

Transcript | How to Improve Your Strategic Thinking

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Hello, everybody! Hello, welcome! I will just give a few minutes for everybody to filter in.

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Okay, great. Well. Hello, everybody, and welcome to this masterclass on how to improve your strategic thinking.

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My name is Joel Smith. I am the Events Manager here at Apolitical. It would be great to hear from you all, so please do post in the chat where you're joining us from, and what organization you work for, and I'll give some shout-outs shortly.

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So today, we are going to be covering a highly useful skill and mindset, strategic thinking.

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This is an approach that has many positives, no matter what role or function you perform in government.

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And my hope is that by the end of this hour, you will leave with some frameworks to analyze problems, anticipate future risks, and make informed decisions that drive real impact in your role.

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For those of you who may be joining us for the first time, welcome. Apolitical is the world's largest community for government, used by over a quarter of a million public servants and policymakers from more than 170 countries.

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Our mission is to make government smarter, and we do this by putting the best knowledge and skills at the fingertips of public servants from around the world.

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So, I'm gonna head into the chat. I can see it's already popping off, it's looking busy, we've got David from Calgary, we've got Jordan dialing in from Liverpool in the UK Uh, Ram here from Toronto, um, Jenny dialing in from the Children's Social Care Policy Department of Education.

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Um, we've got Ian from Bristol, I see. Um, they are coming in too thick and fast for me to keep up with.

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Marty dialing in from Salt Lake City, Utah, welcome. Uh, it must be early there.

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Um, lots of people dining in from Canada, um, good night from Indonesia, lovely. I love to see an international audience. Well.

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There are too many to read, but please do keep them coming. It's always lovely just to see everyone and where everyone is dialing in from. Um... So, before we get into today's event, uh, we are thrilled to extend an invitation to join today's speakers and your peers in the public service.

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From across the globe in our systems thinking community. Whether you work in policy, project management, data, or any other role across government.

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This forum is the place to share resources, ask questions, and gain collective wisdom from your peers on the application of both systemic and strategic mindsets. If you're not a member yet, I really hope you'll consider joining us today. The link is in the resources tab of this webinar, which should have popped up on the bottom of your screen, and I believe my colleague is also going to just post it in the chat, so feel free

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To follow that link, join the community, there's loads of fantastic conversations ongoing, and we'll try and continue the conversation after this event in that community. So, um... Feel free to join.

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So, I'll get a couple of technical notes out the way before we dive into today's conversation.

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So, this event is recorded for on-demand viewing on the apolitical website, so please don't record it yourself.

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Closed captions are available, and they can be toggled on and off in your screen settings.

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Okay, great. So, before we introduce our brilliant speakers, we're going to run a quick few polls, just to get a sense of where everyone is coming to today's conversation from.

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So, uh, let's have a look at the first poll, which should pop up on your screen now.

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Which area do you find most challenging when applying strategic thinking?

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So the answers could be balancing long-term strategy with short-term demands.

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Identifying and analyzing emerging trends. Communicating strategic insights to stakeholders.

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Overcoming bureaucratic or institutional barriers. Implementing strategic plans into daily operations.

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Encouraging a strategic mindset within my team, or something else, if you have additional things.

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Feel free to pop them in the chat as well. Okay, I'll give you all a second just to get voting and get your answers locked in.

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Okay, the results are in. So, it is looking like, uh, the top-rated one, just by a margin, is Overcoming Bureaucratic or institutional barriers.

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Followed closely, uh, at just 28% of you went for balancing long-term strategy with short-term demands.

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That's definitely something that I think I struggle with, with my strategic thinking, is trying to balance the long term with the... With all of the busyness that is happening in the short term.

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And then we've got a fairly even split between identifying and analyzing emerging trends, communicating strategic insights to stakeholders.

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And encouraging a strategic mindset within the team. Interesting. Um, a couple of, uh, things in the chat as well, demonstrating strategic thinking in interview situations. Yep, that is always a challenge with the pressure.

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Of an interview. Difficulty understanding what strategic thinking entails in the first place. Yep, absolutely, sometimes strategy can be kind of just used as a bit of a jargon word, um, so having that actually having meaning.

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Strategic versus short-term, strategic versus daily tasks, yeah. Definitely. Okay, brilliant. Thank you for, um, for getting involved in that one.

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Um, we've got a second poll for you. This one's gonna be a little bit more open, so, uh, we're gonna ask you to actually just post in the chat for this one.

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Um, so, we'd like to know if you currently work on any frameworks that, uh, can help you to employ strategic thinking in your work.

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So please post your answer in the chat, any kind of, uh, strategic thinking or strategy frameworks.

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This could be, uh, I guess, things like OKRs, different strategic systems, um... Let's see what we've got. Um, oh, Lauren, coming in... Quickly, with smart goals, yep, yep, definitely, um... That's a... that's a nice little... little framework if you haven't, uh, looked into that, uh, I'd recommend it.

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Okrs, I think a lot of, uh, a lot of businesses and a lot of departments operate on OKRs, results chain.

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Um, Hoshin Cannery? I don't know much about that. So, um... Yeah, please, Karen, if you want to provide some more info in the chat, that would be really interesting.

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Okrs, to some extent, but difficult to capture policy goals in this way. Yeah, yeah, we hear that a lot from, uh.

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From public servants, um... getting the outcomes guide, the connected community, whole of society approach. Okay.

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Interesting. Well, yes, please, keep them coming. It's nice to kind of get an idea of all the different frameworks that are out there, and if you see one in the chat that you've not heard of.

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Um, have a look, it might, it might, uh, might be a new, a new tool that you could, uh.

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You could bring to your teams. Okay, great. Well, thank you so much for, um, for taking part in those polls.

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So now, onto the meat of today's event, introducing our speakers.

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Um, so we are very fortunate to have two brilliant guests with us today. We have Janine Richo and Elaine Rouche.

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Joining us today. Um, Janine is Assistant Deputy Minister for Multilateral Relations and Internal Trade in the Canadian Government's Intergovernmental Affairs Privy Council Office.

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In this role, Janine is responsible for advising the Prime Minister on matters such as national unity.

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The evolution of the Federation, and removing interprovincial barriers to trade as a means to bolster Canada's economic resilience.

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Elaine is a former senior official within the European Union, where he spent nearly three decades on assignments across four continents with work spanning diplomacy, international development, and strategic foresight.

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Recently, Alan's actions is... Alan's action is focused on complexity science, alternative perspectives on global challenges.

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The role of artists in social change, and the evolving influence of AI.

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Um, you can read the full bios of our speakers by visiting the Resources tab at the bottom of your Zoom screen and heading to the speaker section if you want to know a bit more.

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So, welcome, both of you. Before we launch into today's Masterclass, I thought we could start with a quick icebreaker question, just to get us a bit warmed up.

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So, Alan, Janine, um, I want to know if you do any activities outside of work that help you to cultivate a strategic mindset.

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I wonder if either of you are maybe a mean chess player, or perhaps play a bit of poker on the side, or something like that. I'll give you guys a moment to think, um, on your answer, and everyone else dialing in and watching today.

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I pose the same question to you, and I'd love for you to share your answers in the thread that my colleague just started in our systems thinking community. If you look in the chat now, my colleague has just posted a link, which will take you all to the thread, so I look forward to reading your answers.

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A bit later on, but our speakers. Um, Alan, I'll come to you first.

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What is an activity outside of work that helps you to cultivate a strategic mindset?

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Yes. Good afternoon from Brussel to everybody, wherever you are. Actually, uh.

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My current activity, I'm a retired EU official, but I'm very much involved in mentorship activity.

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In a non-profit organization, when I have intergenerational contact, and I feel it very, very rewarding. It's a double-sense activity.

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A second activity, I'm very fanatic, nearly, of participating in a wiki way.

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To the drafting of books. Particular with, uh, Adam Kahn from Rios Partners, collaborating with the enemy, Habits.

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For transforming the system, and also Cosmos Journal, so it's... I very much like making or thinking humbly that I can make some difference.

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And last but not least, I am also creator of artistic composition.

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Uh, relating to feeling comfortable with your own, my co-partner in this, it's my grandchild, Lucas, age 6 years, and he lives in Barcelona. This is my team.

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Lovely, thank you for that, Alan, that's brilliant. Um, Janine, how about you?

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Yes, we can hear you loud and clear, thanks.

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First off, Joel, everyone can hear me, correct? Okay, perfect. I've been having some technical difficulties this morning, as you know, but um... I also, uh, have two... I... two ideas that I wanted to put on the table. The first is.

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I'm very, uh, physically active. I am a gym goer, I'm a runner, I'm a golfer, I... Um, I lift weights, and the reason I tie that to strategic thinking is because it clears my mind.

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And it allows me to give myself some space. Uh, to think. I find it's a good way for me to mentally prepare for a hard day, is to go for a run, or to go lift some weights in the gym.

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Uh, and that really, I think, helps my mind, clear my mind. And the second one.

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Um, is I do a lot of work in the community, uh, particularly helping young girls participate in sport.

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Um, and the reason I link that to strategic thinking and why it makes me a better strategic thinker.

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Uh, is because it gives you a connection to something bigger than yourself.

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Uh, and I find that that kind of helps you, and we'll get into it a little bit with my talk, that idea something bigger than yourself, and making connections to something outside of your own little sphere.

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I think is very important to strategic thinking.

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Mm-hmm.

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Yeah, absolutely, and there's parallels between both yours, Janine and Alan's. Yeah. Working for the greater, the greater system. That's brilliant. Thank you so much.

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Well, those are fantastic answers, so thank you both. Um, so that is enough from me, for now. So, without further ado, I am going to hand over to Janine for the next 15 minutes to deliver the first Masterclass presentation.

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So, Janine, if you're ready, over to you.

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Great. Well, thank you again, Joel, and I'll start by saying, um, I'm so grateful that apolitical has thought of me. I think this is the second seminar that I do on strategic thinking.

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Um, I'm calling it a seminar because I can't believe anybody would ask me to give a master class. It just seems surreal that I would have something like that to share, but I'm very grateful that you think of me, and I'm happy to share some of my experiences.

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Along the way. When I was thinking, and I apologize for the the background. I'm actually in a hotel room. I'm in Saskatoon.

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Uh, normally I would be taking this call from Ottawa. Uh, but I... we just finished a First Minister's meeting here in Canada, which is the Prime Minister and all of the Premiers coming together.

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It's a pretty big deal, it's very much a summit-style meeting, and it was held in Saskatoon for the first time in 40 years, so... Um, I'm happy that I can do this before I have to jet off to the airport and head back to Ottawa.

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Um, I was thinking about what to talk to you about today, and I'm so glad that someone talked about interviews in the first poll, and strategic thinking and interview, how to showcase that.

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Because that's actually what came to my mind when I was thinking through what can I... speak to you all about today.

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Um, I don't think I ever saw myself when I entered the Canadian Public Service as an executive.

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Um, and I'm very lucky, uh, to have had good mentors who kind of pushed me in that direction.

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Um, and one of the things that you have to do when you want to become an executive, that's right, the Paris of the Prairies, I just saw that pop up on my screen.

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Um, one of the things that you have to do when you become an executive is go through what can be a pretty grueling interview.

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And you have to demonstrate that you meet, uh, six key leadership competencies.

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I'm not gonna go through all six of them, but I am going to... focus on one of the six, which is create vision and strategy, which is what we're talking about today.

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Um, and the way that we define it in the Canadian Public Service is... I'll just read it to you, so if you'll bear with me.

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Leaders define the future and chart a path forward. They are adept at understanding and communicating context.

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Factoring in the economic, social, and political environment. Intellectually agile, they leverage their deep and broad knowledge build on diverse ideas and perspectives.

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And create consensus around compelling visions. Leaders balance organizational and government-wide priorities.

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And improve outcomes for Canada and for Canadians. So, I had been an executive for about 3 or 4 years when I felt, okay, you know, I kind of like being an executive, I think I'm ready to go to the next level. We have five

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Executive levels in Canada. I was an EX1, and I wanted to move in to an EX2. And so I had to do a competition, I had to do an interview.

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And I will... I will readily admit that I thought I didn't have to prepare for it.

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That my record of achievement spoke for itself. That clearly I demonstrated all six of the key leadership competencies because of the work that I did on a day-to-day basis.

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And so I went to the interview feeling super confident. I came out of the interview thinking, you nailed it.

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You're gonna get this job, no problem. And 3 weeks later, I was told that I failed the interview process.

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And I failed on strategic... on creating strategy and vision. And I was shocked. I was shocked, because I had just finished a 3-year stint.

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As the Director of Medical Marijuana, uh, this is prior to Cannabis being legalized.

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In Canada. Uh, and this was a program that was Uh, very badly organized. I had to... take us out of a huge backlog of applications that was landing us in court.

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I was Canada's crown witness in a number of court cases.

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I reformed the program through a huge regulatory process. From consultations with stakeholders, to writing policy.

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To writing regulation, to drafting in the room with the lawyers, everything.

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Technical briefings to parliamentarians. And in my little head, there was no way that I did not use strategic thinking on a daily basis.

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So once I kind of got over my bruised, my little bruised ego. Um, I actually hired an interview coach.

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And I started to work with her. And the very first thing she did to me was she put me through with no prep.

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A mock interview. And again, I did it, I answered all her questions, I thought I nailed it.

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And she said, oh yeah, I see why you didn't pass on strategy.

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And vision. And I thought again to myself, what am I doing wrong? How am I not communicating?

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Strategy and vision. And the advice she gave me then has stuck with me my entire career, and that's what I kind of wanted to share with all of you today.

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She told me that what I was failing to communicate, I was able to communicate my role, my responsibilities, my achievements very well.

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But what I wasn't showing her was what she considered the most important part of strategic thinking.

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And that was that I could make connections between my work And my role in the broader environment around it.

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I just wasn't showing her. That I had a clear understanding of how everything around me was impacting my job and my role and my responsibilities.

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And to me, this lesson has stuck with me my entire career.

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And it is the crux of strategic thinking in my mind.

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I think it's really important that we all understand our role and our lane and our responsibilities, and our priorities.

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And doing our job within that lane, and executing those responsibilities is very, very important.

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And it's key to success. And sometimes, if you enter into somebody else's lane.

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They can get their elbows up, they can get a little... upset with you, so it's really important to understand and work in your lane.

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But if you can't understand how your lane interacts with the roles and the responsibilities and the priorities of your colleagues, of your boss, of your government?

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Then you're not able to really drive an agenda forward.

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Because you're... you're doing... you're doing your work quickly. Blinders on, as opposed to making connections to a broader to a broader agenda. And to me, that is where Um, that is where the magic of strategic thinking kind of happens.

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It's when you can figure out how you connect into a broader picture that you're able to actually amplify your own mandate, your own message.

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You're able to link it to something that is on everyone else's radar, even if it might not seem obvious.

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And you're able to deepen your own understanding of your work.

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Um, you know, and drive it forward as a consequence, because you know how it is interacting with the world around you.

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Um, and so, if I could, just to finish, I thought I would use an illustrative example of present day versus me 15 years ago trying to... move up to the next level of how how in my everyday work, it's so important to connect strategy.

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And vision to drive forward. So Joel mentioned that I am responsible for internal trade, uh, in the Government of Canada. I'm the senior official who is responsible for helping... working with my provincial and territorial counterparts.

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To remove interprovincial barriers to trade. So there's a number of regulatory differences, for example, between provinces and territories.

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That make it difficult for goods to flow seamlessly across the country, labor mobility restrictions.

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And Canada has been partially criticized for having, um. Quite a declining productivity, and this is one of the major reasons cited by Uh, by economists and think tanks around the world that interprovincial trade barriers are getting in the way of

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A productive Canadian economy and competitive Canadian economy. Uh, there are... we have estimates that if we remove all federal and provincial barriers to trade, we could gain 4% GDP.

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Or \$200 billion added to our economy, which is significant. And you would think that that would be enough motivation to get things done.

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But this is a file that has moved at a snail's pace.

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For... since we signed an agreement in 2017. Um, for... not out of bad will, by governments, but priorities. It hasn't been... a priority. There's been other things to focus on.

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In May 2024, I looked in my boss's calendar and noticed that she was going to a meeting that was just called Economic Security.

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And I said to her, Tashara, what's this meeting? And she said, I don't actually know, and I can't go.

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Can you go for me? So I went to the meeting on her behalf.

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And it was bringing together people from the national security community, natural resources Canada, Canada US, international trade.

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And they were talking about no definition economic security.

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And I put my hand up at one point, and I said.

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It seems to me that this meeting is about trying to chart a path to strengthen Canada's economy.

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In the face of an uncertain sort of global environment.

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I just wonder, why aren't we talking about internal trade at this table?

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And my colleague said, oh, no, no, Shannon, this isn't about... This isn't about FedProv stuff, this is about critical minerals, national security.

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Canada, US, like, there's no room for that. Topic at this table. And I said yes, but if we could gain \$200 billion GDP, shouldn't that be part of an economic security discussion?

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Um, and that... that lanes, knowing your lanes that I talked about earlier, that was the reaction I got from some of my colleagues, was Jenin, that's not your lane. Economic security is not your lane.

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So just stick to your lane and let us stick to ours.

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Fast forward to November 2025, President Trump is elected, and or sorry, 2024, he's elected, and the infamous Truth Social post about 25% tariffs.

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And all of Canada's galvanized behind this Um, very challenging moment in a relationship with the U.S.

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And that was the moment where I looked at my minister, my deputy minister, and I said, now is the time to put internal trade on the table.

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With premiers and the Prime Minister. Because if we can't use the threat of tariffs, which was very quickly not a threat and a reality.

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And the harm that that is going to do to our economy.

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To get our act together internally to drive forward internal trade. At this moment in our history.

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We are never, ever going to be able to do so.

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And luckily for me, my minister, my deputy minister, they all saw the... saw the case, saw the argument.

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And since, I would say, January, the interprovincial Trade File has been put on steroids, and it's been moving at a very quick pace.

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Um, maybe some of the Canadian participants on this call will have seen in our media a lot of attention is being paid to interprovincial trade.

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Provinces and territories are tabling legislation to remove barriers. Government is about to table legislation.

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Uh, that my team has been working on to remove barriers. We're all sort of working on labor mobility.

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Um, and it's gained this... enormous amount of momentum and attention.

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Because we were able to show that now is the moment to bolster, if the north-south relationship is not going to work.

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Then we have to fix the East-West relationship, and we have to do it in a hurry.

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And had there not been, you know, all that thinking leading leading up to that, even if they weren't giving me a seat at the table.

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Me and my team were still thinking every day about how to how to hook this file.

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To something that was going to let it take off. And some days, I think maybe it's taken off a little bit too much. I don't always get enough sleep.

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I feel like I'm always working, uh, running to table legislation is a big job. Running around to Saskatoon and other places with First Ministers to have these discussions.

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Is a big, hectic job. But it is a way that we were able to finally make the case, and I really think that that's a big part of creating vision and strategy.

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So, I'm gonna leave it there, um, and I hope that that has given you a bit of a... Grounding in what we look for in the Canadian government, at least, um, in terms of strategic thinking.

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But also a, um... also a bit of a practical example of how we're living that in real time here in the Canadian government, so thank you very much, Joel.

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Thank you.

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Brilliant. Thank you so much, Janine. That was, uh, that was brilliant. You can see the emoji reactions, uh, firing up, so, uh... So the attendees clearly, clearly love that, love to, like, hear those kind of concrete examples as well, and kind of case studies of this in practice, which was... which was fantastic.

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So, um, thank you. Um, Alan, I will hand over to you in just a second. I just want to take a moment to encourage everyone to get their questions submitted.

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In time for the Q&A. We've got two very highly experienced public servants here with us, so please don't hold back. There's no such thing as a bad question. I can already see loads flooding in.

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So, um, yes, keep them coming. But, um, yeah, in the meantime, Alan, um, over to you for your section. Thank you very much.

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Okay. Thank you very much. Today, I'd like to take you on a journey into an Unexpected strategic territory, a space where complexity isn't a problem.

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But a source. I was then in charge.

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Of development cooperation in Dhaka. Bangladesh, the EU representation.

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When all the country was flooded, in particular a remote island, and I decide to go and make myself an assessment.

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So I see landed there, and I met Chief of the village, and asked him, tell me what you most... need now. I had in mind my menu of the EU, night menu, with blankets, oil, stuff, materials, construction things, and so on.

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And then he looked at me and quietly answered, Peace on earth.

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I was speechless, struck by his wyndham. And this extraordinary And completely disruption of what I thought as with my Western mindset of what development aid is worth.

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I had been assuming that nothing happens Unless we make it happen.

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Everything good must be the result of our intervention. Efficiency and planning are what matter most.

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And Rich must be avoided. Then I decided to, from that day, to look at the things and the world with another pair of glasses.

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To look at things according to the angle of complexity, connecting the dots, and creating space for serendipity.

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I built two mantras. Uh, the first one is... Every word counts. We live in a complex interconnected, unpredictable, and rapidly changing world.

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And the second is learning to feel comfortable with the unknown.

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Then sing with it, and cutting its hymn. Uncertainty is the birthplace of wisdom. Think also offers compass, rather.

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Than a map, because we don't know what the destination will be.

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And values matter more than skills. I try to... to gather 7 counter-intuitive statements for engaging with complexity and strategic thinking.

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The first is... Yes to the mess. It's one of the best books in my personal library. A Treatise on improvisation by a pionist And a professor in management.

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And to have the courage to hide. To have the courage to act without guaranteed outcomes.

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And so, as a case study, look at this. It is the organogram from the Pentagon that the head of U.S. Military force found in front of him when arrived in Afghanistan.

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A total mess, of course. Then he decided to improvise, to accept to mess, and make an innovative, we've become a gold Standard, uh, uh... landmark in the home to guide operation teams in combat, which is shared consciousness.

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Like a brain with all the neurons, everything in real time shares the data.

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Is acting without waiting for orders. It's a common understanding across all level of organization.

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Of course, he adapted to the enemy, because Al-Qaeda was a network.

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So he had to adapt it to the enemy, coping the enemy, but to the same complexity. He didn't copy them, he adapted to the same complexity.

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You can see the difference, on the left, the traditional thing, and the right, Al-Qaeda.

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Icon mounting. My second is coherence appears Retrospectively.

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Humility matters. Thank you, Janine, for giving us a lesson of humility.

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What is not there, say the same proverb is, matters as much as what is there.

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All sorts of unintended consequences of our past and current policy.

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And policies of the others. Causality is circular. It's not linear.

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Uncertainty is a permanent condition. It's not a problem to solve.

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Retrospectively, basically works for sense-making. But it works also... not always, but it also works for strategy.

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We often speak of strategy as a forward-looking design. But it's only retrospectively that we recognize that what was truly strategic. Of course, we start with intent, the big word, the first word we all know.

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But we call strategy in the end. It's usually the result of adjustment.

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Unexpected consequences and real-time learning. In other words, we call strategy what works.

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After the fact.

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3. What happens at the edge is critical. Snow melts at the edges, and so do systems.

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Begin to transform. And we have all sorts of remarkable work of applied to the aid sector.

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In complexity, the edges Uh, where early warnings appear, but only if we are paying attention.

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Becoming peripherally aware is no longer optional, it's strategic. This means moving away.

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From rigid plans towards adaptive capacity. By listening to weak signals.

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Building safe spaces for experimentation. Recognizing inflection points early.

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And encouraging continuous learning and external listening. A very good example is.

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Indigenous knowledge often emerges as the edges, as the edge of land, language, and narratives.

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What may appear to us is... art is often a living strategy.

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This is a tradition embraced complexity. And we're so trying to control it. They teach us pattern, move, recycle, and act through relationship.

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For public institutions, this is critical. In such environment, control does not build legitimacy, responsiveness.

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Humidity and the courage to say with uncertainty do. Okay.

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Okay, no need to understand before acting. This is a tough one.

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And we have the model by David Snowden, I worked a lot with this. As you can see, because you can see we have the simplest system.

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With best practices. We many times put it in complex systems.

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We have the complicated system, the word of the expert. And the complex system, when things to do, and the act to do is probe.

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Sense, irrespond. So you have emergence that happens. This is where things shift.

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Fundamentally. And this is why scaling up in the traditional sense simply doesn't work.

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We have a nice illustration. This is a study by the EU on this field of the model of by David Snowden, I strongly recommend you.

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We have a magic metaphor called the magic roundabout. It's a... it's well known, possibly, to you, a central roundabout surrounded with five.

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Mini roundabout with traffic. Flowing both clockwise and counterclockwise.

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With no central traffic light. And it works. The better safety records and more conventional design Why? Because drivers are forced to slow down.

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Paying attention and adapt in real time. There is no single correct.

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Pause. This is complexity in action, emergence. Not control.

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5. Questions matter more than answer. I like powerful question. In complex system.

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Good strategy begins not with answer, but with powerful questions. Like, asking why, or what if.

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The art of asking meaningful questions drive insight and action. Good question, create reflective spaces.

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Where new possibilities can emerge. But our institution and leaders Cultivating a culture.

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That encourages and nurtures powerful question. If no, why don't we ask a better question?

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This is a question I like, actually. The focus should be on asking the right question, rather than seeking the right We have also the crucial dimension of unlearning.

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The dimension of asking a powerful question. It's not the opposite of learning.

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Is simply to let go of outdated beliefs. Mental models and assumptions that no longer serve us.

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It's an experiential and multi-sensory process with free and courage points, our body, mind, and purpose.

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6. Relation, uh... everything. Relationships are... pivotal. They are the living fabric of strategy.

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They hold greater significance and structure. I will repeat this. They hold greater significance than structure, because it's through relationships that we begin to perceive differently.

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Sense more deeply, and act more Wisely.

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It does require a fundamental shift. From being architects who design, control, and manage system, to gardeners who cultivate living and evolving systems.

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The organic approach is very important, very important to illustrate a kind of relationship that exists.

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And also, we have to be aware of the monoculture tab.

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Not living in that. It's keeping this type of means embracing diversity and interdependence.

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When in doubt, return to community, especially communities of practices, relationships also include our relationship with ourselves.

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Self-reflection, inner coherence, and the observance holding shaping what emerged. This is quantum approach.

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Strategic planning is a zombie, the number 7 in my last, counterintuitive.

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In 1994, of a business review published on a similar article called to fall in highs of strategic planning.

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Strategic planning had become too rigid to abstract and disconnected from reality.

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Actually, it began evolving, but let's be honest. In many institutions, it hasn't evolved much.

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Strategic planning behaves like a zombie. Is that still coming back?

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It no longer has a sound. In adaptive system.

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Strategy no longer separated thinker from doers. I worked a lot of what is the gap between research and policymaking.

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Just to realize that this is not a good question. Action generates insight.

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That inform the next move. Projects emerge in response to evolving needs, not from abstract planning session.

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Strategy at its heart. It's about navigating uncertainties through informing.

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Crosses. We have two anti-example.

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A couple of years back, I had to work with a word-by-project structural adjustment, where We still have 128 conditions imposed on an African country.

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And in the EU recent project. One friend of mine was in charge of following it up with 72 indicators.

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Concerning the implementation of this... of this project. This is what I call the zombie strategy. It works, talks, it reports.

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But it no longer thinks. People still ask me, what does strategic thinking actually mean in policymaking?

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Well, actually, it means to hold multiple tools. Without needing to resolve them. It's a mindset. It's not a 5-year plan.

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It, for example, 5 of those are truths. We rarely name out loud.

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Foresight is not prediction, it's the discipline of noticing weak signals Most people didn't ignore before they become loud crises.

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Systems insight and awareness. Everything is connected, and that is a problem.

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Purpose-driven, not everything that counts can be counted. Strategies doesn't live in documents. It lives in decisions, conversation, and what we are willing to unlearn.

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The situation is rather simple. The Newton in this... Despair, meaning this reductionist and mechanist approach.

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Is making us and the word crazy. We know it well. One of my favorite authors, Magarin Whitley, described it so well in an anecdotal way.

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What she had come to call her Newtonian despair. I'll leave you 20 seconds to read... to read this slide.

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And now, we know... what is to be done?

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Shifting... From a word of certainties.

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A word of possibilities. Basically, strategic thinking today means looking at problems through another lens.

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So my call regarding strategic thinking is. View it as a mindset in a culture, not a toolbox.

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Center it within complexity, emergence, and unlearning, and adaptive improvisation. Shift from a mechanistic and Newtonian metaphors to organic ones.

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Place, purpose, powerful question, relationship at the heart of strategic thinking.

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B challenges caring provocateurs. Above all, be yourself.

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Authenticity is your compass. Enter into the dance, and afterwards, you will see that you have been strategic.

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Strategy is not a static plan, it's a lived experience, actually. This is an invitation to shift From the Newtonian to a quantum approach, which is already floating in the air like a murmuration.

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From prediction to resonance. My final slide, the one I hold dearest, I hesitated to include it in the main presentation.

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As I felt almost too brilliant to fit. Thank you.

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Brilliant. Thank you so much, Alan, for that brilliant presentation. So much.

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Deep wisdom to be gained from a lot of what you said there. That was fantastic, thank you.

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So, I'm sure, well, everyone... the questions are rolling in, um, so if you haven't submitted your question already, please do pop it into the Q&A. We will head in to that very shortly. Just while you're getting your final questions into the Q&A, I just want to remind you that we do have a fantastic systems thinking community. Alan obviously just referenced the importance of communities of practice.

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Um, some of you may be members, but for those of you who aren't, the community is a space for sharing resources, practical advice, and case studies to enhance policy responsiveness and effectiveness through systems thinking. It's designed for those looking to learn from global experiences and connect

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With peers committed to making more strategically sound policies. The link is in the resources tab, and also in the chat.

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But, um, on to the Q&A. So, um, I've got, first of all, I've got a question here for you, Janine.

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Um, is there a part of leadership, strategic and visionary thinking.

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That involves receiving and responding to challenges. That is from Kobe.

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That's a great question, Kobe, and I would say absolutely. Um, and I think it's funny.

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I was just saying this to somebody the other day. I've never really fancied myself a strategic policy mind, because I've always thought of myself a little bit more as an action.

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Oriented person, um, like, roll up my sleeves and get stuff done kind of a person.

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Um, and I used to think that those two are very different things, but they're not, um, because you can't roll up your sleeves and get stuff done and jump into action.

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You can do it very reactively without an understanding of context, but you're probably not going to do it very well.

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Um, and so I do think, um. And we are in a very fast-paced environment right now, where we're being asked to do a lot, and we're asked being asked to do things very quickly, and it doesn't always feel like there's time.

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To just take a minute and think strategically. But I actually always try to sort of, like, take a deep breath.

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When somebody's asking me to do something or piling another, you know, item on my list.

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Take a breath and just think, okay. 5 minutes, Jenin, how is this connected to some... to whatever else is going on?

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Um, and how will that impact how you are going to get it done?

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Because if you don't know where your detractors are, where your supporters are, you're never going to be able to, like.

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Action something and move it forward anyway. So, I think there's always... there's always... doesn't always feel like you have the time.

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But there's room for strategic thinking in doing that, and I would argue It will make you a much better and a much more action-oriented or it will give you much better success if you're an action-oriented person, if you just take that beat and think for a minute.

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Lovely. Thank you very much. Um, yeah, very, uh, very detailed answer there.

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Um, Alan, I've got a question here for you from Katrina, so this is a slightly long one, but in my work.

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Um, to be the most efficient and impactful, work across sectors is vital.

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A challenge that I have faced is that a lot of different departments within my... municipality are doing very different work and reinventing the wheel every time, while the end products are sufficient, but could be significantly improved with collaborative effort and the application of different lenses.

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How can you promote buy-in for a roundtable approach versus one that's more siloed, or where one group has absolute decision-making authority?

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I know you obviously referenced moving into this kind of world of possibilities, where it's not so siloed. I was wondering for your take on it.

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Thank you, Katrina, for... I understand you are also like me, like everybody.

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Vulnerable to the Newtonian despair. It means that the problem I see is From the start being... concern with efficiency and impact.

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Uh, I think... It's just a dangerous pass. It's a path of productivism.

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And experience show us that it's difficult to have results in there.

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Especially when we have a silo approach. It's not possible When you have a complex situation, a complex problem, we have so many today, like education.

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It's impossible to work in silo. Because police, education, parental education, every... so many sectors are involved. The only things is a complexity approach, which means Uh, you just... respond, you take a step, you experiment.

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You see and you want the impact of what step you have done.

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And then you take another step, and then you go forward.

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And, of course, you don't have objectives. Because when we have objectives.

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Our main objective becomes to put aside everything, what we have between us and this objective.

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Not playing with words. You have a purpose, which is much higher.

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What is the core? The Word is asking to us.

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Our community. This is a purpose. It's not an object if it's not a goal.

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And then, the problem we have, we are obsessed with maps.

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As I said, we should be much more working with Compass, telling us where we are.

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Thank you so much, Alan. I can see in the chat everyone's, uh, really loving that detailed answer, so thank you for that.

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There's a theme kind of emerging, I think, a lot about the relationships as well, the relationships being so important. And I've got a question here from Tanya for, um, from Janine.

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How do you manage relationships from a strategic perspective when there is disagreement as to how the system is working, and what would be the most effective change lever?

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That is such a great question, and I'm gonna build on, actually, something that LA said in his presentation about authenticity.

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Um, I personally believe that the only way to build effective relationships is by being your authentic self at all times.

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Um, I am no different right now with interacting with all of you than I am when I interact with my colleagues, with my boss.

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With my minister, with premiers at an FMM, like, I am Xenian.

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All the time. And I think that's important because it... it builds from the beginning a sense with your colleagues, with the people who work with and for you, and who you work for.

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It builds... it's easier to trust somebody who's always genuine and authentic.

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Um, so I really... that really resonated with me, what L.A. Was saying about authenticity and always being yourself.

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The reason I raised that here in the context of your question is because It's too late or too difficult to try to build a relationship with someone with whom you are already in a conflict.

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You try to... you try... like, I find... I disagree with colleagues a lot.

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Um, they disagree with me a lot. But because I've taken the time.

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To establish a relationship with them. That dates much further back than the actual moment where we might be disagreeing.

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There's... it doesn't feel as personal, or it doesn't feel as, um... you don't quite feel... as though... you're with a difficult person or being a difficult person, because they know who you are, genuinely.

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You just happen to be having a disagreement. So that's the one... that's one piece of the answer. The second piece of the answer is, and maybe this is my master's in conflict studies speaking.

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Conflict is not a bad thing. Disagreement is not a bad thing. It is actually a driver of creativity.

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Um, and it teaches us to have open minds and to think that maybe we're not always right. Another word that L.A. Used was humility.

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Um, there are times when I disagree with my colleagues, and there are times when I will hold a position and then realize, wait a minute, maybe I'm not listening.

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Maybe they actually have something valuable to bring to this conversation that will actually make me better at doing what I need to do.

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So I think the two parts, just to summarize, are always Be yourself and invest in relationships with your colleagues well in advance.

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Go for coffee, go for a beer. Prefer a walk, whatever it is, and sow that relationship, so that you can count on it in difficult times.

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And then just don't be afraid of those disagreements, because they will often bring other angles, um, and other perspectives to your own thinking that could actually be really valuable to you.

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Lovely. Thank you so much, Janine. Yeah, the importance of relationships in any of these kind of systems is vital for them to... to work properly. A question, actually, for both of you, but I'll start with Elaine, because we've talked a lot about cultivating this kind of

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Culture of uncertainty, I suppose. You mentioned uncertainty as the birthplace of wisdom, which I think, I mean, I want to get tattooed on me, that is such a brilliant line.

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How might leaders cultivate a culture Where uncertainty is embraced as a source of wisdom, rather than feared as a weakness.

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Very good question. Uncertainty is not... It's our mindset.

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Our education. And our world's view.

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Lead us... to be very reluctant.

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To be afraid of the future, sometimes. And when I like, I also work with the East. I didn't have time to mention.

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How's the Chinese looked at strategic thinking.

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Basically, it's an instant. And how we move into the instant.

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Feeling comfortable with your known, it's a very, very big, big dis... challenge for us.

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And how we do that, we have a... a work, a job to do with ourselves.

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Iscent reflectivity. It's also confidence.

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Confident that things at the end of the day, huh? Always alright.

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And they must be... so are they some kind of philosophical content, but at the same time.

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This position must perspire in every note Every briefing we do.

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Why do we multiply defensive points so much? While we should be... cultivating our, uh... confidence in what we are doing.

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In the kind of person who we are. And I think there's a lot of space to be done.

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I will stop there.

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Absolutely. Um, Janine, how about you? How do you think, um, leaders might cultivate this kind of culture of uncertainty? You also mentioned, kind of.

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That culture of climbing out of your lanes, not having to stick to your lane and thinking bigger.

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Um, how to kind of cultivate that. Oops, sorry, uh, Janine, you're on mute.

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I'm on mute 5 years later, and I still do it every time.

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He nearly got through it.

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Um, we nearly did. I do think that, um. I did love that saying. I wrote it down as well, alle uncertainty is the birthplace of wisdom. It's scary for leaders to cultivate uncertainty, because it's... we have We have grown up in a system

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Um, at least in my experience in the Canadian public service.

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Where we are taught that risk is bad. That we are supposed to control for zero risk at all time. I come from a regulatory background, that's certainly a regulatory mindset. Um, and that we are supposed to be able to

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Know with certainty what the outcome will be. Um, and so it's an uncomfortable place for a public servant to be, is to be uncertain.

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But we now live and exist in such an uncertain world.

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That to demand certainty. To me, it... the other saying that that brings to mind when we demand certainty, that is.

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Perfection being the enemy of the good. And we can't... we can't afford.

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Perfection when we have to get stuff done for citizens, for uh, governments.

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Um, and I don't think citizens are demanding perfection. I think they're demanding action.

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I think they're demanding, you know, health, safety. Environmental quality, but they're not demanding that we get everything right, and I think They are probably a little more forgiving than we... assume that they are. So, how to cultivate that uncertainty, I think you need a lot of courage as a leader.

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Um, and it starts by you admitting that you're uncertain. Um, that doesn't mean you're not going to do everything you can to try to get a little bit more clarity.

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But it does mean that you have to get a little bit comfortable with navigating it.

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And then you lead by example.

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Brilliant. Well, thank you so much. That is, unfortunately, all the time we have for questions, but if yours wasn't answered, please do get it into our systems thinking community, and uh... And we will endeavour to get your question answered. Our speakers are in the communities, so they'll be able to kind of jump in and help out, and we've got a wealth of knowledge there.

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First of all, I'd like to ask you all to give me a massive virtual round of applause to our speakers.

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Our brilliant speakers today. Thank you so much. Those were two fantastic presentations and some brilliant insights in that Q&A, so that was excellent.

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And most importantly, I just want to say a massive thank you to you, the attendees, for investing in your learning and being so engaged in this topic. I can see the team's already pulled up a quick poll to find out how you found this event, so please do respond and let us know.

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Um, while you are responding, I want to reiterate that this is not the end, but it's the beginning of the conversation, so we'll keep sharing ideas and challenges and questions in the systems thinking community.

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Um, as a special thank you to everyone who attended today, we're giving you all access to a specially curated playlist of further reading designed to help you to really boost these sort of strategic thinking skills. To claim your link to the content playlist.

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Please go into that systems thinking community and leave a comment on my post, which I've pinned at the top of the page. I think my colleague's just going to post that in the chat, so follow the link straight there, and just comment below, and after the session, towards the end of the week, we'll send you that content playlist of some brilliant articles and pieces of content on strategic thinking. So that is really all we have time for today. We hope you found it helpful, and we want to say a huge thank you once again to everybody who made today happen. Thank you for taking the time out of your busy days.

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Um, keep an eye out for the email coming your way with today's recording and resources.

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And we hope to see you at another apolitical event very soon. Have a great day, everyone. Thanks very much.

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Goodbye