic plan, and so we're actually right in the middle of a big, messy problem, and I think sometimes what you've done before and what has had success often seems like something that can limit future possibilities. So, sometimes recognizing that just because you've had successful solutions

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00:50:52.300 --> 00:51:02.739

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: In one specific area, doesn't mean that necessarily that you need to be coming from that, because the past is no indication of the future.

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00:51:02.740 --> 00:51:22.339

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: So, recognizing when you're circumscribing the problem too narrowly, and just leaning on expertise, this idea about the curse of expertise, I think, is a very real thing, that it actually narrows our focus to what we know has worked in the past, and sometimes that inhibits great things done.

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00:51:22.340 --> 00:51:24.299

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: For opening up the future.

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00:51:24.640 --> 00:51:29.009

Jesse Samasuwo: Yeah, and can you just explain that concept of the curse of Expertise, just very, very briefly?

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00:51:29.010 --> 00:51:53.779

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: Yeah, so oftentimes we think of experts as the people we want to go to. They are the ones that have experience in the domain, they know what's worked. At the same time, these cognitive biases that I've been talking about, they really tend to narrow your thinking. Oh, I've seen this problem before. But actually, there's a wonderful Buddhist statement, we've never been here now before. So there's no situation that

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00:51:53.780 --> 00:51:59.589

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: We're walking into, that we've actually seen in exactly the same set of circumstances.

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00:51:59.590 --> 00:52:08.099

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: And as people become experts, they do tend to feel like they really recognize things. You develop habits and patterns.

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00:52:08.100 --> 00:52:25.029

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: that have worked for you. Reminding yourself that this idea of the beginner's mind, that you want to actually come into the situation with an idea that it can't possibly be the same as what you've seen before, is something that can really prevent you

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00:52:25.030 --> 00:52:32.379

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: From moving very quickly into a solution that worked in the past, but just isn't going to be workable this time around.

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00:52:32.720 --> 00:52:46.989

Jesse Samasuwo: Yeah, really, really helpful. And Matt, a question for you from Rifat. They say, how do you resolve a problem when another problem comes up in the process? So maybe once you started down that journey of reflecting on the problem, and then something comes up into the process? For you, Matt.

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00:52:48.300 --> 00:52:53.049

Matt Etchells-Jones: I think they call this a side quest in the world of gaming, don't they?

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00:52:53.240 --> 00:53:13.450

Matt Etchells-Jones: That's a really good question, but from that perspective, that's when I sort of put my project manager hat on, and I sort of saying, well, okay, have we encountered an issue? Have we encountered something that we didn't know, or a dependency? What are we looking at? Are we looking at something that is just changing the angle that we're approaching this, or are we looking at something that changes the situation entirely that we were unaware of?

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00:53:13.450 --> 00:53:17.370

Matt Etchells-Jones: in terms of... how we framed it. So, I think it's,

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00:53:17.370 --> 00:53:21.180

Matt Etchells-Jones: yeah, in terms of... terms of what do I do if something comes up?

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00:53:21.220 --> 00:53:34.999

Matt Etchells-Jones: I have to work out, is this a showstopper? Is, you know, if it's a showstopper, then yeah, we need to go right the way back to the start. If it's something that's simply changing the angle, we need to look it in, and potentially, yeah, we do need to take a few steps back and say, we didn't realize this, so how do we... how do we fix it in

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00:53:35.000 --> 00:53:41.650

Matt Etchells-Jones: to the area. If we're sort of saying, oh, there's limited resources, or we're saying, oh, there's an extra dependency that we were unaware of, we need to change the

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00:53:41.650 --> 00:53:58.570

Matt Etchells-Jones: the solution, sort of build that in, but we can do that as we move through iterative developments. It's a case of introducing another factor that we were previously unaware of, certainly in terms of IT development and when you're shaping IT solutions, something that I've worked with in some of the problem-solving arenas.

273

00:53:58.920 --> 00:54:07.659

Matt Etchells-Jones: it just... it does happen. You suddenly... you don't know what you don't know, but then suddenly when you do know it, you need to build it in, and you need to factor around it, but until you know it.

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00:54:07.660 --> 00:54:19.160

Matt Etchells-Jones: you don't really understand quite the impact it's having, so it's looking at the impact it's having. Is it to say, is it a showstopper? Is it a game changer? Is it simply just changing the angle that you're going in, and attack it from that perspective?

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00:54:19.470 --> 00:54:20.240

Jesse Samasuwo: Hmm.

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00:54:20.410 --> 00:54:39.590

Jesse Samasuwo: Yeah, really, really helpful. And just very briefly coming to you again, Matt, Joe has asked about, the concept of logic trees. I don't know if you're able to explain those very briefly, and sort of, like, maybe then in the chat, follow up with any top tips on what those are, because I think it's like a tool that maybe other people might want to learn about.

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00:54:40.090 --> 00:54:42.000

Matt Etchells-Jones: Yeah, I mean, it's... it's...

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00:54:42.160 --> 00:55:04.480

Matt Etchells-Jones: it's sort of how... how different suggestions, different solutions take you off in different areas. You've got other elements in lean theory, which is like your fishbone as well, where different solutions come off a single spinal point, but it's... you start with a central question, and then each solution takes you out into different areas. If we're looking at two solutions, each solution is a potential yes or a no, or, you know, gives you a V,

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00:55:04.480 --> 00:55:08.730

Matt Etchells-Jones: And that then leads to other options, and slowly you realize that if something is quite simple.

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00:55:08.930 --> 00:55:17.639

Matt Etchells-Jones: you then ask yourself extra questions, and it takes you further out, and then it's looking at, well, how can we... how can we bring that in? Where do some of these take us? What's the logical outcome? If the logical outcome

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00:55:17.640 --> 00:55:41.920

Matt Etchells-Jones: is acceptable, then do we look at that as a feasible option if the logical outcome is something that's unachievable, then we box that off, because we know there are limitations around that, but we list those limitations as to... as to where we are going there. But it's... it's very much around looking at, how do we take this out? No options are off the table. We need to look at these options. How far do they go? Where do they take us? And what is, you know, is the solution they're offering feasible, acceptable.

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00:55:41.920 --> 00:55:50.559

Matt Etchells-Jones: moral, ethical, etc. You know, what is the risk exposure that it brings us, in terms of there, and what's our capability to reach those outcomes and solutions?

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00:55:51.190 --> 00:55:56.930

Jesse Samasuwo: Really, really helpful, thank you for that. Some really incredible wisdom, from each of our speakers.

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00:55:56.980 --> 00:56:01.549

Jesse Samasuwo: And I'd like you to join me all in giving both Matt and Cheryl a virtual round of applause.

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00:56:01.550 --> 00:56:25.630

Jesse Samasuwo: And mostly to thank all of you for joining us this afternoon or morning for some of you, in Canada, and learning and being so engaged with this topic. I can see there's some really, really great questions, which we can definitely keep talking about in the community. The team is going to pull up a quick poll, which should come up on your screen the third of today, and it says, on a scale of 1 to 10, rank your agreement with this statement. This event was a valuable use of my time. This is completely anonymous and private, just for our

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00:56:25.630 --> 00:56:26.380

Jesse Samasuwo: to learn.

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00:56:26.390 --> 00:56:37.390

Jesse Samasuwo: and improve future events, so please do feel free to answer honestly. Really, really helpful. And just before we wrap up, I also wanted to let all of you know that we've,

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00:56:37.500 --> 00:56:55.569

Jesse Samasuwo: that we've sourced a few great follow-on resources from today's topic, which we think you'll find... which we think you will find useful. There's an article on our platform about problem solving by one of April's top contributors. It's packed with links to useful resources on how to get going when you feel stuck in first gear.

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00:56:55.570 --> 00:57:01.329

Jesse Samasuwo: So if you'd like to kind of get access to that article, please feel free to go to the Life and Government community after the event.

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00:57:01.330 --> 00:57:14.219

Jesse Samasuwo: and leave a comment on the pinned post, which is actually by me. So you'll see my small little face there with a comment, where you can, where you can add your name to receive the resource, and we'll send it to you later this week.

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00:57:14.410 --> 00:57:32.899

Jesse Samasuwo: Incredible. Well, before we do jump off, there's a quick April tradition that we have, for both Matt and Cheryl, and it was just to ask your one-word takeaways from today's event. If I could ask you and put you on the spot, maybe, one word or concept or idea that stuck with you that, that you'll take away from today. Cheryl, you first?

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00:57:34.790 --> 00:57:39.509

Jesse Samasuwo: You're on mute. We managed to get through 58 minutes, and then...

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00:57:41.010 --> 00:57:43.289

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: We've heard a lot about frame the problem.

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00:57:44.120 --> 00:57:48.019

Jesse Samasuwo: Amazing. Matt, one word takeaway, or something that stuck with you?

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00:57:48.540 --> 00:57:51.780

Matt Etchells-Jones: Pause. I think that's my one word, is take time out.

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00:57:52.380 --> 00:57:55.239

Matt Etchells-Jones: Look, what are we doing? Take time out to think. Pause.

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00:57:55.780 --> 00:58:08.340

Jesse Samasuwo: Amazing. Well, thanks to you both again, and to all of you for joining us today. We hope you have a brilliant rest of the day, and hopefully join us at a future event. But thanks again to both Matt and Cheryl, and wishing you all the best. See ya!

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00:58:08.340 --> 00:58:08.979

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn: the invoice.

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00:58:09.250 --> 00:58:10.519

Matt Etchells-Jones: Thank you. Cheers.